1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: Romans, Part 1
Theme: Righteous

Overview: This study of Paul's letter to the Romans explores the righteousness of God. Students will see that God's wrath and judgment are always right, that Jews and Gentiles alike are made right with God by faith—just as Abraham was—that God preserves a faithful remnant by his grace, and that righteousness shows up in how believers treat one another.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The letter to the Romans was written by the apostle Paul (Romans 1:1), with his coworker Tertius writing down the words (Romans 16:22). Paul, once known as Saul of Tarsus, was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin and a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the church before meeting the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19; Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5-6). God called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13), and Paul planted churches across the Roman world on three missionary journeys.

Audience

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, a church he had not founded and had not yet visited (Romans 1:10-13; 15:22-23). The congregation was a mix of Jewish and Gentile believers. Jews had been expelled from Rome for a time under Emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2), and when they returned, tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians seem to have surfaced—an issue Paul addressed throughout the letter.

Date

Most scholars date Romans around AD 57, near the end of Paul's third missionary journey, while he was staying in Corinth before taking an offering to the poor believers in Jerusalem (Acts 20:2-3; Romans 15:25-26; 16:1, 23).

Setting

Rome was the capital and largest city of the empire. Paul hoped to visit the believers there, be encouraged by them, and receive their help for a mission to Spain (Romans 1:11-12; 15:24, 28).

Theme

The theme of Romans is found in 1:16-17: the gospel is "the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes," because in it "the righteousness of God is revealed." Paul showed that Jews and Gentiles both stand guilty before a righteous God, and that both are made right with him the same way—by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Why Study Romans?

Romans may be the clearest explanation of the gospel in all of Scripture. This study shows that God is righteous in his wrath and in his judgment, that Abraham's faith is the pattern for our own, that God preserves a faithful remnant by grace, and that right standing with God shows up in right relationships with one another.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Romans 1:18-32

WEEK 2: Romans 2:1-16

WEEK 3: Romans 4:1-5, 13-25

WEEK 4: Romans 9:22-33; 11:1-6

WEEK 5: Romans 14:1-5, 13-23

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Recognize the rightness of God's wrath, and rejoice that he is a God of grace.**

STUDY: Romans, Part 1

THEME: Righteous

LESSON TEXT: Romans 1:18-32

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 3:10, 23; 6:23; 1 John 3:4; Revelation 6:16-17

RIGHTEOUS WRATH

BY MARK SCOTT

Much wrath is unjustified. After David's son Amnon raped his sister Tamar, he hated her with an unjustified hatred more than the selfish love he had had for her (2 Samuel 13:15). However, God's wrath (yes, he does have wrath—not the type that just blows up but the kind that is settled and measured) is always justified. God cannot be prejudiced.

Paul began the journey to good news (Romans 3:21–5:21) by first giving the bad news (Romans 1:18–3:20). Jews and Gentiles (at great tension in the Epistle of Romans) stand guilty before God due to offending his righteousness. The theme of Romans is in 1:16-17. The gospel is powerful for everyone because God's rightness is made known in it. The journey toward God's rightness begins on the dark side.

Wrath Revealed

Romans 1:18-20

The love of God can only be appreciated by setting it against the wrath of God (sort of like setting a diamond on a black cloth). God's wrath will one day be revealed in full fury (Revelation 19:15). But for now he has hard-wired it into the universe. When people (primarily Gentiles here, it seems) *suppress* (hold down or squash) God's truth, his wrath is released—in a variety of ways—against all the *godlessness* (impiety or lack of reverence) and *wickedness* (things that are unjust or out of harmony).

People cannot blame God for revealing his wrath. After all, they have known better than to push back against it. God not only built his wrath into the universe, but he also built his nature into it. Those who have eyes to see cannot help but observe God's *invisible qualities*. They will see his *power and divine nature* ("Godness"). Since creation, and in creation, God has been made known (*poem* is the derived English word here; it occurs only here and in Ephesians 2:10). Therefore no one can claim that God is unjust in revealing his wrath.

Glory Exchanged

Romans 1:21-23

Paul furthered his argument about God's righteous wrath with a compositional pattern known as "substantiation" (from Walter Liefeld's book, *New Testament Exposition*). Consider how many of the verses or sentences in this text begin with some form of the word *for*. Paul gave reasons for (substantiated) why God's righteous wrath is proper.

God's wrath is proper because people who knew God did not act like it. They did not give him his proper "glory" (i.e., properly ascribe him his praise and place) nor *gave thanks* (a phrase that transliterates the English word *eucharist*). The lack of giving thanks actually is a mark of a reprobate. When people do not glorify God or give thanks to God, they will continue on a downward spiral in mind and heart. They ultimately will become idolatrous (later described as "served created things rather than the Creator," v. 25). In short, God gets exchanged for idols. But in worshipping birds and animals and reptiles, these people are just worshipping themselves (cf. Isaiah 44:9-20). *Glory* is an interesting word to trace through Romans. Glory can be exchanged and missed (1:23; 3:23); it can be sought (2:7); it can be experienced (6:4); it can be offered (11:36; 16:27); and it will be revealed (8:18).

Bodies Degraded

Romans 1:24-32

When people take their focus off of God, there is only one logical place for it to go—to themselves. People look inward instead of looking up to God. This creates all kinds of problems (cf. James 1:14-15). God ultimately *gives them over* to the things that will destroy them. God does not give up on them, but he loves them too much to force them into a heaven they do not desire. God hands them over to do "their own thing," which of course is total chaos. It is hell, which Tom Ewald of Lincoln Christian University said "is truth known too late."

Desires (lusts) are unrestrained and give way to *sexual impurity* (lewdness) and *degrading of* (to treat with dishonor) their bodies. This is one of the six biblical passages on the practice of homosexuality. Some dismiss it by allowing the historical background to become the exegetical foreground. Any perversion can locate itself in some historical circumstance (see Suetonius's *The Twelve Caesars*). But if the text is read on its own terms, we find that any sexual intimacy outside that between a man and woman in the covenant of marriage will experience the *due penalty for* its *error*. Paul went on to cite 21 vices that stem from this *depraved mind* (vv. 29-30). To push back against God's righteous decree will result in death (and to affirm those who practice such is even worse), but nothing in this convicting text is beyond God's grace.

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SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN 'UNANGRY GOD'

BY DAVID FAUST

American preacher Jonathan Edwards delivered a famous message in 1741 called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Don't expect to hear a sermon like that anytime soon from a pulpit near you. Today, people prefer "an Unangry God"—an easygoing deity who makes no demands—a benign Grandpa in the Sky who judges no one and keeps smiling no matter what. Unangry God is a jolly Santa-like figure who treats every day like Christmas morning and always gives us what we want.

The trouble is, that's not the God described in Scripture. In the Bible, wrath is a real attribute of God. Thankfully, it's not his only quality or his dominant characteristic. And no, I'm not suggesting a steady diet of hellfire-and-brimstone sermons. But the truth is, if God had no capacity for righteous anger, it would create some difficult dilemmas.

An Unangry God creates a justice problem. The prophet speaks for many of us when he asks God, "Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?" (Habakkuk 1:3). The martyred saints wonder, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (Revelation 6:10). How can the "holy and true" Lord ignore evil and wave off injustice with a dismissive shrug?

An Unangry God creates a psychological dilemma. Anger is a natural response to wrongdoing. If someone hacked into your bank account and stole your life savings, how would you feel? Our revulsion toward evil and injustice reflects the fact that we are created in the image of God. If child abuse and Taliban brutality stir our emotions, why wouldn't they move the heart of God?

An Unangry God presents a theological and biblical problem. If God has no wrath, why does the Bible say he does? Nahum 1:2; John 3:36; Romans 2:5; Ephesians 5:6; Revelation 14:10; and other verses speak plainly about this. Jesus never sinned, but he expressed righteous indignation.

Romans 1 reveals God's displeasure toward sinful behaviors that our current culture asks us to tolerate and even celebrate, including homosexual acts. But if the only sin you notice is the homosexual kind, I challenge you to read this chapter again. God's judgment falls on "every kind of wickedness" (v. 29). The catalog of evil in Romans 1 includes idolatry—serving created things instead of the Creator. And truth-twisting—replacing God's wisdom with human opinions. The list includes all-too-familiar transgressions like greed, envy, gossip, slander, arrogance, boastfulness, and disobedience toward parents. On the list of offenders are those who "invent ways of doing evil" (v. 30)—like taking information technology with all its positive potential and misusing it to spread lies and disseminate pornography. Who deserves God's wrath? Those who show "no fidelity, no love, no mercy" (v. 31).

Romans 1 debunks the myth of the Unangry God. God is holy, and sin deserves punishment. But we all sin, so is there any hope? That's what the rest of Romans is about. Our holy God cannot tolerate sin, but as a loving, merciful Father he doesn't want to treat us as our sins deserve. The solution? He sent Jesus to save us "from the coming wrath" (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

We shouldn't deny God's wrath, but we should appreciate his grace and say, as Jesus did, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Personal Challenge:

Discuss God's righteous anger with a trusted friend or with your small group. Since "God is love" (1 John 4:16), how can he also be a God of wrath? How does his anger toward sin fit with his love for sinners? As an added challenge, write a worship prayer that praises God for both his holy anger and his amazing grace.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Where did you find hope last week?

2. During the past week, in what way were you able to tell someone about the eternal hope you have because Jesus died on the cross for you?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 1:18-32** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What is your initial reaction to this passage?

4. Let's dig deeper:
   - What is being revealed and made plain/clear to people?
   - What is the effect of this realization?
   - Four times in this passage, the apostle Paul discussed the fact that the people knew God (knowledge) and the truth about him (vv. 21, 25, 28, 32). How do these "refrains" help us understand the purpose for this section?
   - Why is it important for Christ followers to glorify God and give him thanks?
   - Three times this passage says "God gave them over" to sinful behaviors (vv. 24, 26, 28). This means, says Warren W. Wiersbe in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, "that He permitted them to go on in their sins and reap the sad consequences." (God always gives us free choices, regardless of the outcomes.) What are some of the sad consequences of our bad choices?
   - How does the anger of a holy, just God fit in with his love for the world?
   - Let's ask that from a slightly different viewpoint. Recognizing that God's love prompted him to send Jesus to the world to save us from our sins, how does God's love and mercy work alongside his justice and wrath?

5. What do you learn about God as both a God of love and justice from this passage?

6. What do you learn about humans?

7. What do you learn about obeying God versus disobeying him (and their repercussions)?

8. How would you include God's holiness and justice when you share the Good News with someone?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. In what area of your life do you need God's unconditional and saving love this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 2:1-16** as we study the book of Romans and the topic, "Righteous." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Appreciate the righteous judgment of God and commit to leave judging to him.**

STUDY: Romans, Part 1

THEME: Righteous

LESSON TEXT: Romans 2:1-16

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 12:17-19; Psalm 7:6-11

RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

BY MARK SCOTT

Parents and teachers taught us, "When you point your finger at someone else, three fingers are pointing back at you." Judging others comes at a high cost. Ultimately it will come home to roost. Jesus taught the same thing (Matthew 7:1-5).

These first two lessons in Romans deal with God's righteous character evident in his wrath and judgment. Beneath the radar was the tension between Jew and Gentile in regard to salvation. If the wrath of God is poured out on the Gentiles (Romans 1:18-32), the Jews could think they get a pass. They might reason, "Get 'em, God. Sic 'em" (similar to Israel in Amos's day—Amos 1:3–2:3). Paul essentially said, "Not so fast." In this section, Paul advanced his argument that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).

Passing Judgment

Romans 2:1-4

Jews have *no excuse* (apology) when they *pass judgment* on someone else. Let the record show that we must make judgments in life (John 7:24). A non-discerning person is a fool. But Paul, like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, condemned unjustified judgment and censorship. The Jews evidently were doing this against their Gentile brothers and sisters. Some form of the word *judgment* occurs in this text 10 times. Wrongheaded judgment is offensive to God.

When we condemn others we also condemn ourselves because we are hypocritical. We are guilty of seeing in others what we fail to see in ourselves. This thought should give us pause. We *think* (reckon or count) we will escape God's judgment. In doing this we show *contempt* (presumption) for God and presume on his kindness. God's *kindness, forbearance and patience* (long-suffering) are intended to produce repentance (cf. Galatians 5:22). So be careful, little heart, when you judge.

Receiving Judgment

Romans 2:5-11

Judgment belongs totally in the hands of God because human judgment is most often skewed. God's judgment is "based on truth" (Romans 2:2), and he never shows *favoritism* (to show partiality by regarding the face of someone). *Stubbornness* (dryness or hardness) and an unrepentant heart cause God to store up wrath for the ultimate Judgment Day. On that great day, his righteous judgment will be revealed and "people's secrets" will be judged "through Jesus Christ" (Romans 2:16; cf. Revelation 20:11-15).

For a book that so strongly emphasizes that people are saved by grace and not by law, Romans sounds very much like the Gospels at this point. There is no lack of harmony between Paul and Jesus though. There are imperatives of salvation in the New Testament. They evidence real faith. Therefore they cannot be dismissed. God's people are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). The imperatives in and of themselves cannot save. But all of them demonstrate real faith, which is why Scripture can affirm that we are saved by faith but judged by works. People who persist in doing good and who also seek *glory, honor and immortality* get eternal life. On the other hand, people who are *self-seeking* (to work for hire, scheming for themselves), who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be *wrath* (settled and justified anger) and *anger* (fury to where the "thermometer" explodes). To ensure that no one misunderstands, Paul twice underlined that these things were true for Jew and Gentile.

Standard for Judgment

Romans 2:12-16

In this section Paul dug down into the real distinction between Jew and Gentile with regard to what standard of judgment would be used against both groups. Neither group was off the hook. Jews and Gentiles both sin—this was Paul's point in the larger sweep of context. The Gentiles did not have the law of God like the Jews. One might assume they were therefore exempt from judgment. Not so. The parenthetical comment of verses 14-15 teased this out. All people have their *conscience* (moral umpire meaning "to know with"). The Gentiles did not have the law, but they did have their conscience. Paul almost held out for the possibility that if they obeyed their consciences they would be acquitted. But in the end their consciences would *accuse* (to condemn or speak against) them.

On the other hand, the Jews (of which this section is mostly about) had the law. Did they keep it? Hardly. Therefore they would have to be judged by the law. For the Jews, just hearing the law was not enough. The only way to be *declared righteous* (or "truly made righteous") was to obey the law. Paul, of course, would go on to argue that no Jew kept the law—except Jesus (Matthew 5:17).

Boasting has to be jettisoned (Romans 3:27). Neither Jew nor Gentile should judge the other. They both will be judged by God since vengeance belongs to him.

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I GOT CAUGHT

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you ever become angry with other drivers? The slow ones get in your way. Speeders jeopardize everyone's safety. Tailgaters follow too closely. Reckless drivers act like they're competing in the Indianapolis 500, weaving through traffic to gain a few seconds' advantage.

When cars rush by at 90 mph, I mutter, "Where are the police?" I want to see justice done. Up ahead, I want to see lights flashing on a patrol car. I want to see offenders pulled over, getting the punishment they deserve. Do you feel the same way?

Making Excuses

But what about the opposite side of the coin? Do you always obey every traffic law (to the letter)? Have you ever surpassed the speed limit because you were late for work . . . or you had to pick up your kids from school . . . or you were distracted by some bad news? Maybe you inadvertently cut off other cars that were in the blind spot of your rearview mirror. Maybe you truly never saw the road sign that says, "Speed Limit 45." In situations like these, do you hope to see lights flashing on a patrol car, or do you want everyone (including the police) to understand and give you space? When you are the one bending the rules, do you want leniency or justice?

During more than 50 years of driving, I have gotten a few traffic tickets. Not enough to jeopardize my driver's license or my auto insurance, but enough that I cannot claim a perfect driving record. To be honest, at times I have gotten away with breaking the speed limit and I was relieved when no officer pulled me over. Has that ever happened to you? It's human nature to feel righteous indignation toward other offenders while excusing our own actions.

Our Shortcomings and God's 'Long-Going'

In Romans 1, the apostle Paul lowers the hammer of God's righteous wrath on Gentile sinners. I picture first-century readers with a Jewish background, saturated in the Scriptures and devoted to God's law, nodding in vigorous agreement with every phrase. "Yes, that's right. You tell them, Paul! Those immoral, idol-worshipping Gentiles deserve God's judgment, that's for sure."

Then in Romans 2, Paul pivots toward his Jewish readers and says, "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things" (Romans 2:1). Instead of pointing fingers at the failings of others, are we willing to face our own stubbornness and rebellion? The Word of God and our own consciences convict us. If we are honest with ourselves, who can say, "I have done everything God's law requires"?

When I read Romans 1, I get caught in a self-righteous trap—looking down on other sinners. That chapter shows the seriousness of breaking God's law, but then Romans 2 opens my eyes to my own culpability. I am far from perfect, too. If others deserve God's punishment, what about me?

My shortcomings make me appreciate God's "long-going"—the length he has gone to rescue me. And the more I recognize my own sin and accept responsibility for it, the more empathy, mercy, and grace I can show to others.

Personal Challenge:

Think of someone who makes you angry. Try to view that person through the Lord's eyes. Ask God to increase your capacity for grace—to fill your heart with empathy and compassion so you can be forgiving and forbearing toward others.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When and how did you sense God's unconditional and saving love this week?
2. In what areas of your life do you find it easiest to obey God? In what areas is it most difficult?

   Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 2:1-16** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What would you change or add to that restatement of the passage?
4. What do you learn about God from this passage?
5. What do you learn about humans?
6. Let's dig deeper into the passage:
   - Why should we as Christ followers refrain from passing judgment on one another?
   - What comparisons and contrasts did Paul make between Jews and Gentiles?
   - How is God's judgment described?
   - What consequences face people who pass judgment on others?
   - Most Bible interpreters believe the Scripture talks of two coming judgments on humans. In the first, the "great white throne judgment," unbelievers (those whose names are not in the book of life) are judged by their works (Revelation 20:11-15). In the second, the "judgment seat of Christ," those who are saved are judged by their faithfulness (obedience) to Christ to determine their heavenly rewards (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). How does this background help you understand Romans 2:5-16?
7. What do you learn about obeying God and the rewards for that?
8. Take a moment to reflect on God's "kindness, forbearance and patience" (v. 4) for yourself. After a short time of contemplation, discuss how you would tell another person about God's kindness that can lead them to repentance.
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. In what area of your life do you need God's kindness, forbearance, and patience this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 4:1-5, 13-25**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Follow Abraham's example in pursuing the righteousness that is by faith.**

STUDY: Romans, Part 1

THEME: Righteous

LESSON TEXT: Romans 4:1-5, 13-25

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 4:6-12; Hebrews 11:8-19

RIGHTEOUS ABRAHAM

BY MARK SCOTT

Be careful of idolizing Bible characters. They all have feet of clay, and they can marginalize God as the real hero of the biblical narratives. That being said, Abraham is an imitable model of righteousness. Sometimes biblical characters help us get our arms around the great qualities of God. Two lessons will do this in regard to God's righteousness, one on Abraham and the other on the remnant of Israel.

Paul's argument thus far was that Gentiles were depraved (Romans 1:18-32; 2:12-16), and Jews were guilty of unjustified criticism (Romans 2:1-11, 17-29). In Romans 3, Paul traced how the Jews had some advantages but failed to live up to them (vv. 1-18). So, Jew and Gentile are guilty before God and only through faith in Christ can they be righteous (Romans 3:19-31). Abraham was the primary example of someone who put his faith in God.

Faith and Righteousness

Romans 4:1-5

Paul's rhetorical question, "What then shall we say . . . ?" occurs six times in Romans (4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30). The question helped Paul introduce Abraham as an example of faith and righteousness. What did his life teach? Abraham did a lot of great works (Genesis 12:1–25:10; James 2:21-23), but none of these works made him right with God. Therefore he had no cause to *boast* (a key theme as chapter 3 ended).

Against incredible odds, Abraham just believed. Paul quoted the famous Genesis 15:6. Without a child in Sarah's womb, Abraham was asked to believe that God would bless all the nations through his seed . . . and God did. That posture of faith gave Abraham his standing with God. One who works gets *wages*. In fact, wages are due to the worker. Abraham worked "for" God, but he did not work "to get right with" God. He just trusted God, who is in the habit of justifying the ungodly.

Faith and Promise

Romans 4:13-17

In verses 6-12, Paul briefly referenced King David, another great hero of faith. David also did not get right with God by works but with simple trust in grace (Psalm 32 is cited). Paul then returned to his first example, Abraham, and explained that the promise of God (Genesis 12) preceded the sign of circumcision (Genesis 17).

Just as the promise preceded circumcision, it also preceded the giving of the law (Exodus 20). Paul's argument was "first things first." Abraham and his offspring did not get right with God through the law. If that had been true then faith would mean *nothing* (empty or void) and God's promise would be *worthless* (worked down or destroyed). The law simply underlined how sinful Jews and Gentiles were (cf. Romans 7:7-8). There was a sense in which transgression is not even counted if there is no standard (i.e., the law) by which to judge it.

The promise of God to bless the nations through Abraham's seed comes by faith via the grace of God. Since both Jews and Gentiles have to be right with God by faith, Abraham became *the father of us all*. Abraham was not just the father of the Jews, he also was the father of "many nations" (Genesis 17:5). If God *gives life to the dead and calls into being things that are not*, then he does not need puny human works to make people right with him.

Faith and Hope

Romans 4:18-25

Faith and hope will someday give way to sight and reality (Revelation 21–22). But faith and hope are needed in this world and they are hard to separate. Biblical hope is not just wishful thinking. It is an eager expectation of what a living God will bring about. Abraham and Sarah could lead the geriatric parade. Abraham was *as good as dead*, and Sarah's womb was also dead. Dead + dead = dead. This godly but childless couple was asked to believe that their heirs would be as plentiful as the dust on the earth and as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 13:16; 15:5). Guess what? They did believe it.

Abraham did not *waver* (judge or separate) through unbelief. With the tenaciousness of a junkyard dog, Abraham held on to the promise God had made to him. Choosing this posture of faith strengthened him in his faith all the more. It all came back to Genesis 15:6. He chose to believe. The result was credit for himself and for his heirs (e.g., the Christians in Rome). The key to the whole passage might be in verse 25. Abraham's living faith, which preceded circumcision and the giving of the law, made him right with God. This same kind of faith was made possible by Jesus' death for our sins and his resurrection for our justification.

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HELP WANTED

BY DAVID FAUST

I enjoy working in my yard, but I dislike scraping and staining the old deck attached to the back of our house. Last year I skipped those unpleasant tasks and let nature take its course. And nature wasn't kind. My son-in-law gazed at the weathered boards and cracked concrete and said, "Dad, I'm surprised you would let your deck look like that."

Appropriately shamed, I began making plans. "I can do the work myself," I told my wife. She looked doubtful. "You're not 30 years old anymore," she reminded me, peppering me with questions. "Do you really know how to build a deck? Do you have the time? It could take you weeks to build it. And will your back hold up?"

I offered a few counterarguments, but common sense prevailed. We found a company that specializes in building decks, and four strong, young men quickly finished the job. At first, I refused outside assistance, but someone else's help was exactly what I needed.

Receiving Care

"May I help you?" asks the salesperson in a store. "No thanks," I usually respond. Back in the days before GPS, during road trips my family became irritated because I was too stubborn to stop and ask for directions.

A friend of mine has been caring for his wife, who struggles with complicated health problems. They are learning to accept help from others, but it hasn't been an easy lesson. "In the past, we were the ones who visited the sick, not the ones being visited," my friend observes. "It's humbling to be on the receiving end of care."

Something in the human spirit wants to push back, assert our independence, and prove we can handle things on our own. When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, Peter refused at first and exclaimed, "No, you will never wash my feet!" On the surface his objection appeared humble, but in reality, pride was at work. Peter was acting like he knew better than Jesus did!

Remember Naaman, the Syrian military officer? He was accustomed to giving orders, but this situation was out of his control. Stricken with leprosy, he traveled to Israel, hoping the prophet Elisha could heal his ravaged body. For a while, though, pride got in the way. Elisha instructed him to dip seven times in the Jordan River. Offended and angry, Naaman sputtered something about "having better rivers back where I'm from." Only when he humbled himself and lowered himself into the muddy Jordan did he come up clean.

Our Ever-Present Helper

We don't like to admit it, but we all need help—and not just for temporal things like building a deck. We cannot fix this broken world or save our souls through our own human efforts. Spiritual do-it-yourselfers never succeed. Thankfully, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

Abraham was a wealthy and capable man, but he learned to rely on the Lord instead of his own abilities and cleverness. He "was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God" (Romans 4:20). Just as it would be foolish for a drowning swimmer to refuse a lifeguard's help, it makes no sense for us to reject the aid of our gracious God. Faith moves us to humble ourselves and tell the Lord, "I need—and I want—your help."

Personal Challenge:

Are you trying to be a spiritual do-it-yourselfer? Do you seek God's help, or do you try to handle things on your own? Offer a prayer of confession, acknowledging your weaknesses. Affirm your reliance on the Lord and ask him to strengthen your faith.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When and how did you sense God's unconditional and saving love this week?
2. In what areas of your life do you find it easiest to obey God? What areas are most difficult?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 4:1-5, 13-25** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What "aha" moment did you have as you listened to this passage being read and summarized?
4. Let's dig deeper into the passage:
   - What is the spiritual difference between working for wages and receiving a gift?
   - What do you learn about Abraham in this passage?
   - How are we connected to Abraham?
   - We are justified (made right) with God through faith. In this passage, several other associated words and phrases are used: righteousness, belief, trust, grace, hope, giving glory to God. How is each one connected to justification by faith?
   - In what ways did Jesus receive what he didn't "deserve"?
   - How have we received what we don't "deserve"?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. It's obvious from this passage (and the Bible as a whole) that we don't obey God to be saved. Why do Christ followers obey God?
8. "Jesus our Lord . . . was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (vv. 24-25). With whom will you share that clear statement of the gospel in the upcoming weeks?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. In what area of your life do you need to trust God more?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 9:22-33; 11:1-6**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Praise God for the grace that makes righteous the faithful remnant.**

STUDY: Romans, Part 1

THEME: Righteous

LESSON TEXT: Romans 9:22-33; 11:1-6

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Jeremiah 31:7-9, 31-34; Zephaniah 3:9-20

RIGHTEOUS REMNANT

BY MARK SCOTT

Romans 9–11 is often neglected in many Christian churches. Depending on where one falls on the nuances of Calvinism and millennialism, the content is challenging. But Alexander Campbell knew it was there in his Bible, and it served as the basis for his famous "Sermon on the Law" (1816).

If Romans addresses alienation from God (chapters 1–3), justification by God (3–5), and sanctification through God (6–8), then what are we to do with this next section (9–11)? What positions do the Israelites and Gentiles play in the working out of God's salvation history? This may sound like heady stuff for theological eggheads. But the doctrinal backdrop to this issue may frame-up the applications of Romans in chapters 12–16. A formula evident in the missionary journeys in Acts might help us process these chapters: Jewish rejection leads to Gentile inclusion, which leads to Jewish jealousy, which leads to Jewish acceptance or further rejection. Our text follows that progression.

The Righteous Remnant Inclusion

Romans 9:22-26

Paul was willing to put his neck on the line for the *remnant* (abandoned ones or surplus ones—a different word is used in Romans 11:5, but it is synonymous). But who is in this group of people? Our default setting is to answer: the nation of literal, physical Israel. But keep in mind that the Jews loved sarcasm, irony, and paronomasia (i.e., plays on words). Is that what is going on in Romans 9:6b—a play on words? "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." Is "Israel" a loaded term? Does just having Jewish blood running through one's veins qualify one to be in the remnant? Or has God's definition of who was in the real Israel always been inclusive (i.e., made up of both Jews and Gentiles)?

God's sovereignty and election were at work during the times of the patriarchs and of Moses (Romans 9:7-13, 14-18). Like a potter with clay (think Jeremiah 18), God had planned from the beginning for the Gentile inclusion to be in his remnant (Romans 9:19-21). He bore up with great patience under Israel's disobedience. The Israelites deserved his wrath and destruction, but to show his glory he made them objects of his mercy. This was so both Jews and Gentiles could be called "his people" (which is the significance of the quote from Hosea 1:10; 2:23). Maybe the remnant is not just "physical" Israel or "spiritual" Israel. Maybe it is just "Israel."

The Righteous Remnant Exclusion

Romans 9:27-29

Paul pieced together a few different passages from Isaiah to frame up more of his argument. Isaiah 1:9; 13:19; and 10:22-23 are cited. The remnant did not exclude Gentiles. It excluded faithless Israel. Even though, in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, Israel would be like the sand by the sea, only some Israelites would be saved. The Lord would have to carry out his *sentence* (*logos*/word) quickly on the nation of Israel. In fact, had God not done so, the nation that gave birth to the Messiah would become like Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18). Those not in the remnant were guilty of committing the sin of presumption.

The Righteous Faithful Remnant

Romans 9:30-33

The key to being in the remnant was faith, as it was in the entire book of Romans. Being in the remnant did not come because works were pursued. Remnant people operate on faith. Gentiles become part of the remnant by faith. Jewish people must get in the same way. Striving to get in by any other way would cause one to fall. To further that point, Paul used the language of Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22. Jesus was the *stumbling stone* (or *rock*) that Paul had in mind (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:4). If Jew or Gentile does not get faith in that Rock right they will fall and be put to shame. (Romans 10 is skipped for now since it will be discussed in February.)

The Righteous Preserved Remnant

Romans 11:1-6

By this point in Paul's argument, one might assume that faithful Gentiles can be in the remnant, but that Jews now have no place at all. Not so fast. To ensure that his readers do not misunderstand, Paul asked another leading question, "Did God *reject* (push away or drive away) his people?" No! And the writer is the best example. Paul himself is a Jew—in fact, he was from the tribe of Benjamin, the same as King Saul.

Finally, Paul appealed to the Elijah narrative of 1 Kings to make his case for the remnant being preserved. Elijah went through a case of the "Jezebel blues" and felt he was the only faithful one in Israel (1 Kings 19:9-14). God reminded the depressed prophet that a remnant had been preserved by grace—not works.

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LEFTOVERS

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you like leftovers? Do you adhere to the adage, "Waste not, want not"? Do you enjoy turkey sandwiches on the weekend after Thanksgiving? Do you warm up last night's pizza in the microwave and eat it for breakfast? Do you ask for a box at the restaurant so you can take the leftovers home with you? Do you agree that soup tastes better the day after it's made?

Or maybe you dislike leftovers. You insist on eating only the freshest of foods. If your family doesn't consume the entire casserole, you throw it away, because no one will touch it after it's been in the refrigerator for a couple of days.

The word *leftover* sounds stale and unappealing. The Law of Moses instructed the Israelites to give the firstfruits of their labors, not the scraps—to sacrifice the best lamb in the flock, not skimp by offering the scrawniest animal they could find. By tithing, we prioritize giving in our budgets because we recognize that the first 10 percent (not whatever happens to be left at the end of the month) belongs to the Lord.

However, the Bible also has some positive things to say about leftovers. The Law required farmers to leave some grain, olives, and grapes behind in their fields at harvest time. "Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow" (Deuteronomy 24:21)—a practical, compassionate way to provide for those in need. And remember what happened after Jesus fed the 5,000? He instructed his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted" (John 6:12). They gathered up 12 baskets of leftover bread and fish, reinforcing the magnitude of Jesus' miracle and teaching a lesson about good stewardship.

Leftover People?

At first glance, the word *remnant* sounds as unappealing as last week's casserole. Yet, throughout the Scriptures God promises to bless a righteous remnant of his people. Jeremiah predicted that faithful followers of the Lord would gather from all over the world, including "the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor" (Jeremiah 31:7-8). Zephaniah looked forward to a golden era when God would regather the remnant of Israel, including "the meek and humble" who "trust in the name of the Lord" (Zephaniah 3:12). The apostle Paul recalled how in the days of Elijah most Israelites had drifted into idolatry, but God still had 7,000 servants who had "not bowed the knee to Baal. So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (Romans 11:4-5).

What does God's "remnant chosen by grace" mean to us? Here are three points to consider.

It's a reminder about gratitude. We should be grateful that throughout history, God's plans never have been thwarted and he has continued to pour out his grace—even if only a faithful few were willing to accept it.

It's a reminder about faithfulness. No matter what happens, we must remain loyal to the Lord and persevere in faith and service.

It's a reminder about courage. Even if the majority rejects the Lord and chooses a different path, we must be part of his faithful remnant, trusting God and following no matter where he leads.

Jesus asked, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Let's do our part to ensure the answer is yes.

Personal Challenge:

What practical difference does it make to be a follower of Jesus? If you were not a Christian, how would your lifestyle be different than it is now? How does your faith in Christ impact the way you approach your job, your relationships, your finances, your schedule, and your attitude about life?

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When and how did you sense God's unconditional and saving love this week?
2. In what areas of your life do you find it easiest to obey God? What areas are most difficult?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 9:22-33; 11:1-6** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate these passages in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What is your initial impression of these passages?
4. Let's dig deeper into these passages:
   - Look at the three sets of leading questions in these passages (9:22-24, 30-32; 11:1) and the way those questions are addressed. How do those help you comprehend the overall purpose of these passages?
   - According to the Old Testament prophets cited, how does God see the objects of his mercy?
   - The stone and rock from Isaiah (Romans 9:33) refer to Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:4). How did he cause some people to stumble and fall and others to "never be put to shame"?
   - By what criterion are people of the remnant chosen?
5. What do you learn about God and his grace from these passages?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What can you do to assure you are obeying God not as a work to be saved, but because of God's grace for you?
8. Who will you tell about God's grace this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. In what area of your life do you need more of God's patience?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 14:1-5, 13-23**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK FIVE

LESSON AIM: **Treat others with kindness and respect even when they think differently on some things than you do.**

STUDY: Romans, Part 1

THEME: Righteous

LESSON TEXT: Romans 14:1-5, 13-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 14:6-12; 15:1-7; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Philippians 2:1-11

RIGHTEOUS RELATIONSHIPS

BY MARK SCOTT

Faith that does not produce faithfulness is not worth a fig. The new right standing with God that has been created by the gospel has a practical side. Doctrine always shows up in duty. Beginning in Romans 12:1, Paul gave the believers several practical teachings—examples include presenting their bodies as living sacrifices, using their spiritual gifts, loving others purely, obeying authorities, living with moral excellence, and treating other believers with kindness when those believers disagree with one another.

Eating is a big deal in the Bible—and it's spiritual. It's as old as the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1–2). It is the centerpiece of Middle Eastern hospitality (Genesis 12–50). It began the Passover celebration (Exodus 12). It may be all that is important in life "under the sun" (Ecclesiastes). It was the major emphasis at the Last Supper and last breakfast (Luke 22; John 21). It will be part of the marriage feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19). But sometimes mealtimes can get awkward (1 Corinthians 8–10; Romans 14). In righteous relationships people . . .

Accept Others

Romans 14:1-5

Eugene Peterson said, "Where two or three are gathered together, there problems develop." When believers disagree about *disputable matters* (things that would cause dialogue), they are to avoid *quarreling* (making critical remarks) about one another. Instead, they are to *accept* others. It means to welcome them despite feeling differently about various issues.

Eating food was the issue that created this lack of goodwill among Christians; but, of course, food really was just a symptom of the problem. There seem to be some parallels between this situation and the one in Corinth (1 Corinthians 8–10). Had the food been prayed over to the demons and idols? Some thought that if the meat at the table had been prayed over to the idols in the meat market, then the only appropriate response on the part of a Christian was to become a vegetarian. Others felt that idols were nothing, so it did not matter. The meat eaters would *treat with contempt* (scorn) the vegetarians, and the vegetarians would *judge* (condemn) the meat eaters.

Another issue concerned the honoring of special days (cf. Colossians 2:16). This is teased out more in Romans 14:7-8, 10, and 12. Days and feasts were inextricably linked in the Old Testament. But since God accepted both weak and strong, the church must do so, as well. God can make both stand.

De-Stress Others

Romans 14:13-18

It is not enough to accept others. The next step toward righteous relationships is determining not to pass judgments on others or to cause people to stumble in their faith. This is where a Christian conscience comes into the discussion. Believers are not acting in love when they do not care about someone else's conscience (1 Corinthians 8:11-12).

Paul stated his own opinion about the issue in this passage. Since Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), Paul (and Peter in Acts 10) said that *nothing is unclean in itself* (i.e., the Levitical dietary code is fulfilled—its job has been accomplished). But that does not deal completely with the issue. A person must go to bed with his or her own conscience. Some believers can be *distressed* (grieved) by the seeming liberties of others. It is another issue if the weak person makes this a term of the gospel (see the Epistle to the Galatians). But if it is a matter of disrespecting another's conscience, then that believer is no longer acting in love. After all, the kingdom is larger than food. It concerns *righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*.

Edify Others

Romans 14:19-23

It is not enough to accept others and de-stress others. The next step toward righteous relationships is making every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual *edification*. The work of God that is the fruit of righteousness is not about food—though food can enhance relationships. Paul circled back to his own opinion again of all food being clean. But he quickly added that causing others to stumble will not edify anyone. Verse 21 puts a high priority on not doing anything that would cause someone to stumble in their faith. Eating meat or drinking wine or doing anything else could actually be sin. The goal is to build up believers—not make them fall.

Some things are better kept quiet—just between the believer and God. Paul even put a beatitude on the person who learns this (v. 22b). Eating or abstaining from eating must come from a posture of faith. In fact, faith actually interfaces with our conscience in such a way as to be a moral umpire on our relationships.

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DISAGREEING WITHOUT BEING DISAGREEABLE

BY DAVID FAUST

The Bible says, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26), but anger rules the airwaves 24 hours a day. Someone is constantly upset on Fox News and CNN—just for different reasons. Talk shows boost their ratings by provoking controversy, and social media thrives on it. Yet, God's Word cautions, "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels" (2 Timothy 2:23).

How can we honor the Lord when conflicts arise? Is it possible to hold firm convictions without destroying relationships? A time-honored slogan says, "In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, love." Several principles found in Romans chapter 14 can help us put this slogan into practice.

Remember who is the boss. The apostle Paul asks, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" (Romans 14:4). I can't barge into a GM plant and tell the workers how to make cars, force a restaurant's chef to change the menu, or march onto the football field and tell the quarterback and wide receiver what plays to run. They don't report to me. "Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God" (v. 12). The Lord is in charge.

Build others up, don't trip them up. "Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister" (v. 13). Is glorifying God and loving others more important to us than our own rights and preferences?

Know when to keep your opinions to yourself. It's OK to stand up for your convictions. "Do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil" (v. 16). But that doesn't mean you should spew your private views all over the internet. We don't have to join every argument and take sides in every controversy. Sometimes it's best to keep our mouths shut (and our fingers off the computer keyboard) while we ponder and pray about an issue. "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God" (v. 22). Alexander Campbell wrote, "But men cannot give up their opinions, and, therefore, they never can unite, says one. We do not ask them to give up their opinions—we ask them only not to impose them upon others. Let them hold their opinions; but let them hold them as private property. The faith is public property; opinions are, and always have been, private property."

Keep the main thing the main thing. First-century Christians disagreed about eating certain foods and observing special days, but secondary issues like these didn't need to divide the body of Christ. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (v. 17).

In Christ we're free to disagree about matters of opinion, but we're not free to be uncharitable or to divide the church over minor matters. "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (v. 19).

Father God, show us how to speak the truth in love. Grant us courage to stand up for our convictions and wisdom to distinguish biblical essentials from our personal preferences. Teach us to prioritize what matters most. Fill us with the fruit of the Spirit so we can resist the hostility and quarrelsomeness so prevalent in our culture. Help us to conduct ourselves with godliness and respect even when we disagree so we can honor the Prince of Peace in whose name we pray. Amen.

Personal Challenge:

Do a media fast. For one week, avoid the news on TV or radio, and don't read it on your laptop or cell phone. Stay off social media for a week. Ask the Lord to clear your mind and adjust your attitude so you can express your opinions in a way that honors his name.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did you experience God's patience this past week?

2. Whom did you tell about God's grace last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 14:1-5, 13-23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What verse stood out to you? Why?

4. Let's dig deeper into the passage:
   - What surface-level issues were people in the church having with one another?
   - What deeper issues may have been behind those problems?
   - In general, how should we treat people—especially other Christ followers—who see debatable issues differently than we see them?
   - Go through the passage and inventory the instructions given to the church for how we should respond (what we should and shouldn't do) when we disagree with others. Name and then discuss each one, focusing on how these mandates would have affected the original recipients.
   - One of the guiding precepts of Christian churches is, "In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things, love." How can that principle help us when disputable matters come up?

5. What do you learn about God from this passage?

6. What do you learn about people?

7. What do you learn about living as a part of the body of Christ and God's kingdom?

8. How can we as a group live out the main principles from this passage—without quarreling over disputable matters (v. 1)?
   - Are there any specific issues discussed in this passage that we as a group should address? If so, which ones, and how should we address them?

9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

10. In what area of your life do you need more of God's peace or joy this week?

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.