



1717 BIBLE STUDIES

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

OVERVIEW

Study: Romans, Part 3

Theme: Holy

Overview: This is the third series in this study of Paul's letter to the Romans. Holiness is God's "otherliness," and for his people it means being set apart and dedicated to him. Students will remember that their baptism raised them to a holy life, recognize their own unholiness and turn to Christ for rescue, appreciate the holy heritage they share with God's people, and offer themselves as living and holy sacrifices.

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.

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).

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, and Paul worked throughout the letter to show both groups their place in God's saving plan.

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).

Setting

Rome was the capital and largest city of the empire, a place of many gods and loose morals. Some in the

Roman church apparently reasoned that if grace increases where sin abounds, they might as well keep sinning. Paul answered that thinking in Romans 6-8 and then showed what a holy life looks like in practice (Romans 12).

Theme

Those who have been justified by grace are called to be holy. Paul pointed believers back to their baptism, where they died to sin and rose to new life (Romans 6:4). He showed that God's holy law exposes our unholiness and drives us to Christ for rescue (Romans 7:24-25), that Gentile believers are grafted into a holy root (Romans 11:16-17), and that the right response to God's mercy is to offer our bodies as "a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1).

Why Study Romans?

Holiness can seem like a slippery virtue in today's culture, but God still says, "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). This study calls believers to live out their baptism, to depend on Christ rather than their own strength, to value the faith of those who came before them, and to give themselves wholly to God in everyday life.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: Romans 6:1-4, 11-23

WEEK 2: Romans 7:7-12, 21-25

WEEK 3: Romans 11:11-32

WEEK 4: Romans 12:1-21

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Pursue holiness as part
of your new life in
Christ.**

STUDY: Romans, Part 3

THEME: Holy

LESSON TEXT: Romans 6:1-4, 11-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 22:6-16; 26:19-23; 2 Corinthians
5:11-17; Ephesians 5:1-10

RAISED TO A HOLY LIFE

BY MARK SCOTT

Holiness is hard to come by today. It almost seems to be a slippery virtue in our culture. But second to love, holiness is probably God's greatest quality. It is God's "otherliness," setting him apart from his creation. Since creation presently is stained with sin, God's holiness is partially viewed as moral excellence. When applied to his people, holiness has to do with being dedicated solely to God. The theological term for it, sanctification, is the major theme of Romans 6–8.

In the immediate context, Paul championed grace as the answer to sin. The text assumes the genre of a diatribe, and so one can almost hear the wheels turning in the minds of some in the Roman church: Let's see, if grace increases where there is sin, then the way to get more grace . . . is to sin more. Paul battled against such thinking in Romans 6.

Baptism Declares Death

Romans 6:1-4, 11-14

Paul took the believers back to their baptism to make his point. There was a day when Christians said no to sin, when they died to sin's effect on their lives, and when they committed to live for God. On that day, they put their faith in Christ, confessed his name, and followed their faith in baptism. The act of baptism declared that grace won and sin lost. To continue to live a life of sin is to misunderstand grace. Paul said no to this in the strongest way (By no means!—notice the same phrase in 6:15).

Baptism is a death. The word itself has the smell of death all over it. Jesus was baptized in water (Matthew 3:13-17), but he was also baptized (buried) in Joseph's tomb (John 19:41-42). If one is dead, it is hard to sin. Our baptism unites us with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, it could hardly be a "work" for it is something that someone else does to someone. When the evangelist Juan Carlos Ortiz baptizes someone, he says, "I kill you in the name of Jesus."

Since believers do not physically die in their baptism, they must count (consider or reckon) themselves dead. This allows them to also count themselves alive to God as they live this new life (a qualitatively new life). Sin cannot reign (be king) in their lives. That would make their body an instrument (weapon) of wickedness instead of an instrument of righteousness. Christians are to give no breath to their old dead lives. They are to live for the holy God who brought life to them. Grace, not law, now controls them, and their baptism declared this change.

Allegiance Declares Slavery

Romans 6:15-23

Paul shifted from the metaphor of death (baptism) to the metaphor of slavery in this part of the chapter. The word slaves appears 10 times in this section. It is difficult to think of slavery in the United States and not think of the Civil War (1861–65) or (in modern times) the debate about critical race theory. But slavery was different in Paul's day. Sometimes even prominent people would sell themselves into slavery to lean into others for their care. So, the metaphor is appropriate to Paul's argument since one could choose slavery as a means of showing allegiance.

We become slaves to whatever we embrace. Giving in to addictions makes us a slave to those addictions. It has to do with the illusion of freedom. Our freedom depends on the object of our choice. Following Paul's argument and metaphor (an example from everyday life), to choose sin is to choose a union with death. Choosing sin makes people slaves to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness. In fact, choosing sin proved that they were free from righteousness. The benefit (fruit) of those things was shame and death.

But, to choose obedience is to choose righteousness and holiness. Paul acknowledged that the Roman Christians had chosen well. They chose to follow the pattern of teaching that had been given them in the gospel. Due to the nature of their choice, the believers experienced freedom and had become slaves of God. The benefits (fruits) are holiness and eternal life. Paul summed it up in the last verse. The wages (money to be used to purchase food) of sin is death. In great contrast though is the gift (charisma) from God, which is eternal life in Christ Jesus. When our highest allegiance is to be a slave of Christ, because of who he is and what he brings, we experience true freedom.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

DON'T FORGET YOUR BAPTISM

BY DAVID FAUST

When I was 9 years old, at an evening service at our church on Good Friday, I walked forward during the invitation while the congregation sang,

*Coming home, coming home,
Nevermore to roam;
Open now Thine arms of love,
Lord, I'm coming home.*

The preacher, Paul Hakes, asked me to confess my faith by saying, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Soon I stood in the baptistery, shivering not because of the cold but because I was afraid of water. (For those of us who don't know how to swim, immersion is an extra test of faith!)

I came up from the water coughing and sputtering while the congregation sang, "O happy day, that fixed my choice on Thee, my Savior and my God!"

I don't know if anyone else besides the Lord remembers what happened that night, but for me it remains a precious memory.

Colossians 2:12 says we were buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him through faith. Baptism isn't for infants. It's for those who trust in Christ and repent of personal sin. We can't remember what happened when we were babies. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter concluded his sermon by telling his listeners, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Why Should We Remember Being Baptized?

It helps us appreciate Jesus' sacrifice. Like drowning swimmers who need a lifeguard, we can't save ourselves. Christ did the saving work, pouring out his precious blood and bearing our sins on the cross (1 Peter 1:19; 2:24). Our memories of being baptized—and seeing new believers baptized today—should move us to thank God for his grace.

It reminds us of our commitment to Christ. In baptism we confirmed our decision to follow Jesus Christ and be his disciples. We united with him in his death, burial, and resurrection, accepting his free gift of eternal life and submitting to his authority as Lord (Matthew 28:18-19).

It assures us that we belong to Christ's church. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). There's a humbling commonality about baptism. It puts us all on the same footing.

Whether you're the treasurer of Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-39) or a 9-year-old kid from an Ohio farm, you come up sopping wet and go on your way rejoicing as a member of the body of Christ.

It motivates us to holy living. Romans 6 compels us to ask, Why would we choose to sin against God after he has been so gracious to us? Our goal should be to honor God, not to live in rebellion and disobedience.

And besides all this, looking back at our baptism reinforces our hope for what is ahead. "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Romans 6:5).

If you were baptized in the past, praise God for his saving grace and remember your baptism with joy and gratitude. If you haven't been baptized, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

Personal Challenge: What do you remember about your own baptism? In your small group, tell about your memories of when, where, and why you were baptized into Christ, and what baptism means to you today.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What circumstances did you face last week that required God's grace or strength?
2. Over the last week, to whom did you take good news?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 6:1-4, 11-23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words.

3. What verse or phrase from this passage might cause you to shout "Hallelujah!"?
4. Let's dig deeper into the passage:
 - What words or phrases in this passage describe or demonstrate the act and meaning of baptism (immersion)?
 - What words or phrases are connected to living a new life (v. 4)?
 - If you have been immersed in Christ, what do you remember about it?
 - How did your baptism demonstrate your own death, burial, and resurrection to a new life?
 - How does being "under grace" affect how you live each day?
 - What does the contrast between being slaves to sin/impurity and being slaves to obedience/righteousness teach you about how to live a holy life?
 - What do you learn about being free from sin?
 - What do you learn about God's grace?
5. What do you learn about God's nature from this passage?
6. What do you learn about human nature?
7. In verse 17, Paul talks of how "you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance." In Scripture, the heart is the core of who you are. It is the center of your will, attitudes, and intentions. With this in mind, how does one obey from the heart?
8. How could you use this passage to teach a nonbeliever or new believer about the nature of God's forgiveness and grace?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What do you need most to live in obedience to God?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 7:7-12, 21-25**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Recognize your
unholiness and ask the
Lord to rescue you.**

STUDY: Romans, Part 3

THEME: Holy

LESSON TEXT: Romans 7:7-12, 21-25

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Ezekiel 6:8-10; 20:42-44; Romans 7:1-6;
Galatians 3:10-22

THE HOLY COMMANDMENT EXPOSES MY UNHOLINESS!

BY MARK SCOTT

Adam was exposed (Genesis 3:9). Cain was exposed (Genesis 4:9). David was exposed (2 Samuel 12:7). Peter was exposed (Luke 22:61-62). John Mark was exposed—literally (Mark 14:51-52). All of us have been exposed (Hebrews 4:13). The Bible is like a mirror that exposes us—warts and all.

Paul continued his argument about sanctification in Romans 6–8. Remembering our baptism helps us live holy lives (Romans 6). The Holy Spirit helps us live holy lives (Romans 8). And staying close to the Bible helps us live holy lives—specifically by allowing its convicting power to wash over us.

The Holy Law Convicts

Romans 7:7-12

Paul used the example of marriage to make his point about the purpose of the law at the beginning of Romans 7. Marriage is binding upon a couple until the death of one's spouse. The purpose of the marriage contract is to keep the couple together. The same is true of the law in regard to its purpose for Christians.

The law (mentioned 12 times in our text and also called the commandment six times in this text) had a noble purpose—i.e., to help make us holy. There is no problem with the law. The law is certainly not sinful. It cannot be blamed for our unholiness. It did what God set out for it to do. It convicted people of sin.

Paul used the example of coveting (strongly desiring something that someone else has). Some scholars have suggested that this was Paul's affliction—but that is only a guess. "You shall not covet" is the final commandment of the 10 (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21). Not knowing the commandment does not exonerate one from being guilty of breaking it. But when one is informed of breaking God's law, the only path forward is to be responsible with that conviction.

Sin seized (mentioned twice in the text, it means "took hold of") the opportunity to attack Paul at his weakest point. Even if Paul did not know he sinned, he still was guilty; but knowing he had sinned made his sin worse in a sense. Paul personified sin by saying sin sprang to life. This happened by listening to the law with its convicting power. The law was intended to make God's people holy. In the end, the law underlined their sinfulness.

The law had a redemptive side. There was nothing wrong with it. It remained holy, righteous and good. Exposure beckons responsibility.

The Law of Sin Wages War

Romans 7:21-25

One might be tempted to think that once the law brought its conviction to God's people they would be totally done with sin. That is wishful thinking, for the battle with sin will continue as long as God's people live or until Jesus returns.

Scholars differ about whether Paul was describing a reality in his life at the time of this book's writing or possibly a reality from his life before he met Christ. First-person descriptors (I, my, and me) occur 24 times in this text, and the present tense might seem to argue that Paul was describing a present struggle. But the grammar does not have to be understood that way. And would a "Christian" say that "good . . . does not dwell in me" (Romans 7:18)?

Regardless of the time period Paul was describing, the "law of sin" (in this case "law" does not mean the Old Testament law but the "principles drawn from experiences") waged war against his soul. Paul's desires were pure. He longed for the right thing (delighted in God's law). But heaven can fix some things we cannot fix in this world. Temptations will come while we exist in the flesh. In fact, sin can make a prisoner out of the finest of believers.

For Paul this meant his life was like a walking civil war. He was similar to a push-me/pull-me toy (i.e., a toy that wants to go in opposite directions at the same time). Paul self-diagnosed himself as wretched (afflicted or in suffering). The only one who can rescue and deliver is Jesus. Constant connection with Jesus helps us wage the war with sin.

Paul admitted to this ongoing war. His saved state in the realm of the mind of Christ submitted to God. But the flesh pulled him away from God. He found himself trapped and enslaved to sin. This was his reality. But a larger reality was when he delighted in God (Psalm 1:2; 119:16, 24, 27) he experienced no condemnation from God . . . and neither will we (Romans 8:1). Exposure can be a good thing so long as it drives us to God.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

LOOK AT THE RIGHT MIRROR

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you ever step into an elevator that has mirrored glass walls and feel surprised by the way you look? I see myself every day in the bathroom mirror at home, but in the changing room at the clothing store, things look different. Maybe it's the light or the angle of the glass, but a different mirror reveals aspects of my appearance I otherwise tend to overlook. Have I put on a few pounds? Is my hair really that gray?

It's good to take a fresh look at ourselves now and then, because most of us gravitate toward one of two extremes and see ourselves as either heroes or zeroes. Narcissists make themselves the center of attention. Others, who are self-effacing, mentally beat themselves up and constantly review their flaws.

In his book *The Self-Aware Leader*, John Maxwell points out that those who lack self-awareness don't realize how they come across to others. He recommends what he calls the Mirror Principle: "The first person we must examine is ourselves."

The Mirror of Truth

Like a mirror, Scripture reflects reality. How foolish it would be to gaze in a mirror and see dirt on your face, but instead of washing your face, you simply walk away and forget about the dirt! According to Jesus' brother, that's what it's like when we hear God's truth but don't practice it (James 1:22-24).

David modeled healthy self-awareness when he wrote, "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). Without defensiveness and with remarkable transparency, David invited the Lord to search his heart.

Likewise, Paul made himself vulnerable in Romans 7. Despite his best efforts, the great apostle admitted he often found himself doing the very things he hated! If you ever feel like a spiritual failure, remember this: One of the world's most influential Christian leaders wrote, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:24). Aren't you glad Paul didn't stop with that verse? He went on to say, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25).

Many of us can identify with Paul's struggle described in Romans 7; the answer to those struggles isn't found in our own human efforts, but in the Spirit-filled life he described in Romans 8.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The Holy Spirit lives in us (v. 9), intercedes for us (v. 26), and makes us "more than conquerors" (v. 37).

If you base your self-image on what others think about you—or pamper your ego with an inflated sense of self-importance—you're looking at a contorted mirror. But if you want to develop healthy self-awareness, it's better to look in the clear, undistorted mirror of God's Word and heed the practical lessons found in Romans 7 and 8.

Don't pretend. Be honest with God about your weaknesses and struggles.

Don't give up. You aren't in the battle alone. God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit will help you.

Don't despair. You may not be a hero, but you aren't a zero. Despite your struggles and imperfections, nothing can separate you from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35-39).

Personal Challenge: In your personal journal or on a piece of paper, write your own "Romans 7." Be honest and vulnerable as you pour out your heart to the heavenly Father about your inner struggles and temptations. Then write your own "Romans 8," expressing gratitude for God's love and the power of his Holy Spirit, who gives you victory over sin and death.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Over the past week, how did God provide you with what you needed to obey him?
2. How did it go last week when you sought to teach a nonbeliever or new believer about the nature of God's forgiveness and grace?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 7:7-12, 21-25** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words.

3. What sentence or phrase from this passage stands out to you?
4. Let's dig deeper into the passage:
 - What is the relationship between sin and the law (commandment)?
 - What words or phrases did Paul use to characterize his struggle with sin and evil?
 - How did Paul view God's law in his heart?
 - How would you summarize the struggle between the desire to do good and the allurements of evil?
 - How would you summarize the solution to the struggle?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about yourself?
7. How does the choice to obey God help you when you experience spiritual warfare?
8. How can sharing your own struggles help you to share the good news with someone you know?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. Please answer one of these questions:
 - What do you want to thank God for?
 - What struggles do you anticipate in your life this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 11:11-32**. 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: **Appreciate the heritage that is ours because of the faith of the patriarchs and other faithful.**

STUDY: Romans, Part 3

THEME: Holy

LESSON TEXT: Romans 11:11-32

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Exodus 19:3-6; 1 Peter 2:1-9

HOLY ROOT, HOLY BRANCHES

BY MARK SCOTT

The lesson title is also a book title. Ronald J. Allen and John C. Holbert wrote *Holy Root, Holy Branches: Christian Preaching from the Old Testament*. When Christians read the Bible, they recognize the heritage from which it comes. If believers are the branches (and they are, John 15:5), then, according to Romans 11, the patriarchs and the other faithful in the Old Testament are the root.

One way to solve the pastoral challenge of helping Jews and Gentiles get along will be to show them how they fit into God's program to save both in his cosmic plan. This is the content of Romans 9–11. It all happens under the sovereignty of God, but it is a bit like dominoes—one must fall before others can fall.

Gentile Inclusion and Jewish Envy

Romans 11:11-24

The Jewish believers in the church at Rome felt squeezed out of God's plan and blessings because the Gentiles were given the right to come into God's family. Some Roman Jews evidently thought that since their forefathers had failed to walk in faith, there was then no hope for them. Paul affirmed just the opposite.

Did the Old Testament Israelites stumble in their faith? Yes, but did they stumble in an irrecoverable way? Not at all! In fact, God used their stumbling as an avenue for the Gentiles to come into God's plan. Israel transgressed (failed, lapsed, or erred), which allowed the Gentiles to experience salvation. But God leveraged this to make Israel envious. Once again, we see this formula at work: Jewish rejection led to Gentile inclusion, which led to Jewish jealousy. That jealousy then would drive them into belief.

Paul took pride (glorified) in his apostleship to the Gentiles to help his own people. If the Gentiles would be reconciled to God by virtue of Paul's ministry, what would happen if the Jews would be stirred to envy and come into the kingdom? That would be joy unspeakable. So, Paul used two metaphors to illustrate his point. The first one, dough, was rather simple. If the dough (i.e., the Jews) was offered as the firstfruits to God, then the whole batch (Jews and Gentiles together) would be holy.

The second metaphor, root and branches, was more complex. To be clear, the root, with some broken-off branches, was Israel, and the ingrafted branches were the Gentiles. The Gentiles are referred to as a wild olive shoot that has been grafted (inserted with a puncture) into the tree. This should give the Gentiles pause and

not make them feel superior. The same God who grafted them in can take them out. The key to both Jew and Gentile is faith (this has been Paul's theme throughout the Epistle). Wild branches and natural branches are maintained by the root through faith.

Jewish Hardening and Gentile Embrace

Romans 11:25-32

God was working his plan. Therefore, ideas of ethnic inferiority or superiority should be jettisoned. The hardening (becoming calloused) of Israel cracked open the door for Gentiles to come into God's family. Therefore, in this way all Israel will be saved. This is a difficult phrase since in this section (Romans 9–11) "Israel" has been understood to be physical Israel (i.e., Jewish descendants). In that sense, Gentiles are not Israel. However, when one considers how inclusive Paul has been to those of Gentile descent (Romans 2:28-29) and how inclusive God has been in times past with those outside Israel (e.g., Exodus 12:38), then "all Israel" that will be saved would be Jews and Gentiles who come to God in faith.

Paul marshaled support for such a wide embracing conclusion from Isaiah 59:20-21 and 27:9. A deliverer would come from Zion (Jesus?) and push godlessness and sins away. This would put an end to the hardening Israel had experienced. For the most part, the Jews had opposed the Christian faith and church in its infancy (cf. Acts 13–21), but that does not mean God washed his hands of Israel. They were, after all, elect. (Is this a promise to hold them together as a people at the very least?)

God's call to Israel could not be taken back (it was irrevocable). The call had already gone out. If God went back on his promise to Israel it would undo his love for the patriarchs. And disobedience on the part of Jews or Gentiles is no problem for God. He handles that with judgment or mercy, and mercy triumphs over judgment (cf. James 2:13). The holy root and the holy branches can be in solidarity through the obedience of faith.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

DON'T CHOP AWAY YOUR ROOTS

BY DAVID FAUST

We worship “the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8), so our view of God should shape our perspective about the past, the present, and the future.

We can’t live in the past. Our relationship with God shouldn’t rely on a nostalgic preoccupation with the way things used to be. Ecclesiastes 7:10 advises, “Do not say, ‘Why were the old days better than these?’ For it is not wise to ask such questions.” Faith invigorates us in the present and hope propels us toward the future.

But we shouldn’t forget the past. The Christian faith is rooted in historical events. The annual Passover observance reminded the Israelites about their long-ago deliverance from slavery. The Psalms called worshippers to praise the Lord for his faithfulness to past generations. At the Last Supper, Jesus instructed his disciples to eat and drink in remembrance of him. Remembering can be an act of worship. It keeps us in touch with our roots. The apostle Paul told Timothy, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead” (2 Timothy 2:8).

The Root Supports You

Romans 11 compares God’s covenant people to an olive tree. Some of the branches (unbelieving Jews) have been cut off, while the Gentiles are like fresh branches grafted onto the tree. Paul cautions the Gentile believers not to be arrogant and consider themselves superior to their brothers and sisters of Jewish descent. Instead, these grafted branches owe a debt of gratitude for the life-giving sap they now receive from God’s tree. Through a remnant of faithful Israelites, Jesus the Messiah came to bring “salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (Romans 1:16).

Paul reminded his readers, “You do not support the root, but the root supports you” (Romans 11:18). Isn’t that an interesting turn of phrase? “The root supports you.” This lesson was originally intended for first-century Christians who struggled to unify Jewish and Gentile believers in the body of Christ, but it’s not a stretch to see how it applies to us. We shouldn’t be prideful that God has grafted us like branches onto his tree. Instead, we should be grateful for those who paved the way for us—who supported us so we could bear fruit for the Lord.

It’s easy to find fault with previous generations, and it’s OK to be honest about their flaws. But we should respect and honor our faithful predecessors who supported us and gave us roots in the faith.

Did Christian parents do their best to bring you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Were you influenced by hardworking schoolteachers and college professors who shaped your character and informed your mind? Have you known churches that faithfully teach God’s Word, serve their communities, and demonstrate God’s love by giving generously and caring for others? Have you been blessed by youth groups, camps, Bible colleges, and seminaries that challenged you to deepen your roots in the faith? Are there friends and family members who have loved you, advised you, and enriched your relationship with God over the years?

Who has supported your walk with God and helped you grow in your faith? “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7).

Personal Challenge: Think of two or three people who have deepened your roots in the Christian faith. Tell them why you appreciate their impact on your life.

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Please answer one of these questions:
 - What can you thank God for today?
 - What struggles did you face last week?
 2. With whom did you share your struggles as you shared the good news last week?
- Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 11:11-32** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly restate the passage in their own words.
3. How would you state the overall message of this passage?
 4. Let's dig deeper:
 - How does the olive tree illustrate God's family?
 - What do you learn from this passage about God's plan for Gentiles (non-Jews)?
 - What do you learn about God's plan for Israel (Jews)?
 - What attitudes and spiritual mindset were Gentiles to take as God works out his plans?
 5. What do you learn about God's character from this passage?
 - What do you learn about his sovereignty?
 - What do you learn about his grace/mercy?
 - What do you learn about his patience?
 - What do you learn about his faithfulness as a promise-keeping God?
 - What part does the "deliverer . . . from Zion" play in all this?
 6. What do you learn about people?
 7. What do you learn about obeying God regardless of your understanding of how he is working?
 8. What attitude should you take as you share the gospel?
 9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
 10. In what way do you need assurance of God's promises this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 12:1-21** as we continue studying Romans. 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: **Commit to living as a pure and holy sacrifice to the Lord.**

STUDY: Romans, Part 3

THEME: Holy

LESSON TEXT: Romans 12:1-21

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Philippians 2:1-8, 14-18; Galatians 2:20

LIVING AND HOLY SACRIFICE

BY MARK SCOTT

In *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart called the Epistles “task theology.” Raymond Bailey called the Epistles “performance literature” in his book, *Paul the Preacher*. In other words, the Epistles were written to cause something to happen. Information was not enough. Transformation was needed. Salvation was to show up in tangible and measurable ways. After 11 chapters of doctrine, Paul shifted his focus to duty in this chapter.

Offering One's Body

Romans 12:1-2

Paul made his appeal to the church in view of God's mercy. This is not the normal word for mercy. This word means “pity shown to others that have been through suffering.” That would be true for both Jews and Gentiles. Paul called these believers who had been “through it” to offer (cause to stand up) their bodies as a living sacrifice. The phrase “living sacrifice” is odd. A person who offers their body as a sacrifice typically dies. A living sacrifice, by contrast, would be someone who reckoned themselves dead but went on living for Christ. Paul said three things about this: it was holy, pleasing (acceptable), and true and proper worship. It is the most and least that a Christian can do in light of God's mercy.

This living sacrifice was offered via transformation. The world will try to “squeeze you into its . . . mould” (J.B. Phillips translation) to match the world (age). God's way is transformation (a total change in form) by the renewing of your mind. In living this way, a believer affirms the will of God, which is good, pleasing and perfect (complete).

Serving the Body

Romans 12:3-8

Individual bodies fold into the larger body of Christ (i.e., church). We will “really feel good about ourselves” (as Bob Russell said in a sermon series on Romans 12) if we offer our bodies to the Lord, but also if we use our spiritual gifts to serve in the church. God's grace (charis) and the gifts coming from that grace (charisma) are to be used to serve others. In humility (thinking with sober judgment, and not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought), we should recognize the gifts God has given us and employ those gifts, as distributed by the Holy Spirit, in faith for others.

Verses 4-5 give the analogy of a human body with its varied parts. Verses 6-8 give a list of seven spiritual gifts. The church functions like a human body. These are not all the gifts of the Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:8-11,

28-31; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10-11); the list also includes prophecy (inspired speech), generic serving (deaconing), teaching (formal instruction), and encouraging (lifting others up). It also includes giving, which can take many forms: giving money, providing leadership (which should be done with great energy or diligence), and acts of mercy (which should be done “hilariously”).

Love Inside and Outside the Body

Romans 12:9-21

The greatest gift of the Holy Spirit is love (1 Corinthians 12:31ff.), and the gifts of the Holy Spirit should always be employed with love. So, in this closing section, Paul used imperatives and cryptic and proverbial sayings to teach the church what love looks like when applied to those inside and outside the church.

Seth Wilson said, “To love the things God loves means that we must hate the things that God hates.” When believers really love as they should, everything else in the text follows. Goodness is embraced. Devotion for others is so strong that honoring them beyond ourselves becomes natural. Our zeal for God and for doing his work becomes second nature. Maintaining joy in hardship, enduring affliction, being faithful in prayer, giving generously, and practicing hospitality in the church body become like breathing.

Loving those outside the body (vv. 14-21) has its challenges, but it also gives evidence of living and holy sacrifices. Blessing persecutors is upside-down behavior to the people of the world. Identifying with the joys and the tears may gain us a hearing with others. A commitment to live in harmony and “work the back of the room” demonstrates humility.

A commitment to peace and living by the golden rule (Matthew 5:44; 7:12) is the best approach in a fallen world. While we cannot demand peace from others, we can do our best to live at peace with everyone. It is wise to leave vengeance to God (Deuteronomy 32:35; Hebrews 10:30) since he does that better than we do. In verse 20, Paul quoted Proverbs 25:21-22 to show how proactive we should be toward the truly needy and those who desire to harm us. Most of these commands are countercultural, but they bring a smile to the face of God.

Mark Scott serves as preaching minister with Park Plaza Christian Church in Joplin, Mo. For 35 years, until 2021, he served as professor of preaching and New Testament with Ozark Christian College in Joplin.

WHAT HAVE WE SACRIFICED?

BY DAVID FAUST

“In view of God’s mercy”—when you consider how kind the Lord has been to you—“offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1). In biblical times, sacrifice usually meant death—animals slaughtered at the altar. What does it mean to be a living sacrifice?

Romans 12:1 makes me ask myself, Am I unreservedly devoted to the Lord? What does it cost me to follow Jesus? Am I willing to push my ego aside, put God’s kingdom first, reject “the pattern of this world,” and “be transformed” by the renewing of my mind (Romans 12:2)?

You Call This a Sacrifice?

I don’t live in a mansion, but my refrigerator is full of food and my closet contains plenty of clothes. I don’t drive a fancy car, but my six-year-old Toyota Corolla gets me where I need to go. I don’t dine like royalty, but I enjoy tasty, nourishing meals every day, and whenever I turn on the faucet, pure water comes out—at the temperature I desire. If I get sick or injured, modern medicine helps me recover. With my cellphone I can communicate conveniently with friends all over the world.

In centuries past, kings and queens would have envied the blessings I take for granted. Sure, I face times of discouragement, but in the big picture, serving the Lord has brought me more blessings than burdens.

Simon Peter once blurted out to Jesus, “We have left everything to follow you!” (Mark 10:28). Moments before, the rich young ruler walked away sad because he couldn’t let go of his possessions. Peter couldn’t help but point out the contrast. In truth, the apostles had given up a lot to follow Jesus—some walked away from their fishing businesses and one left a lucrative tax collecting career. Instead of enjoying comfortable (though unremarkable) lives, they stepped out and joined Jesus on a mission that made them targets for controversy, rejection, hardship, and martyrdom.

Remember Jesus’ response to Peter? “No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). Notice: eternal life comes “with persecutions.” Hard times come when we follow Jesus, but the Lord offsets the burdens with blessings, including a spiritual family so vast it’s beyond comprehension.

Gospel Paradoxes

I know missionaries who have traded the comforts of American life for the challenges of cross-cultural ministry, yet they express no regrets. I know Christians who live in tense, dangerous environments in other nations, yet they seldom complain. Is it possible that being a living sacrifice doesn’t always “feel” sacrificial, “in view of God’s mercy”?

The way of the cross is filled with paradoxes. Lose your life, and you will save it. Deny yourself, and you will find your higher purpose. Volunteer, and you will find joy when you “use whatever gift you have received to serve others” (1 Peter 4:10). Tithe, and you will discover why Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

What do you think it means to offer yourself as a living sacrifice?

Personal Challenge: Write down two lists with the following titles: “What I have sacrificed for the Lord” and “Blessings I have received from the Lord.” Which list is longer? What do you learn from comparing these two lists?

David Faust serves as senior associate minister with East 91st Street Christian Church in Indianapolis.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How has God fulfilled his promises to you or those you love over the past week?
2. With whom did you share the gospel message last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 12:1-21** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly restate the passage in about a minute or less.

3. Look at each of the three sections of this passage (vv. 1-2, vv. 3-8, vv. 9-21). How does each section work together to present the overall message?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - How does verse 1 impact how we carry out the rest of this passage?
 - How does your choice—to conform or be transformed—affect how you follow Christ?
 - How does that same choice affect how you interact in community as a member of Christ's body?
 - How can many Christ followers (from different backgrounds and with different personalities, experiences, and gifts) become "one body"?
 - What main points was Paul making about the gifts we've been given?
 - How can you understand and live out what God wants you to do?
 - How would you characterize the "Christ followers' code of ethics" in verses 9-21?
 - Which of those directives in the "code of ethics" seem to be focused on church insiders? Outsiders?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What directive in verses 9-13 do you most need to obey?
8. Look again at the list of directives in verses 14-21. Which one(s) could most help you in sharing the gospel with people in your circle of influence?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. How can we as a group serve you and share with you 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.