



GOOD NEWS

A Study On Romans 1-3

Seven Week Study
for Groups or Individuals

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

This study was written in the summer of 2015 by Mark Robinson, Stan Schuermann, Dee Graves, Russell Hollingsworth, and Adam Geurkink to be a supplement to a sermon series (entitled “Good News”) at Wildwood Community Church in Norman, Oklahoma. The series was preached from August 16 - September 27, 2015.

The questions for each week (Days 2-4) were written by the following person:

- Week 1: Mark Robinson
- Week 2: Stan Schuermann
- Week 3: Stan Schuermann
- Week 4: Dee Graves
- Week 5: Dee Graves
- Week 6: Russell Hollingsworth
- Week 7: Adam Geurkink

The author of the introduction to the study and the devotionals (Day 5 of each week) are noted next to those sections.

INTRODUCTION:

Good News by Mark Robinson

My wife recently made a decision to help improve the quality of her life. She decided to stop watching the 10:00 PM news. She made this decision not because she dislikes Kelly Ogle or does not care about tomorrow's forecast. She made this decision because so much of the news reported at 10PM is bad news. "A murder in the 700 block of South Walker." "A recall of defective airbags in 500,000 automobiles." "Wars and rumors of wars in the Middle East." These stories (and more) make the average newscast a prelude to counting blood pressure pills, not sheep. We can handle the news on our own timetable, but at bedtime we need a break!

Have you ever felt this way? Have you ever uttered the phrase "I just wish there was more GOOD NEWS?"

Well, believe it or not, there is GOOD NEWS that we can read about every night. In fact, this Good News is really GREAT NEWS for the following reasons:

- It is **relevant**. Sure, occasionally you hear about someone winning the lottery or some team winning the championship . . . but most of the time that is not you! Wouldn't it be great to regularly hear good news that is directly relevant in your life?
- It is **radical**. We live in world that is heavily marketed. Most things around us are presented to us by people who are trying to make their product seem better than it really is. This good news, however, is truly radical. It is spectacular.
- It is **revolutionary**. In a dark and dying world, we are accustomed to "good tries in losing efforts." A lot of what we normally think of as "good news" is merely a temporary moral victory at best. This good news, however, is world changing and everlasting.
- It is **real**. This good news is not just a fortune cookie comment or a wish upon a falling star. This is something that is really happening and really delivering results.

What is this Good News? It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This news is so great because it reveals how utterly broken and breaking people can be made whole again by the God who loves them.

Paul wrote of this Good News in Romans 1:16-17 when he said, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'the righteous shall live by faith.'" This good news is relevant ("for everyone who believes"), radical ("the power of God"), revolutionary ("for salvation"), and real ("revealed from faith for faith").

To say it another way, because of the love of God for you, He wants to revolutionize your life and radically alter your future. Really. Now that is GOOD NEWS.

Over the next 7 weeks, you are invited to join us in a study through the first three chapters of Paul's great letter to the Romans. This epic theological treatise was given by God to us so that we might understand what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. We hope you won't turn the channel. This study brings peace to anxious hearts as we tune in to the Greatest News ever told.

Day 2

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”
2. Read Romans 1:1, 7
3. STUDY NOTE: In modern day America, people typically begin their letters by saying “Dear _____” (identifying who the letter is to), and ending the letter by saying “Sincerely, _____” (identifying who the letter is from). In the first century, letters had a slightly different format. The letter would begin with a revelatory paragraph of who it was to and who it was from. Romans 1:1-7 is the introductory paragraph to one of the greatest letters ever written.
4. What do we learn in Romans 1:1-7 about who this letter was written to and who it was written from?
5. What do you know about the Apostle Paul? (If you want to hear Paul’s life story straight from his mouth, read Acts 26:1-20.)
6. Paul referred to himself as a “servant of Christ Jesus.” Of this designation, W.H. Griffith Thomas said, “He regarded himself as the purchased possession of his Lord and Master. The two ideas of property and service are suggested. There was no serfdom or servility, and yet there was an absolute loyalty in the consciousness of absolute possession. The bond-servant owned nothing, and was nothing apart from his master. His time, his strength, everything belonged altogether to another. There was nothing nobler to St. Paul than to be a slave of the Lord Jesus. He desired to be nothing, to do nothing, to own nothing apart from Him.” This is quite a statement that Paul was making. In what way are all followers of Christ “bond-servants of Jesus”? What would it look like for your life to have that kind of commitment to Jesus?

7. Paul next referred to himself as someone who was “called” and “set apart.” Of these word choices, William Barclay said, “Paul never thought of himself as a man who had aspired to an honor; he thought of himself as a man who had been given a task.” What was the task Paul felt he had been set apart for? Do you have a similar sense of calling in your life?

8. STUDY NOTE: The Greek word “apostle” means “one who is sent.” In a technical sense, this term was applied to the original twelve apostles PLUS Paul. Paul had a special role to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul clearly did not see this role as something he chose, but something God gave.

9. Romans 1:7 lets us know that this letter was written to Christians in the city of Rome . . . a city Paul had never visited (at the time he wrote the letter). In some respects, Rome was the “capital of the western world” in the first century. It was a city of great political importance. The fact that there was a church in Rome by 57 AD (when the letter was written) shows how quickly the Gospel was spreading around the world. Jesus commanded His followers to “Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20), and the budding church in Rome was another evidence that the disciples took Jesus’ commission seriously. What are the “Romes” of our day that the Gospel has pierced? How does a church in Rome in the first century encourage you about the possibility of the church growing in places all over the world today?

Day 3

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23-24. “This is what the Lord declares: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.” Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read Romans 1:2-4
3. According to Romans 1:2, the Gospel was something that God had promised and spoke about through the prophets throughout the Old Testament. Based on what you know about the Old Testament, what are some of the things God said to the world through the prophets about the coming of Jesus?
4. Read Isaiah 53:1-12. This passage is most likely one of the passages of Scripture Paul was thinking of as he talked about the Gospel spoken of by the Old Testament prophets. Though Isaiah wrote hundreds of years before Jesus was born on the earth, it refers to the coming of the Savior who would one day make atonement for the sins of His people. Scan this passage and make a list of all the references you see that Jesus fulfilled in His time on this earth.
5. What does it tell you about the heart of God for His people that He had planned Jesus arrival and ministry many years before Jesus actually came to the earth?

6. **STUDY NOTE:** In the opening paragraph to his letter to the Romans, Paul makes it clear that this book is about the Gospel (or good news) in 1:1b (Paul was “set apart for the Gospel.”) In 1:3, we see that the Gospel is concerning the Son (Jesus). In verses 3-4, Paul gives a couple of reasons why Jesus is someone we should take seriously.
7. The first reason Paul mentions for why we should take Jesus seriously is because He is the Son of (or descendant) of David (1:3). What is the significance that Jesus was a descendent of David? (NOTE: If you need help, revisit 2 Samuel 7:8-17 and read the promises that God made to David and his descendants.)
8. The second reason Paul mentions for why we should take Jesus seriously is because of Jesus’ divine identity. Romans 1:4 is full of references to Jesus being God. What are some of the things you see in this verse that point to Jesus’ deity?
9. In 1:4, Paul references Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Paul wrote this just 25 years after Jesus’ resurrection. This made the original recipients of the letter people who could have somewhat easily verified the historical veracity of the empty tomb. If Jesus had NOT risen from the dead, it would have been fairly easy to disprove in 57 AD. Eye witnesses to his death were still alive and accessible. The grave site was still easy to find, and several people could have taken you there. However, Paul boldly proclaims the resurrection as a fact. Bolstered by the eye witness accounts of many who had also seen Jesus resurrected (including Paul himself who saw Jesus on the road to Damascus), Paul boldly proclaimed the authenticity of the good news by linking it to the empty tomb. What does this tell you about what Paul thought about the historicity of Jesus’ death and resurrection and its importance for the Christian life?

10. Have you ever stopped to realize that your faith in God is not based on fairy tales but on history? Jesus indeed came to the earth. He really lived a perfect life. He really died on the cross for your sins. He really rose from the dead. If Jesus did not really do these things, then our faith is built on a myth or a lie. Have you ever stopped to consider that our faith is founded on truth God revealed in history?

Day 4

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, “Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.”
2. Read Romans 1:5-6
3. Citizens of Rome were not people most Jews wanted to convert in the first century. They were people they wanted to defeat. Rome was an occupying force in Israel, making them an enemy to many. Most first century Jews had little compassion for their oppressors. Yet Paul desires to minister among this group of people. Why do you think that is? What happened in Paul’s life that would have him so interested in ministering to the Roman Gentiles? How does Romans 1:5 help you answer this question?
4. The clear implication of Romans 1:5 is that Paul had been given both grace and a calling. Paul was forgiven and set free from his sin, but also commissioned to take this same message to the Gentile people, including the people of Rome. Like Paul, all Christians, have been given both grace and a calling. In your own words how would you describe your “grace and calling” given by God to you in this life?
5. The power of the Gospel will ultimately lead to a changed life (“obedience of faith” in verse 6). While Christians are not saved by their good works (something that Paul will explain in great detail in Romans 1-3), the Christian who is saved by grace is also saved and equipped with the expectation and hope of an obedient (to God) life. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God has called you to follow Him in obedience. What are some areas of your life today where you struggle to obey God in faith?

6. People long to belong. We are wired to be together. Paul writes to the Roman followers of Christ, and encourages them that they have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. In Christ, there are no longer divisions between Jews (like Paul) and Gentiles (like the Romans). There are just people saved by grace and united by Jesus Christ. What are some of the ways you are tempted to divide the church today (rich/poor, black/white, etc.)? How does this encouragement by Paul that we can all “belong in Christ” encourage you?

7. Scan back over Paul’s introduction to his letter to the Romans in 1:1-7. What most stands out to you about how he describes himself? About how he describes the Gospel?

Day 5

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Where are YOU From? by Mark Robinson

In the summer of 2000, I found myself in paradise. Some people are beach people. Paradise for them is under an umbrella watching the tide roll in. Other people are mountain people . . . loving life most at elevations over 5,000 feet. I am more of a mountain man myself, so when I had the chance to go to Banff National Park in Canada in June 2000, I jumped at the chance.

A man in our church gave my wife and I some frequent flyer tickets for a graduation present from seminary, and Kimberly's sister was stationed in Calgary for the summer by her employer - so we had free transportation and a free place to stay about an hour's drive from Canada's most beautiful National Park.

After a few days exploring the high country, we ended up back in Calgary and at dinner with Kimberly's sister and her (then boyfriend, now husband). At this point, I had been in Canada for nearly a week and I had begun to think that I "fit in" north of the border. I had learned the lingo, wore similar clothes to the locals, and adored their mountains. Though Canada is a different country, there are many similarities in appearance to my home back in the states. However, any thought that I could pass as a Canadian evaporated as the waitress took our drink orders.

The orders started with my brother-in-law then moved around to my sister-in-law, then wife. They all ordered without issue. However, when I ordered my drink, the waitress stopped in her tracks and said, "Where are YOU from?"

Honestly, I do not think I have an accent. I sound "normal" to me. However, as time has gone on, I realize that my southern drawl tethers me to my Oklahoma home. All 4 of us around the table that night were from the same hometown, yet it was my voice that blew our cover.

We live in a world where most of the time Christians "fit in." As American Christians we know the lingo, wear fashionable clothing, and enjoy much of the same local entertainment as our non-Christian friends. Sure, we have unique beliefs and a different moral compass, but generally we look the part of American locals.

However, our home is not here. Our citizenship is in heaven. Eventually, the world will find this out, and one of the ways the world finds out who we really are is when we open our mouths and speak. When Christians talk, our "spiritual accent" should come through, showing our connection to our Savior.

We clearly see this from the Apostle Paul. In Romans 1:1-7, Paul begins a letter to the church in Rome. In this introductory paragraph Paul introduces himself. When he does, his connection to

Jesus is clearly heard. Paul here describes himself as a “servant of Christ Jesus” (1:1). Bible Scholar W.H. Griffith Thomas described Paul’s connection to Christ this way, “He regarded himself as the purchased possession of his Lord and Master. The two ideas of property and service are suggested. There was no serfdom or servility, and yet there was an absolute loyalty in the consciousness of absolute possession. The bond-servant owned nothing, and was nothing apart from his master. His time, his strength, everything belonged altogether to another. There was nothing nobler to St. Paul than to be a slave of the Lord Jesus. He desired to be nothing, to do nothing, to own nothing apart from Him.”

Paul saw his entire life and purpose tied up in Jesus Christ. He could not talk without pointing people back to Him. When Paul spoke, I believe people said things like, “where is this guy from?” not because of his Jewish complexion or Greek dialect. I think they said that because His self-descriptions pointed people to His Lord and Savior.

How about you? When you describe who you are and what is important to you, do you reference the person of Jesus Christ and His redeeming work in your life? For Paul, this was the most important thing about himself, so he led with that identity. Paul did not lead off with his human education (which was excellent) or his earthly accomplishments (which were also stout.) He led off with His Savior, showing not where he was from but where He was going. Does your speech reveal a similar story?

I am challenged by this. As someone who is a “vocational Christian,” people quickly ascertain that I am a part of the Christian religion. However, I am not a follower of Christ because I get paid by a church or went through graduate school at a seminary. The most important thing about me is not my vocation or my schooling. The most important thing about me is what Jesus has done for me, and what He wants to offer you. When I speak, I want people to know where I am going (following Christ) more than where I am from. After all, it is not important that we all sound like we are from Northeast Oklahoma, but I pray God uses me (and my words) to help many follow Christ.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend a few moments thanking God for the promise of life that He has given you in Jesus Christ. Ask that His Holy Spirit would continue to help you hold on to that promise in your daily life. Pray that you would “fan into flame” the gifts that God has given you and the unique ways He has equipped you for ministry.
2. Reread Romans 1:1-7
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Day 2

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”
2. Read Romans 1:8
3. In Romans 1:8, Paul says, “*First, I thank my God*” - Paul begins this section by commending the faith of the Roman’s and he implies that their faith had been received from God. In his commentary on Romans, John Calvin writes, “We are taught that faith is God’s gift; for thanksgiving is an acknowledgment of a benefit. He who gives thanks to God for faith, confesses that it comes from Him.” (NOTE: Paul often directs those to whom he is writing to know that their faith is a gift from God; see 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, Ephesians 2:4-9 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1-4.)
 - Do you understand that the faith you have to believe in Christ is a gift from God?
 - Do you often give thanks to God for your own faith?
 - Do you give thanks for the faith you see in others?
4. Paul goes on to say, “*I thank my God through Jesus Christ*” – We should remember that all of our blessings are God’s free gifts. We see in Paul’s example that thanks should be given through Christ because it is in His name we seek and obtain mercy from the Father. What does it mean to you to give thanks through Jesus Christ?

5. Paul continues and says, “*I thank my God*” – We also observe that Paul addresses God as *His God*. Calvin writes, “This is the faithful’s special privilege, and on them alone God bestows this honor. There is indeed implied in this a mutual relationship, which is expressed in this promise.” We see in Paul’s prayer the example that Christ Himself taught – That we have the special privilege of coming to God as *our* God and *our* Father, continually.
- Do you think of the eternal creator as *my* God?
 - What comfort and confidence does this give to you as you pray?
6. STUDY NOTE: Our God invites us to acknowledge that all of our blessings are His free gifts and they come to us because of Christ.

Day 3

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23-24. “This is what the Lord declares: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.” Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read Romans 1:9-14
3. STUDY NOTE: In 1:11, we see Paul’s desire to visit the Roman Christians (“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you . . .”). It is clear that Paul sees great benefit in being in fellowship with other believers. Of this, Calvin writes, “He has here strikingly pointed out the use of gifts by the word, *imparting*: for different gifts are distributed to each individual, that all may in kindness mutually assist one another, and transfer to others what each one possesses.”
4. In 1:12 Paul says, “That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.” It is amazing to see how Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, was willing to learn from unexperienced Christian “beginners.” From the youngest to the oldest, each one in the Church has gifts which they are able to contribute to others. We can sometimes be hindered from benefiting from this blessing of Christian fellowship by our high-mindedness and our belief that we possess all that we need and are sufficient of ourselves. (See 1 Corinthians 12)
 - When have you been eager to fellowship with other believers, so that you may “impart” to them what they may lack and thus encourage their faith?

 - What gifts do you impart to other believers?

 - Since by God’s design, we are not sufficient by ourselves, what gifts do you receive from other believers?

5. This mutual giving and the resulting encouragement is also true of the believers in our own household.
- For those who are married, do you have this desire to “impart” your gifts to your husband or wife?
 - Are you thankful for and eagerly receive the gifts your spouse gives to you?
 - How do you encourage your spouse to impart his/her gifts to you?
6. In 1:14, Paul says, “I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.” John Stott, in his commentary on Romans, gives a helpful illustration of this obligation or indebtedness. “There are two possible ways of getting into debt. The first is to borrow money from someone; the second is to be given money for someone by a third party... It is in this second sense that Paul is in debt. He has not borrowed anything from the Romans which he must repay. But Jesus Christ has entrusted him with the gospel for them.”
- Do you consider yourself, like Paul, having received the Gospel, to now be indebted to others?
 - How are you discharging this debt?

Day 4

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, “Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.”
2. Read Romans 1:15-17
3. STUDY NOTE: In Romans 1:16-17, Paul says “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” The two leading doctrines of this great letter to the Romans are stated in these verses. First: Salvation is by faith alone. Second: The free offer of salvation is to all without distinction – Jew and Gentile alike. The Gospel, which Paul will systematically explain in the rest of his letter, can be summarized as Good News offered to a people who hear and understand the Bad News about their condition. The Bad News is that in order to be loved by God, we must first become righteous, since God regards unrighteousness with hatred. The Good News is that the righteousness which God requires, He also provides. In His Son, God offers to all, without distinction, His own righteousness that we might be saved from the condemnation and the power of sin. The gospel of God’s righteousness is offered freely in His Son and that is why it can only be apprehended by faith.
4. Paul is also preparing the Romans for bearing the reproach of the cross of Christ. Calvin writes, “Lest they should esteem the gospel of less value by finding it exposed to the scoffs and reproaches of the ungodly; and, on the other hand, he shows how valuable it was to the faithful. If, in the first place, the power of God ought to be extolled by us, that power shines forth in the gospel; if, again, the goodness of God deserves to be sought and loved by us, the gospel is a display of his goodness. It ought then to be revered and honored, since veneration is due to God’s power; and as it avails to our salvation, it ought to be loved by us.”
 - Since the gospel is such Good News, why would Paul, an Apostle, be tempted to be ashamed of it?
 - Why are we tempted to be ashamed of the gospel, rather than extoll it and love it?
 - How do we overcome this temptation?

- How can we increase our love for the gospel of Christ?
5. In 1:16, Paul says, “*for it is the power of God for salvation - to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*” – of this John Calvin writes, “The gospel invites all to partake of salvation without any difference.” He goes on to say, “Everywhere in Scripture the word salvation is simply set in opposition to the word destruction... Since the gospel delivers from ruin and the curse of endless death, the salvation which the gospel brings to us is eternal life.”
- What is required of us to receive the benefit of this power?
 - According to John’s Gospel (John 1:12-13), how does someone become a child of God?
 - Is this sufficient proof that everything pertaining to our salvation has already been done?
6. 1:17 references the “righteousness of God.” To the best of your understanding, what is the righteousness of God?
7. STUDY NOTE: John Stott summarizes the righteousness of God, as Paul has used it, in this way: “It is a righteous status which God requires if we are ever to stand before Him, which He achieves through the atoning sacrifice of the cross, which He reveals in the gospel, and which He bestows freely on all who trust in Jesus Christ... It seems legitimate to affirm, therefore, that ‘the righteousness of God’ is God’s righteous initiative in putting sinners right with Himself, by bestowing on them a righteousness which is not their own, but His.”

8. We have received the rich benefits of the Reformation of the 16th Century. The Reformation began when Martin Luther, a lawyer turned monk, for the first time understood the gospel as Paul declares it in Romans 1:16-17. R. C. Sproul describes from Luther's writings his response to Romans 1:16-17 "Luther was looking now at the Greek word that was in the New Testament... the word which didn't mean to make righteous, but rather to *regard* as righteous, to *count* as righteous, to *declare* as righteous. And this was the moment of awakening for Luther. He understood that here Paul was not talking about the righteousness by which God Himself is righteous, but a righteousness that God gives freely by His grace to people who don't have righteousness of their own." Luther then understood that the righteousness by which he must be saved, is not his! It's what he called a *justitia alienum*, an alien righteousness; a righteousness that belongs properly to somebody else. It's a righteousness that is *extra nos*, outside of us. Namely, the righteousness of Christ. And Luther said, "When I discovered that, I was born again of the Holy Ghost. And the doors of paradise swung open, and I walked through."

- Have you experienced the gospel's saving power in your life?

- How does the righteous man live by faith?

9. STUDY NOTE: John Stott is helpful in understanding this: "Righteousness and life are both by faith. Those who are righteous by faith also live by faith. Having begun in faith, they continue in the same path."

Day 5

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

The Power of God by Stan Schuermann

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,

What was the reason Paul was not ashamed of the gospel? Why was he so confident? Paul knew that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. He knew that the gospel has the power to change lives.

My grandchildren recently were amazed as they watched a tractor equipped with a loader bucket lift boulders and heavy tree stumps. The lifting of these giant loads seemed to them impossible. But each time a boulder or stump rose into the air, they gave a collective, "Wow!" as they marveled at the "awesome" power of the tractor. We are most impressed by power, when we see it displayed in doing what to us seems impossible.

To understand *the power of God for salvation*, consider what the prophet Jeremiah asked, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? The answer is certainly no, for it is impossible. "Then may you also do good, who are accustomed to do evil." (Jeremiah 13:23 NKJV) The prophet makes his point – It would be impossible for those of whom he is writing to change.

This could mean that all of us with sinful habits, are doomed to remain unchanged. But everywhere the gospel is preached we see the power of God displayed in salvation, the changed lives of people who believe. In fact this was the case in every city where Paul proclaimed the gospel and the Spirit of God worked. See also (Acts 17: , etc.)

Consider what Paul writes to the Corinthian Church. Like Rome, Corinth was a place of commerce, wealth and luxury while it abounded in every evil and vice. Like Rome, a church had been established earlier through the preaching of the gospel.

"⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 ESV)"

Notice what Paul is saying, "And such were some of you!" The transformed lives of the people in the church in Corinth were a display of the power of God in the gospel of His Son.

Give thanks for this power that has come to you “by the Spirit of our God.”

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend a few moments thanking God for the promise of life that He has given you in Jesus Christ. Ask that His Holy Spirit would continue to help you hold on to that promise in your daily life. Pray that you would “fan into flame” the gifts that God has given you and the unique ways He has equipped you for ministry.
2. Reread Romans 1:8-17
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Day 2

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”
2. Read Romans 1:18-32
3. STUDY NOTE: 1:18 - For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. In this section Paul describes the three stages of the downward spiral of pagan depravity. John Stott identifies these stages as 1) Men knew God, 2) Men rejected this knowledge in favor of idolatry and 3) God gave them over. To understand verse 18, we must understand the wrath of God. John Stott describes God’s wrath as “God reacting in revulsion against sin. It is his deeply personal abhorrence of evil.” Paul says God’s wrath is being revealed against ungodliness. God’s wrath is ongoing and is visible in the moral and social corruption that Paul describes. Stott says, “Scripture is quite clear that the essence of sin is godlessness. It is the attempt to get rid of God and, since that is impossible, the determination to live as though one had succeeded in doing so. ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes’ (Romans 3:18).” As you read this section, you will see that Paul describes several “exchanges.” In order to exchange something, I must first possess it. I must first possess a shirt, before I can go into a store and exchange it for one I like better. In verse 23, men *exchanged* the glory of the incorruptible God for images of corruptible men and animals, which they preferred. In verse 25, men *exchanged* the truth of God for a lie, which they preferred. And in verse 26 and 27, men and women *exchanged* what was natural for the unnatural function which they preferred. Paul also, in three separate verses, describes God’s wrath as the terrible judgment of giving men over, or giving men up to their own sinful desires. This is the idea of ceasing to restrain. In verse 24, *God gave them over* in the lusts of their hearts to impurity. In verse 26, *God gave them over* to degrading and unnatural passions. And in verse 28, *God gave them over* to a depraved mind, which is a mind that can choose nothing that is right.
4. How do men presently “suppress the truth” about the glory of God?

5. Why do men attempt to suppress the truth? Are they successful?

6. Are those whom God has “given up” (ceased to restrain from sin) beyond the saving power of the gospel? Why or why not?

Day 3

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23-24. “This is what the Lord declares: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.” Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read Romans 1:19-23
3. **STUDY NOTE:** Paul says that although God is Himself invisible, He makes His glory known in His creation. This revelation is sufficient so that men are without excuse. We cannot plead ignorance. Calvin writes that, “The Apostle means, that man was created to be a spectator of this formed world, and that eyes were given him, that he might, by looking on so beautiful a picture, be led up to the Author himself.” He goes on to say, “We conceive that there is a God and that He should be worshipped, but our reason fails us and we cannot know who or what sort of being God is.”
4. What invisible attributes of our invisible God should men clearly see?
5. Our children are full of wonder and curiosity AND questions! What should we teach them concerning the creator of the beauty that they see?

6. STUDY NOTE: Men robbed God of His honor as creator as they exchanged the truth about God for images and thoughts which they themselves imagined according to their own reasoning and superstitions. In our day, although few are creating images of how they imagine god to be, many believe that the beauty and order they behold is merely the effect of random collisions of chemicals. They believe that science has now shown God to be unnecessary. Professing themselves to be wise, they reject God as creator.

7. In what ways are CHRISTIANS tempted to exchange the revealed truth about God for a lie?

8. STUDY NOTE: Although the knowledge of God in creation is sufficient to render men without excuse, see Acts 14:16-17 and Acts 17:22-31, it is not sufficient to lead men to salvation in Christ. The knowledge which leads us to Christ is found only in his gospel. Paul will explain this fully in Chapter 10:14-17.

Day 4

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, “Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.”
2. Read Romans 1:24-32
3. Why would men and women exchange the truth about God for what is false?
4. Paul says that as part of the judgment of God, God gave humanity over to unnatural lusts, even lusts which reversed the whole order of nature. In what way is the example of homosexuality in 1:26-27 a good example of this reversal?
5. Do you see evidence of God’s wrath against godlessness today? Do you believe God is currently revealing His wrath upon mankind by giving men over to these sins?

6. Paul sets forth the relation between sin and punishment in 1:28. Calvin writes, “As they chose not to continue in the knowledge of God, which alone guides our minds to true wisdom, the Lord gave them a perverted mind, which can choose nothing that is right... They preferred their own vanities to the true God.” Everywhere the Bible tells us that true wisdom comes from God alone. When men reject God’s wisdom and prefer their own, how will they come to know the wisdom from God?

7. **STUDY NOTE:** In 1:29-31 Paul recites a catalogue of vices. While not all were murderers, or thieves, or adulterers, all have been polluted by one vice or another. This is why the gospel, which Paul will later explain, is such good news and brings hope for everyone. No one is beyond the saving power of the Gospel as he stated in verse 16. This point is graphically illustrated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. In those verses Paul includes another list of sins and vices, follows that list by saying, “Such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God.”

8. What has the power to change not only our destiny, but also our identity and our habits?

9. STUDY NOTE: Paul's closing thought to chapter 1 (found in 1:32) relates to the willful rebellion of mankind. Of this verse Calvin writes, "That men left nothing undone for the purpose of giving unbridled liberty to their sinful propensities; for having taken away all distinction between good and evil, they approved in themselves and in others those things which they knew displeased God, and would be condemned by His righteous judgment. For it is the summit of all evils, when the sinner is so void of shame, that he is pleased with his own vices, and will not bear them to be reproved, and also cherishes them in others by his consent and approbation. This desperate wickedness is thus described in Scripture: 'They boast when they do evil,' (Proverbs 2:14.)" The bad news about our condition is very bad. So bad that this section of scripture is even hard to read. We see why God has such a strong and personal revulsion towards our sin and we see how unable we are to get ourselves "back to the garden." Paul is not yet through with his indictment of mankind, but in Chapter 3 all of this darkness which he carefully catalogues will yield to the light of the gospel that he will declare. Paul will answer the question, how can a sinful and unjust people be declared just before a holy God? It is by the gospel - for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Day 5

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Off with the Old, On with the New by Stan Schuermann

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

How does the righteous man or woman live by faith? We may not consider ourselves to be righteous. Maybe we are not even comfortable with the term, righteous. But recall that as a believer in Christ, we are not of ourselves righteous. It is Christ, our mediator, who is righteous. And He grants (imputes) His righteous standing to us. This is why our righteousness is what the Bible calls an *imputed* righteousness. It belongs to someone else who has freely given it to us.

So that is how we may be considered righteous before God. But what does Paul mean when he says, *The righteous shall live by faith*? John Stott is helpful: "Righteousness and life are both by faith. Those who are righteous by faith also live by faith. Having begun in faith, they continue in the same path."

Believing in the truth about Jesus is how I am *declared* righteous. Now I am to *live* believing the truth about Jesus and believing the truth about who I am. And I am to continue believing. Paul had this in mind as he wrote to the Romans. In fact many of his letters have a similar theme, 1) He explains to the reader this is who you were, then, 2) This is who you now are in Christ, so therefore, 3) This is how you are to live. (See Ephesians 4:13-32 and Colossians 3:1-17)

Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus that they are to "grow up in all aspects in Him (Christ)" by understanding who they were, who they now are in Christ, and living according to who they are in Christ. He tells them to put off (like an old garment) who they were and put on (like a new garment) who they are in Christ.

Paul has given us a most practical and encouraging truth. We don't have to remain in our old sinful habits and thoughts. When we recognize them, we can know that this is part of what Paul calls our "old self" that no longer has power over us and we can live according to our "new self." Why is this such great news? Think about how long it takes you to change your shirt. It doesn't take years. It only takes a few seconds.

As a believer I bring my old habits and sins into my new life as a Christian. But as I live by faith, God the Spirit helps me recognize them and put them off. I grow up and gradually (growth is gradual) I become more like my new habits than my old habits. This is not just a change that happens through my own efforts, but through God the Spirit, working in me.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend a few moments thanking God for the promise of life that He has given you in Jesus Christ. Ask that His Holy Spirit would continue to help you hold on to that promise in your daily life. Pray that you would “fan into flame” the gifts that God has given you and the unique ways He has equipped you for ministry.
2. Reread Romans 1:18-32
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Day 2

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to humble your heart so that you may receive the grace described in James 4:6 “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”
2. Read Romans 2:1
3. STUDY NOTE: The Apollo 13 mission launched at exactly 13:13 Houston time. Two days later on April 13, 1970, something happened. In describing the event, commander of the mission, James A. Lovell, said, “the roof fell in; rather, oxygen tank No. 2 blew up, causing No. 1 tank also to fail. We came to the slow conclusion that our normal supply of electricity, light, and water was lost, and we were about 200,000 miles from Earth.” “Houston, we have a problem.” At the conclusion of Romans 1, we realize, mankind has a problem. Mankind has failed, is lost, and seemingly 200,000 miles from God.
4. Look back at Romans 1:18-32 where Paul is describing the “Wrath of God” and mankind’s sin. How many times does Paul use the word “they” or “them” or “their?” What effect does this have on us as we read about the sins of mankind? Do we feel anger and frustration with mankind for their sinfulness?
5. Now looking at Romans 2:1-16, we see that Paul begins with the word “You.” How many times does Paul use the word “you” in these first 16 verses? What message does this communicate about the anger and frustration we felt with mankind when we were reading the end of Romans 1?

6. What do you think is the main point of Romans 2:1-16?

Day 3

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23-24. “This is what the Lord declares: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.” Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read Romans 2:1-3
3. What does it mean to “pass judgment on someone else?” (Romans 2:1-3)
4. Why does Paul tell us that when we pass judgment on others we condemn ourselves? What do you think this means?
5. When Paul’s letter was read aloud to the Roman church, there were likely some listeners who were nodding their head at the condemnation of idol worshipers, homosexual practices, and violent people. What do you think their reaction was to Paul’s announcement that they were guilty of sins that God took just as seriously as the things listed in chapter 1?

6. Is there any sin so insignificant that God will overlook it?

Day 4

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, “Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.”
2. Read Romans 2:4-16
3. God in kindness holds back His judgment patiently allowing us to repent (2:4). In looking at the sins of others, God’s patience might be mistaken for indifference or approval of sin. How then should we feel when we consider God’s patience with our own sin?
4. Paul describes the reader’s lack of repentance storing or treasuring up wrath for them in the day of His “righteous judgment” (2:5-16). Paul then notes that it will only be the seeker of glory, honor, and immortality who will receive eternal life. Who can these people be: the unrepentant and the seeker? In our understanding of scripture as a whole, is there anyone who perseveres in “doing good” sufficiently enough to merit eternal life?
5. Paul describes the Jews who have the Law and the Gentiles who have the law written on their heart. But He notes that hearing the law is not the same as obeying the law. So, God in His fairness does not show favoritism to either group. “All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.” Who then can be saved? Is there anyone who does not violate either the standard given by God or the standard they create for themselves?

6. Around the world, there is evidence in every society and culture of God's moral law. Murder, for example, is prohibited in every society and culture. However, in what culture or society has there never been a murder? What does this demonstrate about mankind's ability to follow the standard he sets for himself? How do you live up to your own standard?

Day 5

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Parable of the River *By Max Lucado*

(Taken from The Grip of Grace by Max Lucado)

Once there were five sons who lived in a mountain castle with their father. The eldest was an obedient son, but his four younger brothers were rebellious. Their father had warned them of the river, but they had not listened. He had begged them to stay clear of the bank lest they be swept downstream, but the river's lure was too strong.

Each day the four rebellious brothers ventured closer and closer until one son dared to reach in and feel the waters. "Hold my hand so I won't fall in," he said, and his brothers did. But when he touched the water, the current yanked him and the other three into the rapids and rolled them down the river.

Over rocks they bounced, through the channels they roared, on the swells they rode. Their cries for help were lost in the rage of the river. Though they fought to gain their balance, they were powerless against the strength of the current. After hours of struggle, they surrendered to the pull of the river. The waters finally dumped them on the bank in a strange land, in a distant country, in a barren place.

Savage people dwelt in the land. It was not safe like their home.

Cold winds chilled the land. It was not warm like their home.

Rugged mountains marked the land. It was not inviting like their home.

Though they did not know where they were, of one fact they were sure: They were not intended for this place. For a long time the four young sons lay on the bank, stunned at their fall and not knowing where to turn. After some time they gathered their courage and reentered the waters, hoping to walk upstream. But the current was too strong. They attempted to walk along the river's edge, but the terrain was too steep. They considered climbing the mountains, but the peaks were too high. Besides, they didn't know the way.

Finally, they built a fire and sat down. "We shouldn't have disobeyed our father," they admitted. "We are a long way from home."

With the passage of time the sons learned to survive in the strange land. They found nuts for food and killed animals for skins. They determined not to forget their homeland nor abandon hopes of returning. Each day they set about the task of finding food and building shelter. Each evening they built a fire and told stories of their father and brother. All four sons longed to see them again.

Then, one night, one brother failed to come to the fire. The others found him the next morning in the valley with the savages. He was building a hut of grass and mud. "I've grown tired of our

talks," he told them. "What good does it do to remember? Besides, this land isn't so bad. I will build a great house and settle here."

"But it isn't home," they objected.

"No, but it is if you don't think of the real one."

"But what of Father?"

"What of him? He isn't here. He isn't near. Am I to spend forever awaiting his arrival? I'm making new friends; I'm learning new ways. If he comes, he comes, but I'm not holding my breath."

And so the other three left their hut-building brother and walked away. They continued to meet around the fire, speaking of home and dreaming of their return.

Some days later, a second brother failed to appear at the campfire. The next morning his siblings found him on a hillside staring at the hut of his brother.

"How disgusting," he told them as they approached. "Our brother is an utter failure. An insult to our family name. Can you imagine a more despicable deed? Building a hut and forgetting our father?"

"What he's doing is wrong," agreed the youngest, "but what we did was wrong as well. We disobeyed. We touched the river. We ignored our father's warnings."

"Well, we may have made a mistake or two, but compared to the sleaze in the hut, we are saints. Father will dismiss our sin and punish him."

"Come," urged his two brothers, "return to the fire with us."

"No, I think I'll keep an eye on our brother. Someone needs to keep a record of his wrongs to show Father."

And so the two returned, leaving one brother building and the other judging.

The remaining two sons stayed near the fire, encouraging each other and speaking of home. Then one morning the youngest son awoke to find he was alone. He searched for his brother and found him near the river, stacking rocks.

"It's no use," the rock-stacking brother explained as he worked. "Father won't come for me. I must go to him. I offended him. I insulted him. I failed him. There is only one option. I will build a path back up the river and walk into our father's presence. Rock upon rock I will stack until I have enough rocks to travel upstream to the castle. When he sees how hard I have worked and how diligent I have been, he will have no choice but to open the door and let me into his house."

The last brother did not know what to say. He returned to sit by the fire, alone. One morning he heard a familiar voice behind him. "Father has sent me to bring you home."

The youngest lifted his eyes to see the face of his oldest brother. "You have come for us!" he shouted. For a long time the two embraced.

"And your brothers?" the eldest finally asked.

"One has made a home here. Another is watching him. The third is building a path up the river."

And so firstborn set out to find his siblings. He went first to the thatched hut in the valley.

"Go away, stranger!" screamed the brother through the window. "You are not welcome here!"

"I have come to take you home."

"You have not. You have come to take my mansion."

"This is no mansion," Firstborn countered. "This is a hut."

"It is a mansion! The finest in the lowlands. I built it with my own hands. Now, go away. You cannot have my mansion."

"Don't you remember the house of your father?"

"I have no father."

"You were born in a castle in a distant land where the air is warm and the fruit is plentiful. You disobeyed your father and ended up in this strange land. I have come to take you home."

The brother peered through the window at Firstborn as if recognizing a face he'd remembered from a dream. But the pause was brief, for suddenly the savages in the house filled the window as well. "Go away, intruder!" they demanded. "This is not your home."

"You are right," responded the firstborn son, "but neither is it his."

The eyes of the two brothers met again. Once more the hut-building brother felt a tug at his heart, but the savages had won his trust. "He just wants your mansion," they cried. "Send him away!"

And so he did.

Firstborn sought the next brother. He didn't have to walk far. On the hillside near the hut, within eyesight of the savages, sat the fault-finding son. When he saw Firstborn approaching, he shouted, "How good that you are here to behold the sin of our brother! Are you aware that he turned his back on the castle? Are you aware that he never speaks of home? I knew you would come. I have kept careful account of his deeds. Punish him! I will applaud your anger. He deserves it! Deal with the sins of our brother."

Firstborn spoke softly, "We need to deal with your sins first."

"My sins?"

"Yes, you disobeyed Father."

The son smirked and slapped at the air. "My sins are nothing. *There* is the sinner," he claimed, pointing to the hut. "Let me tell you of the savages who stay there..."

"I'd rather you tell me about yourself."

"Don't worry about me. Let me show you who needs help," he said, running toward the hut. "Come, we'll peek in the windows. He never sees me. Let's go together." The son was at the hut before he noticed that Firstborn hadn't followed him.

Next, the eldest son walked to the river. There he found the last brother, knee-deep in the water, stacking rocks.

"Father has sent me to take you home."

The brother never looked up. "I can't talk now. I must work."

"Father knows you have fallen. But he will forgive you..."

"He may," the brother interrupted, struggling to keep his balance against the current, "but I have to get to the castle first. I must build a pathway up the river. First I will show him that I am worthy. Then I will ask for his mercy".

"He has already given his mercy. I will carry you up the river. You will never be able to build a pathway. The river is too long. The task is too great for your hands. Father sent me to carry you home. I am stronger."

For the first time the rock-stacking brother looked up. "How dare you speak with such irreverence! My father will not simply forgive. I have sinned. I have sinned greatly! He told us to avoid the river, and we disobeyed. I am a great sinner. I need much work."

"No, my brother, you don't need much work. You need much grace. The distance between you and our father's house is too great. You haven't enough strength nor the stones to build the road. That is why our father sent me. He wants me to carry you home."

"Are you saying I can't do it? Are you saying I'm not strong enough? Look at my work. Look at my rocks. Already I can walk five steps!"

"But you have five million to go!"

The younger brother looked at Firstborn with anger. "I know who you are. You are the voice of evil. You are trying to seduce me from my holy work. Get behind me, you serpent!" He hurled at Firstborn the rock he was about to place in the river.

"Heretic!" screamed the path-builder. "Leave this land. You can't stop me! I will build this walkway and stand before my father, and he will have to forgive me. I will win his favor. I will earn his mercy."

Firstborn shook his head. "Favor won is no favor. Mercy earned is no mercy. I implore you, let me carry you up the river."

The response was another rock. So Firstborn turned and left.

The youngest brother was waiting near the fire when Firstborn returned.

"The others didn't come?"

"No. One chose to indulge, the other to judge, and the third to work. None of them chose our father."

"So they will remain here?"

The eldest brother nodded slowly. "For now."

"And we will return to Father?" asked the brother.

"Yes."

"Will he forgive me?"

"Would he have sent me if he wouldn't?"

And so the younger brother climbed on the back of the Firstborn and began the journey home.

All four brothers heard the same invitation. Each had an opportunity to be carried home by the elder brother. The first said no, choosing a grass hut over his father's house. The second said no,

preferring to analyze the mistakes of his brother rather than admit his own. The third said no, thinking it wiser to make a good impression than an honest confession. And the fourth said yes, choosing gratitude over guilt.

"I'll indulge myself," resolves one son.

"I'll compare myself," opts another.

"I'll save myself," determines the third.

"I'll entrust myself to you," decides the fourth.

May I ask a vital question? As you read of the brothers, which describes your relationship to GOD? Have you, like the fourth son, recognized your helplessness to make the journey home alone? Do you take the extended hand of your Father? Are you caught in the grip of his grace?

Or are like one of the other three sons?

A hedonist. A judgmentalist. A legalist. All occupied with self to the exclusion of their father. Paul addresses these three in the first three chapters of Romans. Let's look at each one.

The Hut-Building Hedonist

Romans 1:21-32

Can you relate to the hut-builder? He traded his passion for the castle for a love of the lowland. Rather than long for home, he settled for a hut. The aim of his life is pleasure. Such is the definition of hedonism, and such is the practice of this son.

The hedonist navigates his life as if there is no father in his past, present, or future. There may have been, somewhere in the somewhat distant past, a once-upon-a-time father, but as far as the here and now? The son will live without him. There may be, in the far-away future, a father who comes and claims him, but as for today? The son will forge out his life on his own. Rather than seize the future, he's content to seize the day.

Paul had such a person in mind when he said, "They traded the glory of GOD who lives forever for the worship of idols made to look like earthly people, birds, animals, and snakes...They worshiped and served what had been created instead of the GOD who created these things" (Rom. 1:23-25). Hedonists make poor swaps; they trade mansions for huts and their brother for a stranger. They exchange their father's house for a hillside ghetto and send his son away.

The Fault-Finding Judgmentalist

Romans 2:1-11

The approach of the second brother was simple: "Why deal with my mistakes when I can focus on the mistakes of others?"

He is a judgmentalist. *I may be bad, but as long as I can find someone worse, I am safe.* He fuels his goodness with the failures of others. He is the self-appointed teacher's pet in elementary school. He tattles on the sloppy work of others, oblivious to the F on his own paper. He's the neighborhood watchdog, passing out citations for people to clean up their act, never noticing the garbage on his own front lawn.

"Come on GOD, let me show you the evil deeds of my neighbor," the moralist invites. But GOD won't follow him into the valley. "If you think you can judge others, you are wrong. When you judge them, you are really judging yourself guilty, because you do the same things they do" (Rom. 2:1). It's a shallow ploy, and GOD won't fall for it.

The Rock-Stacking Legalist

Romans 2:17-3:20

And then there is the brother in the river. Ahhh, now here is a son we respect. Hard-working. Industrious. Zealous. Intense. Here is a fellow who sees his sin and sets out to resolve it by himself. Surely his is worthy of our applause. Surely he is worthy of our emulation. And, most surely, he is worthy of the father's mercy. Won't the father throw open the castle doors when he sees how hard the son has worked to get home?

With no help from the father, the legalist is tackling the odds and fording the river of failure. Surely, the father will be happy to see him. That is, if the father ever does.

You see, the problem is not the affection of the father but the strength of the river. What sucked the son away from the father's house was no gentle stream but rather a roaring torrent. Is the son strong enough to build an upriver path to the father's house?

Doubtful. We certainly can't. "There is no one who always does what is right, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). Oh, but we try. We don't stack rocks in a river, but we do good deeds on earth.

We think: *If I do this GOD will accept me.*

If I teach this class...and we pick up a rock.

If I go to church...and we put the rock in the stream.

If I give this money...another rock.

If I endure a Lucado book...ten big rocks.

If I read my Bible, have the right opinion on the right doctrine, if I join this movement...rock upon rock upon rock.

The problem? You may take five steps, but you have five million to go. The river is too long. What separates us from GOD is not a shallow stream but a tumbling, cascading, overwhelming river of sin. We stack and stack and stack only to find we can barely keep our footing, much less make progress.

The impact on the rock-stackers is remarkably predictable: either despair or arrogance. They either give up or become stuck-up. They think they'll never make it, or they think they are the only ones who'll ever make it. Strange, how two people can look at the same stacked rocks and one hangs his head and the other puffs out his chest.

Call the condition a *religious* godlessness. It's the theme behind Paul's brazen pronouncement: "We're sinners, every one of us, in the same sinking boat with everyone else" (3:19 MSG).

Godless or Godly?

Quite a trio, don't you think?

- The first on a barstool.
- The second in the judge's chair.
- The third on a church pew.

Though they may appear different, they are very much alike. All are separated from the Father. And none is asking for help. The first indulges his passions, the second monitors his neighbor, and the third measures his merits. Self-satisfaction. Self-justification. Self-sufficient. "They never give GOD the time of day" (3:18 MSG).

Paul's word for this is *godlessness* (Rom. 1:18 NIV). *Godlessness*. The word defines itself. A life minus GOD. Worse than a disdain for GOD, this is a disregard for GOD. A disdain at least acknowledges his presence. Godlessness doesn't. Whereas disdain will lead people to act with irreverence, disregard causes them to act as if GOD were irrelevant, as if he is not a factor in the journey.

How does GOD respond to godless living? Not flippantly. "The wrath of GOD is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness" (Rom. 1:18 NIV). Paul's main point is not a light one. GOD is justly angered over the actions of his children.

I might as well prepare you: The first chapters of Romans are not exactly upbeat. Paul gives us the bad news before he gives the good news. He will eventually tell us that we are all equal candidates for grace but not before he proves that we are all desperately sinful. We have to see the mess we are in before we can appreciate the GOD we have. Before presenting the grace of GOD, we must understand the wrath of GOD.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend a few moments thanking God for the promise of life that He has given you in Jesus Christ. Ask that His Holy Spirit would continue to help you hold on to that promise in your daily life. Pray that you would “fan into flame” the gifts that God has given you and the unique ways He has equipped you for ministry.
2. Reread Romans 2:1-16
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Day 2

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God for purity in your thought and motives. “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” 1 Peter 2:1.
2. Read Romans 2:17-29
3. STUDY NOTE: At the time of the formation of the early churches, including the church in Rome, certain Jewish Christians were teaching the Gentile believers that “‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’ This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them.” (Acts 15:1-2) “Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised **and required to obey the law of Moses.**’” Acts 15:5. In Romans 2:17-29, Paul gets to the *heart* of the problem with this way of thinking. (See also Galatians 2:15-16.)
4. What do you think is Paul’s MAIN POINT in Romans 2:17-29?

5. Some of the Jewish Christians who were relying on the law for their salvation, were also holding themselves in higher esteem and bragging about their relationship with God. Christ describes the hypocrisy of judging others in Matthew 7:3-5, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” What does Jesus’s teaching tell you about the sinfulness of even the most religious people in the world?

Day 3

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23-24. “This is what the Lord declares: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.” Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read Romans 2:17-29
3. In Romans 2:17-23, Paul says the Jews needed to teach **themselves** instead of trying to teach others. Are there times, when you are presented with the depravity of others, that you have a prideful feeling of righteousness? When you are listening to a sermon or a Sunday School lesson, do you ever catch yourself thinking “If my spouse (or my friend or my co-worker) would learn this, they wouldn’t be so difficult to deal with?” We have an inclination to focus on how others need to improve. What should we strive to consider instead?
4. When we proclaim ourselves to be Christians, condemn the acts of others (think political leaders, celebrities, non-believers) then continue to sin ourselves, what message does this convey to non-Christians about Christians? What message does it convey about Christ? What do people think about God from watching your life?

Day 4

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, “Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.”
2. Read Romans 2:25-29
3. In Genesis 17:9-14 circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of his special covenant with his people. However, Paul indicates that this outward sign was meaningless without obedience to the law. Paul notes that circumcision need to be inward, a circumcision of the heart. What does a “circumcision of the heart” mean?
4. What outward acts do we as Christians today perform to demonstrate our Christianity? Attending Church or becoming a member of a church? Being Baptized or confirmed? Doing good or even great things in the name of Christ? In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!’” If performing miracles in the name of Christ is not sufficient, what is?

5. What is the motivation for our actions according to Romans 2:29? Do we seek praise from others or praise from God? When praise is given, to whom do we give the credit? (See 2 Cor 10:18)

Day 5

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Much in Every Way by Mark Robinson

The summers of the early 1980's meant many things to me. They meant long days playing baseball in the front yard. They meant nights riding the mini roller coaster or bumper cars at the local "Kiddie Park." Ah, the American dream. No, my dog was not named Lassie, and my parents were not Ozzie and Harriet, but in many ways, the hot summer days of my early youth looked a lot like Wally and Theodore Cleaver's.

One other thing that the summers of the early 80's meant to me was an opportunity to use my skill and cunning to decipher how to take lots of bounty from a local establishment. Wait a minute . . . hold on! This sounds a lot like a foray into organized crime, not a Norman Rockwell painting. What on earth could I be talking about? I'll spell out very clearly what I am talking about for you in three letters . . . V-B-S.

These three letters, of course, stand for Vacation Bible School, and within this week of eating two oreos at snack time and making a diorama of the Sermon on the Mount out of paper mache, I had the opportunity to act the part, recite the memory verses, and walk out of there each Friday with gift certificates good for ice cream at the local 31 flavors.

I would always get lots of praise for most all of what I did at this day camp. One teacher would comment on how I sang so well in the closing program (the louder you sing, the greater the chance at getting the gift certificates – my performance on this particular year earned me a chocolate shake.) To another teacher I would recite my memory verse to every day . . . and each one led to another gift certificate (I'll take Rum Raisin please.) Within this week long culture, I knew how to play the game, and I played it well. Interestingly, at the time I was not really thinking about an eternal God and the forgiveness offered through His Son (and this is really what all those teachers wanted for me.) Though I acted the part, I missed the point. Given that is the case . . . were these summers a wasted time?

Let's put a hold on that thought for a moment, and let's look at Romans 2:17-29. In this section of Paul's great letter to the Romans, he turns his discussion to the Jewish people, living in Rome and gives them a stinging critique. At the time this book was written, the Church universal was at a crossroads. For a couple of thousand years preceding the time of Jesus and Paul, God was primarily dealing with only one ethnicity of people in the world . . . the Jews. Our Old Testament contains the basis of the Old Covenant that God had arranged to govern His dealings with the nation of Israel. Jesus Himself was a Jew. Beginning with the death and resurrection of Christ, however, the doors were blown off their hinges, as now Jews and Gentiles BOTH had equal access to God through Christ as

participants in a New Covenant relationship with God. I say all this to point out that when Paul wrote Romans 2, the Jews represented the people who had been a part of the “right” religious system for many years. In fact the Jews of Paul’s day “relied upon the law and bragged about their relationship with God (2:17).” They “knew His will and approved what was superior because they were instructed by the law (2:18).” They had become “instructors of the foolish and teachers of infants” in the things of God (2:20). When viewed this way, it is somewhat analogous to compare first century Jews to 21st century American church goers. If you grew up in the church, you too grew up hearing of God’s law and attending many meetings where people instructed all in the ways of God. If you grew up around the church as I did, at VBS and on Sunday mornings all your life you have heard the truth about who God is, and how we relate to Him.

I mentioned earlier that Paul leveled a strong critique at the Jews of his day, and by application, to the church goers of our day. That critique comprises Romans 2:21-24. In these verses, Paul describes how God is unimpressed with those who merely hear about the right thing to do, or are a part of the right religious system . . . He wants those who do the right things and have their heart trusting in the right plan of God. I believe that if Paul had written this letter today to the believers here in Norman, he would have said, “It is not enough to sit under the regular teaching of Bruce Hess or attend Wildwood Community Church. Sure you may know the right things to say, but Wildwood Community Church is still made up of a bunch of sinners. Mere church membership is not enough to save anyone.” In a sense, Paul was saying that salvation is not about what information you know or where you attend or how loud you sing in the service. Salvation is not given out like 31 flavors.

Salvation is only found when we trust in the saving work of Jesus on the cross to provide forgiveness for our sins. It is a gift of grace to an unworthy sinner, not a gift certificate to a hard working attender. My VBS teachers knew this . . . my heart just was not ready to embrace it. Perhaps you have come to view your relationship with God in this way. What Paul wants us to know here is that no amount of church attendance or knowledge of right and wrong or even moral uprightness will ever be enough to save us.

On Easter Sunday in 1990, I came to understand the truth that I was a sinner and in need of the great forgiveness that Christ offered. For the first time in my life, I realized my great need was met by Christ’s great provision, and I received His gift of grace. I had attended church for over 16 years, yet it all came clear that Sunday night in April 1990.

Now at this point, I want to go back to my initial question. Given the fact that I never really knew Christ during my years of attending Sunday school and VBS, were all those Sundays of attendance a waste of time? I mean, what was the value of hearing the stories about Jesus each week, when my understanding was as flimsy as the flannel graph board on which the story was shared? What was the value of making the paper mache mountain if I never really knew what Jesus said on top of it? What is the value to growing up in the church? If it is not enough to save you, is it doing more harm than good?

Absolutely not! Growing up in East Cross United Methodist Church is one of the greatest gifts God has ever given me. In fact, it is good in every way. It is good that Mrs. May took the time to teach our Sunday school class every week for years and years, patiently telling us about God and telling us the Old Testament stories. It is good that Duane Wakeley took the time to pray with a group of rowdy sixth graders who thought they were too cool for “Sunday School.” It is good that Alice Doyle had me tell Bible stories to little kids with a puppet on my hand. It is good that my parents took me to church all those years, when what I really wanted to do was watch the “NFL Today” pregame show with Jimmy the Greek and Brent Musberger. These things were good because when my heart finally caught up to my head in the spring of 1990, I had the blessing of knowing much more about God than I ever realized . . . and I have carried that legacy into a life time of serving Him.

As Paul says of the Jews in Romans 3:1-2, “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! Foremost of all, they have been entrusted with the very Words of God.” I am very thankful for how growing up in a Christian family and church have entrusted me with the very Words of God. In a way, this letter is an open thank you to all who God has used to build into me before I ever knew what was going on. Our heritage will never save us . . . but its value is immense.

I want to challenge all of you who have grown up in a Christian home or church to sit down sometime soon and write one person who impacted you a thank you note. Thank them for entrusting to you the very Words of God in your early years . . . and thank God for the heritage He has raised you within.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend a few moments thanking God for the promise of life that He has given you in Jesus Christ. Ask that His Holy Spirit would continue to help you hold on to that promise in your daily life. Pray that you would “fan into flame” the gifts that God has given you and the unique ways He has equipped you for ministry.
2. Reread Romans 2:17-29
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Day 2

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His word in your life as the Psalmist says in Psalm 25:5 to, “Lead me in your truth, and teach me.”
2. Read Romans 3:1-8
3. **STUDY NOTE:** As we saw last week at the end of Romans 2, Paul made the provocative point that Jews and Gentiles are on equal footing – both are under the power of sin and in need of the gospel. Expressly, a right standing with God made possible by Christ’s death and resurrection. In verses 1-8 of Ch. 3, Paul takes the opportunity to answer the challenges that He knows will arise from saying that even though outwardly you may be a Jew, you are not really a Jew and that some Gentiles can really be a right with God even though not circumcised (2:25-27).
4. In 3:1-2, Paul asks (or uses an imaginary objector/challenger to ask) – “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?” Paul answers by saying, “Much in every way!...they have been entrusted with the very words of God.” How did this “advantage” shape the Jew’s view of their relationship with God? How has this “advantage” given the Jews a feeling of security in their relationship with God?
5. What is the great benefit of being entrusted with the very words of God? As Christians, what does it mean to us that we have been entrusted with the oracles of God- The Bible?

6. In 3:3, Paul brings about the second objection/challenge – “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness?”
- Is God’s faithfulness dependent on man’s faithfulness? (See 2 Tim 2:13)
 - How is God’s punishment of Israel’s sin and unbelief consistent with His promises and righteous character?
7. In 3:4 Paul answers the second objection, “ Not at all! Let God be true and every man a liar.” Paul also quotes Psalm 51:4 to support that God is still faithful and true even if He judges the Jews along with all other sinners.
- Read Psalm 51:4.
 - What is the reason David uses in saying that God would be just to judge him?
 - How does this reasoning apply to us?
8. **STUDY NOTE:** Many commenters have expressed that 3:1-8, and in particular 3:5-8, are an extremely difficult passage to wrap our minds around. John Piper stated, “I found this passage to be about as hard a paragraph to deal with as any in this letter. The difficulty of following the train of thought in this paragraph is enormous.” I tell you this as an encouragement as you dig in deeper to God’s word. As Paul presents the final objections in vs. 3:5-8, it is good to remember that at this point in Paul’s ministry he has had countless debates with Jews and Gentiles and knows what they will say at this point in the argument and he wants to present a final answer leading into his summary in vs. 9.

9. To the best of your understanding, summarize in your own words the objections/challenges that are presented by Paul's objectors in vs. 5-8.

10. What are Paul's answers in vs. 6 and at the end of vs. 8? How does this coincide with what Paul wrote in Romans 1:18-21, 32?

Day 3

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23-24. “This is what the Lord declares: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.” Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read Romans 3:9-18
3. In 3:9, Paul summarizes everything he has been teaching from 1:18-3:8. “What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.” Paul answers his analysis of what is wrong with the human race. The answer is sin.
 - In your own words, write a summary of Paul’s statement about humanity’s desperate condition before God described in 3:1-9? (This is a doctrine often described as “total depravity”)

 - What does this indicate about our “earthly nature”? (See also Ephesians 2:3 and Colossians 3:5-6.)

8. Secondly, it has ruined our relationships with other people. John Calvin says, "...so inhumanity commonly follows where there is ignorance of God, as every one, when he despises others, loves and seeks his own good." How does Paul depict our ruined relationships with other people in verses 12-17?

Day 4

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, “Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.”
2. Read Romans 3:19-20
3. 3:19a says, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law...” Who is Paul referring to here? What was their primary advantage (Referring back to 3:1-2)?
4. 3:19b says, “...so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.” What do you think Paul means when he says the “whole world held accountable to God?”
5. “...every mouth may be silenced... (Romans 3:19)” Of this statement, John Piper says, “No mouth anywhere in the world – from the primitive tribe to the university lecture hall – will be able to raise a legitimate objection against God’s judgement.” Additionally, Tim Keller states, “To have your mouth silenced means no excuses...” How does Paul use Romans 1:20, Romans 2:15 and now Romans 3:19 to show that all will be silenced with no objection and no excuse?

6. Paul uses 3:20 to bridge us from the very **bad news** he has been delivering since Chapter 1 to the very **good news** of the gospel. In his final point he states, "...no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law." What does Paul say the law does for us? (Read Galatians 3:24. What ultimately does this understanding of the law do for us?)

Day 5

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Under the Black Light by Mark Robinson

Visual images are powerful teachers. The faculty of a Nursing School in Auckland, New Zealand knew this . . . that is why they used it to teach one set of nursing students a valuable lesson.

A few years ago, a friend of mine was attending this school when her class was receiving some instruction on the importance of washing their hands while preparing for service. Without informing the students of the experiment that they were about to undertake, the professor told the students to wash their hands well, then proceed to the examination room. After washing their hands, the young nursing students walked into the examination room where they found the overhead lights turned off. The only light that pierced the darkness of the room was a simple black light that was wanded over their now “clean” hands. The visual that ensued is an image those students will not soon forget. The black light revealed lots of dirt, soap residue, and other possible contaminants all over the newly washed hands of the nurses. The lesson was clear . . . your hands are not as clean as you think they are. A more thorough cleaning is necessary to prevent contamination and illness.

Romans 1:18-3:20 is one continuous argument. The point of this section of Paul's letter to the Romans was to reveal all humanity as lost, sinful, and separated from God. The irreligious, moral, and religious people of the world ALL fall short of God's glorious standard. If the only verses we had in the Bible were Romans 1:18-3:20, we would ascertain that all humanity is sinful and separated from God with no hope of ever achieving salvation. This is made clear as Romans 3:9 summarizes, “We have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.”

To say it another way, on our own, all people (whether they feel clean or not) are dirty before God. These verses are like a black light to vividly reveal to us our sinfulness. Our holy God cannot be contaminated by our sinful residue, so without an appropriate cleaner, humanity has no hope of salvation or a lasting relationship with God.

Thankfully, Romans 1:18-3:20 are not the only verses in the Bible. Thankfully, these are not the only verses even in the letter Paul gave to the Romans! Romans 3:1-20 share with us the bad news to prepare us for the GOOD NEWS that God wants us to know about in 3:21-ff.

Jesus is the One and only cleaner who can cleanse us from our sin and present us spotless

and without blemish under any black light available. It is only in Christ that we have hope, and Paul will explain that in great detail beginning in 3:21.

For now, however, in the course of our study of Romans, we need to allow the “black light” of these verses to fulfill their intended effect. Allow this visual to teach each of us a lasting lesson — that apart from Christ, we are without hope. Thankfully, this is not all of the story.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend a few moments thanking God for the promise of life that He has given you in Jesus Christ. Ask that His Holy Spirit would continue to help you hold on to that promise in your daily life. Pray that you would “fan into flame” the gifts that God has given you and the unique ways He has equipped you for ministry.
2. Reread Romans 3:1-20
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Day 2

1. As you pray for your study today, ask God to use His Word in your life as the writer of Hebrews prayed in Hebrews 13:20-21: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”
2. Read Romans 3:21-23
3. Up to this point in his letter, Paul has laid out how everyone lives (and dies) by some kind of law. For the Jew it is the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai and for gentiles and Jews before the law given to Moses, it is our conscience or natural law. By whatever law we live, Paul makes clear that we fail to keep the law, and are thus under God’s just judgment and penalty. God’s perfect holiness and character demands justice. What two words in 3:21 give us reason to hope for God’s mercy from the just condemnation Paul has described in the previous 2 and a half chapters?
4. “The righteousness of God” was a phrase that used to terrify Martin Luther, but later became a great comfort to him. What does “righteousness” mean and why would it terrify him if not understood properly in this passage?
5. The Law has been described as a mirror that shows us who we are, compared to what we should be. It has been said “you don’t use a mirror to wash your face, the mirror only shows you where the dirt is”. If the mirror is the law, what is it that cleanses us?

Day 3

1. As you prepare your heart for study, know that God desires to reveal Himself to you, and He has given you His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth. Before you open in prayer, consider Jeremiah 9:23-24. “This is what the Lord declares: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.” Pray for this understanding and knowledge of God with the Holy Spirit as your guide.
2. Read Romans 3:24-25
3. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus was tempted in every way but was without sin. He was perfect in His obedience to the Law of God. The righteousness that God demands He provides in the perfect life and sacrifice of Jesus. It is Jesus’ righteousness that we need. How is that righteousness given to us?
4. When the righteousness of Jesus’ is given to someone, that person is declared to be “justified”. Justification is not a word that we use commonly but is considered to be the point on which “the Church stands or falls”. What does justification mean, and is it a one time declaration or is it an ongoing process?
5. Paul says that we are justified by grace as a gift. How does thinking of justification as a gift help you understand what God has done to save us?

6. Redemption is another seldom used word in our culture, but it is helpful to understand the sinner's position or situation that God finds us in when we are left to ourselves. What does redemption mean, and how does it clarify your understanding of mankind's condition?

Day 4

1. Take a moment to pray. Praise God for His Word and ask Him to teach you its truth, just as the psalmist prayed in Psalm 119:12-16, “Praise be to You, O Lord; teach me Your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from Your mouth. I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word.”
2. Read Romans 3:25-31
3. God gave the nation of Israel a complex and elaborate system of sacrifices for the atonement of sin as a nation and individually. However, Hebrews 10:3 states it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. In Romans 3:25, Paul says that “God put forward as a propitiation by His blood (Jesus’) to be received by faith”. What does propitiation mean and how is it different than the ceremonial rites of the Israelites in the Old Testament?
4. How does the satisfaction of God’s wrath by the sacrifice of Jesus (propitiation) show God’s righteousness? Do you think Jesus’ sacrificial death had to happen to show God’s righteousness? Why or why not?
5. God has revealed to us in His word and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, His plan for redeeming mankind. Seeing this plan as Paul describes it, how is God both “just” and the “justifier” as described in 3:25?

6. C.S. Lewis says in his book “Mere Christianity” that pride is the sin that leads to all other sins. If boasting is the outward expression of pride, why can we not boast over others about our salvation?

7. 3:28 states the Christian understanding of how a person is justified before God and how he is not. Is there anything else, besides faith, that justifies a person, or does it require faith in Jesus, alone?

8. There was, at the time of Paul’s writing, an enormous cultural gap in the early church between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. What do you suppose a gathering of Christians would have looked like when the Jews (who were deeply entrenched in Jewish custom like circumcision) and the Gentiles (who may not have known who Moses was) got together?

9. Is it helpful to be able to look past the differences between Christians (political, social, national, etc..) when we realize that we all come to Jesus on equal ground by faith only?

10. Probably the most common objection to justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is that it will lead to moral chaos. If we know that obedience to the law is not required to be reconciled to God, do we then have license to live disobedient lives? How does Paul answer that? When you realized the gift of salvation given to you by God in Christ Jesus was free, was your response one of sinning more, or did you find you were being more obedient out of gratitude?

Day 5

Take a moment to read and reflect on the following devotional as you continue to seek understanding and to apply this week's passage to your life.

Mortgage Spirituality by Mark Robinson

Millions of Americans own their home. At least that is what they tell people. In actuality, most do NOT own their home. If they owned their home, they would not have to make payments each month to lenders for their right to live there. I own the pair of shoes I am wearing right now, and since I own them, I do not have to pay Nike \$10 a month for the right to wear my shoes. Not continuing to pay for something, in my mind, is the definition of owning it. Given this definition, how can we say that millions of Americans who make payments on their houses each month own their houses? Based on my other experiences in ownership, this just doesn't make sense.

Home ownership is a funny concept in this day and age. With the rise in housing costs and the urbanization boom that has swept over the country in the past hundred years, the home mortgage has become a necessary step to many people having a place to live. Banks are willing to loan out money equal to the value of a home to qualified buyers, under the assumption that the buyer will pay back this money over a fixed period of time plus interest.

Most people today have grown up with an understanding of what a mortgage is, and the role it plays in helping people move into a home today that they would not ever be able to afford otherwise. Since we have grown up in a mortgage culture, is it possible that the concept of a mortgage has infected our understanding of salvation? Here is what I mean. . .

I believe that there are many people today who practically view salvation as a spiritual mortgage transaction. Understanding the notion that all people are sinful and separated from God, we have come to know none of us have the personal righteousness in our bank account to please a holy God. Therefore, we understand the need for a giant deposit of righteousness to be made into our spiritual account from Jesus Christ in order to "get us in" to a relationship with God today, even if we could not "afford" it on our own. The rest of our lives, we make daily, weekly, monthly, or annual "paybacks" to Jesus through our devotion that help to "keep us into" our relationship with God. Taking this analogy to its very end, we believe that if we ever stop making our weekly payments to God through church attendance, good deeds, partaking in communion, etc., that we would then be evicted from the good graces of God, and see our eternal security foreclosed on by our God, the lender. This is a crude analogy, and somewhat of an overstatement, but I believe at our core, many of us today are living our lives with a spiritual mortgage mindset.

So what is the problem with this mortgage mindset? At one level it seems to make sense to us. At the most important level, however, it is just flat out heresy. Our God is not a lender, He is a giver. Salvation is not something we pay back, it is something He paid for. We are not in debt to God, we are heirs of His great promises! This is quite a switch.

In Romans 3, we see this played out in vivid detail. After spending the better part of the first three chapters of the book of Romans convincing mankind that we are all sinful, Paul concludes in Romans 3:9, “What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.” Paul goes on to let us know that our need before God is not partial, but total. Our salvation is not 20% us and 80% God. Since our need is total, our salvation needs to be 100% God’s gift to us. The great news of the gospel is that God was willing to provide 100% of the funds for our salvation, and not require us to pay it back (which is great, because we could never “afford it”.) Romans 3:25-26 say it this way, “God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” The price of our home in heaven is 100% paid for by Christ on the cross! This gift is truly a gift, as Romans 4:4-5 says, “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” In other words, we do not pay back the deposit of righteousness that Christ places in our spiritual accounts the moment we trust in Him. We merely receive this as an unbelievable gift!

Take a moment and think through your perspective about the Christian life. Do you view your relationship with God as a free gift, or as a 70 year mortgage? Do you see your sin (past, present, and future) as paid for or still requiring further payment by you? Do you realize the full extent of the blessings you have been given in Christ? If you have trusted in Christ, your salvation is paid for . . . you are completely forgiven.

Use the space below to write down any thoughts, prayers, questions, or responses you may have.

Day 6

1. Spend a few moments thanking God for the promise of life that He has given you in Jesus Christ. Ask that His Holy Spirit would continue to help you hold on to that promise in your daily life. Pray that you would “fan into flame” the gifts that God has given you and the unique ways He has equipped you for ministry.
2. Reread Romans 3:21-31
3. Read back through the questions and answers from this past week.
4. What did you learn this week that was either new or especially significant to you?

5. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?