

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 1

Background

This letter was written by Paul in 57-58AD during his third missionary trip. It is among the first of Paul's epistles and it is an explanation of the essentials of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The main theme is the lost condition of humanity and justification by faith for everyone. This letter was sent to the Christians in Rome. Paul had not yet visited Rome. Christians from Rome traveled many miles to meet him when he later came to Rome as a prisoner. (Acts 28:14-16) The realization that humans are justified by faith in Jesus alone impacted the thinking of many Christian leaders such as Augustine, Martin Luther and John Wesley.

Introduction (1:1-7)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Jesus has paid a sin debt for those who put their faith in him. Therefore, Christians have been purchased from the kingdom of the devil to serve in the kingdom of God. This is why Paul calls himself a servant and so are all who call Jesus their Savior and Lord. (Rom 5:6-11)
2. Paul was called by Jesus to be an apostle or messenger of the gospel. Likewise, Christians are called by God to be his ambassadors in spreading the gospel, the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. (Acts 9:15; 2 Cor 5:17-21)
3. This gospel was predicted by Old Testament prophets and fulfilled by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. (Isa 53:1-6)
4. Those who are born-again spiritually into the kingdom of God, are made holy in the sight of God. This is why Paul calls believers saints. Saints have received grace and have peace with God, being reconciled to him by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

5. The gospel or good news about Jesus is that he chose us, he pardoned us and he made us holy in the sight of God. This is entirely his work and his will. Christians are called the Bride of Christ. We respond in obedience to the will of Jesus our Lord through the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, good works come from God because it is from his work in us that changes us and gives us the desire to do his work. This is different from the world's philosophy of becoming or achieving something through individual determination and effort alone. (1 Cor 15:1-4; Eph 2:1-10)

Paul's Desires (1:8-17)

First, I thank God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

1. The Christians in Rome were living in good ways that honored Christ and so they had a good reputation. *Are you living in ways that honor Jesus? Do you have a good reputation? If not, what do you need to change?*
2. The focus of Paul's life was to preach the gospel and disciple Christians. This should also be our focus. *What do you spend most of your time and energy on? Does this honor Jesus and advance his kingdom?*
3. Paul desired to share his spiritual gifts and, in turn, to be blessed by the gifts of other Christians. Christians need to gather and develop relationships for encouragement and spiritual growth. (Prov 27:17)
4. Paul is eager to preach the gospel to everyone who will accept it by faith. The righteousness of God is given to men through faith in Jesus alone. (Hab 2:4; Jn

3:16-18; 2 Cor 5:21)

God Revealed Through Creation (1:18-20)

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

1. God has revealed through the Bible that he will punish everyone who sins and is not forgiven through faith in Jesus. This punishment is the wrath of God. It is just and impartial. (Nah 1:1-3; Jn 3:36; Rom 3:21-23; Eph 5:6; Col 3:5-6, 25)
2. The conditions that are required to support life are so many and so unique to earth, that most scientists conclude there must be a creator (God). The prevalence and persistence of religious beliefs throughout human history testify to fact that mankind knows there is a God.
3. People tend to spend their time and energy pursuing wealth, power and pleasures. *How can these desires lead to wickedness and suppressing the truth about God?*
4. *What are some characteristics of God that are evident by observing nature?*
5. Creation, conscience and the life of Jesus witness to the existence of God. Creation and conscience bring the knowledge of our sinful condition. *How do this happen?* Faith in Jesus brings forgiveness and the knowledge of God. (Jn 1: 9-13)

The Depravity of Mankind (1:21-32)

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity

for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

1. People know there is a God but they reject him and find substitutes for him. Some deny God completely and choose to put their faith in science and technology. Others create false gods that they can control by making up things like how to please the god, what to expect from pleasing the god and how to worship. There is no peace, no lasting purpose or joy without Jesus.
2. Rejection of God leads to claims of being wise. Such people become arrogant because they claim to have secret or more knowledge than others. They worship created things or knowledge about how creation works. Their pride leads them to experiment in pleasures that are sinful. They engage in homosexuality and other abnormal sexual lusts. They promote these perverse behaviors as normal. *What are some ways that sexual perversions are being taught as acceptable?*
3. Evil behaviors such as greed, envy, murder, strife and hatred grow in societies where leaders reject God and promote their own ideas of morality. The news media spread lies and their people become self-centered. Children do not respect their parents. The government seeks to gain control over the daily lives of its people. *Are these things happening your society? What can be done to change this?*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 2

Do not Judge Others (2:1-11)

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.

1. It is easier to see the faults of others than our own. Sometimes pointing out the sins of others makes us feel better about ourselves. Paul warns against this because it can give a false sense of being better than others. Paul says that everyone sins in many common ways. For example, even if you have not murdered or committed adultery, the Bible teaches that being angry or lusting in the mind are sins. (Mt 5:21-22; 27-28)
2. God is the only one who clearly knows what is sinful. Therefore, he alone is able to judge. God judges us according to the truths in the Bible. Therefore, it is important to know what the Bible says. *How often do you study the Bible?* It is important to meditate and memorize parts of the Bible. (Ps 119:9-11; 105; 133)
3. God is patient with us and does not immediately punish us for our sins. His desire is that people will repent of their sins. (Rom 9:22-24; 1 Tim 1:15-16; 2 Pet 3:9)
What does it mean to repent of sins?
4. God judges everyone as guilty of sin and worthy of eternal punishment in hell. The only exception is for those who accept Jesus as Savior and Lord through faith. This faith is a gift from God given to those whom he chooses. (Eph 2:1-9)
The first good work that humans can do is to believe in Jesus (Jn 6:28-29)
Subsequent good works come from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit within each born-again Christian. (1 Cor 3:11-16; Eph 2:10)
5. Born-again Christians desire to do good works under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit. They persist in doing what God defines as good because they have faith in his promises of future glory and rewards. (Jn 14:1-3; Rom 12:1-3; 1

In 3:1-3) The good works of those who are not born-again Christians do not merit salvation from God's wrath. Good works without a foundation of faith in Jesus and the indwelling Holy Spirit are like filthy rags in God's sight that are tainted by sinful human motives. (Is 64:6)

6. There is no favoritism with God when it comes to judging sin and rewarding good works. However, we are created different from each other with different talents and opportunities. God chooses those who will be saved. *Does this show favoritism?* (Rom 9:14-21)

God's Laws and Judgment (2:12-16)

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. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

1. God judges according to obedience to his laws and his will. Perfect obedience is required in order to be declared righteous in God's sight. Therefore, nobody will be declared righteous because it is impossible for humans to perfectly obey God. Jesus did this because he was God in human form and was consistently aware of the will of God the Father. (Rom 3:22-24; Jn 5:19-21)
2. There are three groups of people that have different amounts of knowledge about the laws and will of God. First, there are those who do not have any knowledge about the Bible. These people have the least knowledge about God but they will be judged according to the natural laws of God's creation. These people have intuitive knowledge that there is a God. Every one of the ten commandments, except keeping the Sabbath, are intuitively known to everyone: do not kill, steal, commit adultery, etc. There are many moral people who do good things. However, the Bible says that it is the bad things that condemn us. Even exceptional people, like Ghandi, are imperfect. God is holy and demands perfection to be with him.
3. The second group of people are the Jews who have the Old Testament but reject the New Testament. The third group are Christians who have the full revelation

of the will of God. The primary judgment of God results in pardon or punishment for sins. Rewards for good works only apply to those who are born-again Christians. The good works of Christians are the result of the work of the Holy Spirit within believers. This brings honor and glory to God. (1 Cor 3:12-16; Rev 20:11-15)

4. Christians are to be responsive and submissive to God. This is part of being the Bride of Christ. God takes the initiative in our salvation, sanctification and redemption.

Jews and the Law (2:17-29)

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.

1. The Jews are a special people because God chose them to reveal himself and to tell them his will through his commandments. God promised that they would be his special people and that he would protect them if they obeyed him. Also, God chose the Jews to reveal himself as a human through Jesus. These are among the reasons that some Jews and Jewish Christians thought of themselves as superior to Gentiles. (Lev 26)

2. Paul says that the Jews should be humbled and not proud because they have more knowledge about God and his commandments. They should realize that they have not kept God's commands perfectly. Judging others by God's laws while breaking the same laws is hypocrisy. External appearances of being moral do not make a person good. Paul uses the example of circumcision. (Lk 18:9-14)
3. Paul says that people are made acceptable to God only if they have been changed on the inside by the work of the Holy Spirit. This work comes from a spiritual birth through faith in Jesus. Nobody can be justified by keeping God's commandments. (Rom 3:20; Eph 2:8-9)
4. Many Christians are confused about the importance of doing good works. Some denominations teach that good works (such as giving money to the poor, taking the sacraments, praying the rosary, etc.) will merit forgiveness of sins from God. This is clearly false based on the teachings of the Bible. Our good works come from the work of the Holy Spirit within born-again believers. These good works are a result of who we are, (forgiven and sanctified saints), not from what we hope to become.
5. Circumcision is a surgical procedure that affects a very private, sensitive and intimate part of the body. This procedure is not apparent except to parents and spouses. *How is spiritual circumcision like this?*

Off the Shelf
Sunday School Lesson
Romans 3

Greater Revelation Brings Greater Responsibility (3:1-8)

What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge." But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances

God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result?" Their condemnation is deserved.

1. Paul says that the Jews have been blessed by God. They were his chosen people through whom God gave his commands. God made covenants or promises with the Jews. God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and he provided for them in the desert. God blessed them with a rich land to live in and he blessed them when they obeyed him. *In what ways are Christians like the Jews?*
2. The Jews were given the words of God through Moses and the prophets. This knowledge far exceeded what the rest of the world knew about God. However, many of the Jews disobeyed God because they did not have a faith that drove them to strictly follow God. They were corrupted in their beliefs by the false gods and customs of their Gentile neighbors. *What are some beliefs, customs and even laws that challenge our faith today?*
3. Paul takes up a false argument that some were saying about his teaching. Some were saying that, if the great love and goodness of God is related to his forgiveness of sins, then sinning more brings more glory to God. *Would not the grace of God be increased through sinful living?* Paul says that only unsaved people would make such an argument. *Why is this true? What happens to a person's thinking and behavior after being born-again through faith in Jesus?*

Sin Condemns Everyone (3:9-20)

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. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit; The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed innocent blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

1. Paul concludes that it does not matter if a person is a Jew or Gentile because the problem of sin is much deeper than religion, race or ethnic group. Humans have a sinful nature that separates us from God. Paul says that nobody understands or seeks after God (unless God takes the initiative and gives knowledge about

himself).

2. Paul says that humans express their sinful thoughts and attitudes through their speech. Everyone is guilty of being deceitful, telling lies, cursing, being angry and resentful. (Mt 15:16-20; Jas 3:9-12) *What are some things that you can do to better control your tongue?*
3. Sins have separated us from God. Humans are restless, unhappy and unsatisfied because nothing can replace our need for God. There is no peace, purpose or joy without knowing Jesus. We do not fear or reverence God as we should because we can't comprehend his power, glory and wrath. (Heb 10:26-31)
4. Paul concludes that the Jews should be more humbled and fearful of God, (not proud or feel superior), because they have the commandments. Because they know God's commands, they know how much they are sinners. Nobody will be justified or saved through trying to keep God's commands or religious rules. Everyone who fails to keep the law perfectly is condemned in God's sight. (Jas 2:10)
5. God knows that we can't keep his commandments, but he expects us to do our best to obey. His purpose is to show us our sinfulness and our need of his forgiveness. Nobody (except Jesus) kept his commandments and lived a righteous life. We learn to become dependent upon God through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is only through the presence of the Holy Spirit that humans can understand, obey and seek after God. (1 Cor 6:19-20)

Justification by Faith Alone (3:21-31)

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith alone apart from observing

the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

1. The commands of God are the requirements for being righteous in God's sight. This has never changed. However, through faith in Jesus Christ, a new way to attain righteousness while meeting the requirements of the law was revealed. Jesus took the punishment required for breaking the law, for everyone who believes in him. This justification comes purely by the grace of God and not from human effort. It is a gift.
2. Because God has gifted some with faith, there is no boasting. Everyone has been condemned because we have broken God's commands. It is through God's loving provision of the sacrifice of Jesus that justification is possible.
3. Good works are the evidence of having been justified and not the means of justification with God. (Jas 2:18)
4. Jesus saves us from the penalty of our sins by faith. No human works are involved for us to know him as our Savior. However, good works demonstrate our obedience to our Lord Jesus. It is through our submission and service to Jesus as our Lord that there will be heavenly rewards. The good works of born-again Christians bring honor and praise to God. (Mt 5:14-16; Eph 2:8-10) *In what ways are you honoring Jesus as Lord in your life?*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 4

Old Testament Examples of Justification by Faith (4:1-12)

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. 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 to him as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works. “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” Is this blessedness only for the uncircumcised, or also for the circumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

1. Paul uses the example of Abraham to show that the Old and New Testament teachings, both agree that faith alone is the basis of righteousness with God. Abraham was given righteousness because of his faith and not because of works. This is a gift given by God and not an obligation given because of good works. *What does it mean to have righteousness with God?*
2. The willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac was a result of his faith. Good works are the proof of being righteous with God and not the means to attain it. (Jas 2: 20-24)
3. Paul also quotes David who said that those whose sins are forgiven are blessed by God. The act of blessing is by the will of God alone. Those blessed receive it and can do nothing to earn it. The result of being blessed is a state of holiness or blessedness.
4. Paul uses the example of Abraham to show that this blessing is for both Gentiles and Jews. Abraham was blessed before he was circumcised. Therefore, circumcision is an act of obedience that showed he had faith and not part of attaining it.

The Law and Faith (4:13-25)

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in

whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not(,) as though they were. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He(w) was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

1. God made a promise to Abraham that he would be the father of a special group of people. This promise was given freely by God and accepted by Abraham through faith. The Mosaic Laws were not given by God until 430 years later. Therefore, the commandments and rules given by God had nothing to do with this promise. In fact, Paul says that these laws were conditions upon which God gave blessings or punishment. (Dt 27-28)
2. Those who try to be justified with God through keeping his laws will be condemned because nobody can perfectly keep God’s commands (except Jesus). Those who are justified by faith in Jesus are not condemned for breaking God’s laws because Jesus has reconciled us to God. (2 Cor 5:15-21)
3. Abraham and Sarah were about one hundred years old when God made a promise to make him “the father of many nations.” Despite the fact that he and Sarah were beyond childbearing years, he believed that God would do what he promised. This is the same faith we have in Jesus. We believe in his atoning death, resurrection and that he will make us holy and like him one day. These things are a matter of faith. (Heb 11:1-12)
4. Those who are not Christians find faith in Jesus to be foolish and irrational. However, to those who have faith in Jesus, it is a wonderful and beautiful foundation for life. Do not doubt that faith alone can save you. Examine yourself to be certain that you have this faith and then grow in love and in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 13:5; Jas 1:2-7)

Off the Shelf

13

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Bible quotes use New International Version

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 5

The Benefits of Justification by Faith (5:1-11)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

1. Those who are born-again through faith in Jesus have peace with God. We become adopted children who are abundantly loved, rather than enemies and objects of wrath. (Jn 1:12-13; Eph 2:1-9)
2. *Why do Christians rejoice in "the hope of the glory of God?"* (Col 3:4; 1 Pet 5:10; 1 Jn 3:1-3) *Is this hope certain or uncertain? How will you be different when you have the glory of God?*
3. *How does suffering for Jesus strengthen our faith and make us more like Jesus? How have you suffered for Jesus?* (Mt 24:9; Jn 15:20)
4. The Holy Spirit causes a spiritual birth through faith in Jesus. He indwells born-again believers and works to change their thinking, character and behavior. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the evidence of our salvation. Salvation is certain, for the calling of God to those he has chosen to be heirs of salvation is permanent. (Ti 3:4-7; Php 1:6, 2:12-13; Eph 1:11-14)
5. The death of Jesus on the cross is a one-time payment for sins that forgives those who have faith. This is a legal payment to meet the demands of God's justice for sins. (Rom 6:23) Because Jesus rose from the dead, he lives to intercede for us and so our salvation is secure. When we die and are judged as sinners, Jesus will be there to guarantee our salvation. (Heb 7:23-25; 10:8-14)

The Law and Faith (5:12-21)

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.

Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

1. The sin of Adam and Eve, in eating forbidden fruit, gave them knowledge of good and evil. This knowledge corrupted them and changed their character. This was passed from them to their descendants. Therefore, being sinful and rebellious against God became part of what makes us human. (Rom 3:10-18)
2. Death is the penalty for sin. People age and die. Likewise, sin causes eternal separation from God. This has been the fate of humans regardless of whether they know God's commands as given to Moses. This knowledge was given to the Jews and the result was that it increased their knowledge of sinfulness. It did not excuse those who did not have this knowledge.
3. Christians are servants of God. The Bible teaches that the servants of God will not be condemned because of their sins but they will be judged. There will be consequences for the lack of obedience but not condemnation. (Lk 12:47-48; 1 Cor 3:11-15; Rom 8:1-4)

4. Paul teaches that, just as humans were corrupted and condemned by the sin of Adam, so humans can be forgiven by faith in the righteous life, death and resurrection of Jesus.
5. Some false teachers say that the use of “many” and “all” by Paul mean that everyone will be saved by Jesus regardless of faith. This idea clearly conflicts with the fundamental idea found throughout the Bible that faith is required. The Bible says that some will go to heaven and others hell based on whether they have faith in Jesus. *Can you think of other Bible teachings that conflict with the false teaching of universal salvation?*
6. Physical death is the fate of everyone except those who are raptured and a few special people like Enoch and Elijah. This is the result of the sin of Adam. Likewise, everyone will be resurrected because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. However, there will be two types of resurrection: one to holiness and eternal life in heaven and the other to condemnation and torture in hell. (Rev 20:11-15)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 6

Union with Christ (6:1-10)

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

1. Paul responds to those who say “have faith and do what you like.” This false idea ignores the fact that Jesus saves us so that we can serve him as our Lord. Jesus is

- both our Savior and our Lord. Those who are not changed, but claim they have faith, are deceiving themselves. Jesus commands his disciples to take up their cross daily and follow his commands. (Lk 9:23-24)
2. Those who preach a gospel that stresses accepting Jesus by faith and not being changed by his Lordship are false teachers. Salvation is much more than fire insurance against going to hell. It changes the thinking and behavior so that you do what pleases God and not just yourself. Christians are born-again through faith instantly, but they live a lifetime learning to serve the Lord Jesus. A major focus of the epistles of the New Testament is on how to live as a Christian.
 3. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Paul says that we shared in his death. There is a sense in which we were present with him on the cross. Likewise, the resurrection of Jesus guarantees that we will be resurrected and share in his glorious life. Jesus is united with born-again Christians in an intimate and inseparable way. He is our life as well as the means of our salvation. (Ps 27:1)
 4. Paul says that Jesus died to free us from being slaves to sin. This does not mean that Christians do not sin after they are born-again. It means that we have a new nature of holiness, through the presence of the Holy Spirit who instructs us in righteousness. The sinful human nature is still present, but it is being overcome by the transforming work of God. Christians are learning to live for God and not only to satisfy themselves.
 5. In what ways has the Holy Spirit changed your thinking and behavior? Are there some sinful habits that you are struggling with? If so, this is a sign that God is at work in you. The sinful human nature is being crucified to make you more like Jesus. (Gal 2:20; Eph 4:17-24)

Servants of God (6:11-23)

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in

human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. Jesus freed us from the penalty of sin on the cross. The Holy Spirit changes us to be more like Christ and so frees us from the power of sinful desires. Paul says that we must think of ourselves as servants or slaves of Jesus who is our Lord. This means we are to seek the will of God. We must consider ourselves dead to sinful habits. This is a struggle for those that we are holding onto. However, when we lose the desire for sinful habits, they no longer attract us. *What are some sinful habits that you had but that no longer are part of your life?*
2. Paul says that Christians will ultimately be freed from sin because of the grace of God. Jesus is our master because he has overcome sin and death for us. We sin because we are selfish and self-willed creatures. We are being transformed into creatures who are selfless and desire God's will. In heaven, our focus will be totally on God. We will be perfected in his likeness and have thoughts and actions in unity with God. *How does this make you feel?*
3. How much time do you spend each day thinking about God? *This is a good way to examine yourself regarding your spiritual growth.* Are you living mainly to fulfill your desires or are you seeking to know God and do his will? *As servants of Jesus, we are expected to serve him. How can you serve him if you are not attentive to his will and seeking to please him?*

Paul summarizes the gospel by saying that we earn death because of our sins(, however,) but Jesus offers us the gift of eternal life through faith in him. You must take possession of this gift and allow it to take possession of you. It is not enough to simply acknowledge that it is true. *Have you accepted this gift?*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

18

By Warren M Mueller dba Crosslink Inc at www.warrenmueller.com

Bible quotes use New International Version

Romans 7

The Role of the God's Commands (7:1-13)

Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve (I) the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then. The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

1. Paul says that laws do not apply to dead people. He uses an example to illustrate this in that, a husband or wife is freed from marriage laws by the death of the spouse. In like manner, faith in the atoning death of Jesus has freed Christians from trying to be justified with God by keeping his laws. Paul says that we have been freed from the penalty of breaking the law (death) in order to serve Jesus as Lord.
2. People are made to serve. Paul says that we were slaves to our sinful passions according to our fallen human nature before we were born-again. Born-again Christians are like children being taught by the Holy Spirit how to serve God. Like children, we make mistakes, but we have the mind of Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us into Christlikeness. (1 Cor 2:14-16; 1Jn 5:18-20)

3. Paul teaches that Christians serve God according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit rather than through legal obligations. Love for God and a desire to please him and to bring him honor are the primary motivations, rather than fear of punishment and death. The Holy Spirit changes our thinking and our character. (Gal 5:16-25)
4. God's laws are good but they have a bad effect (punishment and death) because everyone (except Jesus) disobeyed them. Paul says that failure to keep God's laws has one good effect which is to show us how hopelessly sinful we are.
5. *What does it mean to covet something? Can these kinds of sins be thoughts as well as actions?* (Ex 20:17; Mt 5:27-28; Jas 3:16) These kinds of sins have been committed by everyone.

The Conflict of the Two Natures (7:14-25)

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

1. After a person is born-again, he has two conflicting natures within. Instead of just "me" there is "we." Instead of simply following natural desires, the Holy Spirit gives desires that cause conflict. Paul personalizes these struggles and admits that he does not always follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Some false Christian teachers advise that we should "love God but do what you like." *What is wrong with this thinking?*
2. Paul says that he wants to do God's will but finds that he sometimes does not have the power to do it. *How does this relate to spiritual growth? Can these*

struggles and failures be a good thing?

3. There are some Christian teachers who preach a gospel that promises that you will be happy, wealthy and wise if you have enough faith. *How does Paul's experiences conflict with this message?*
4. Paul concludes that human effort and self-discipline alone will not conquer his sinful desires. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit to change his thinking and character that he has the ability to be like Jesus.
5. Having the mind of Christ is the first step in conquering sinful behavior. This is why it is important to read the Bible, pray and become part of a community of born-again Christians in a local church.

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 8

The Work of the Holy Spirit (8:1-11)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of the sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

1. People who do not have faith in Jesus are subject to the power of sin, which leads to death. This is a natural law like gravity that pulls humans away from God. Christians who are born-again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit are subject to the power of God, which leads to holiness. The spiritual law of holiness pulls Christians towards living like Jesus as subjects of God. People are like swimmers caught in a strong river current that leads to a waterfall. God's Holy Spirit is like a powerful wind that overcomes the current and enables some people to reach the shore.
2. The righteous requirement for breaking the laws of God is death. Jesus lived the life we could not live in obedience to God. His sacrificial death for those who put their faith in him fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law. (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:22; 3:18)
3. *What are some of the things that the natural nature desires? How do these differ from what the new nature of God desires? (Gal 5:17-25)*
4. The sinful nature of man causes him to want to rebel against the laws of God and human authority. *Can you think of some common examples of actions that violate God's laws?*
5. Paul says that born-again Christians are controlled by the Holy Spirit. However, we still have free-will and natural sinful desires. Therefore, the control must refer to the authority of the Holy Spirit. Christians have been purchased by God and adopted into his family. Ultimately, we will be transformed into the likeness of Jesus. There is a struggle in this life, but God will have the victory in fulfilling his promises and purpose for us. (Eph 2:10)
6. The presence of the Holy Spirit within is the evidence that a person has been born-again through faith in Jesus. *Do you pass this test? (Jn 1:12-13; Rom 10:8-10)*

Life with the Holy Spirit (8:12-17)

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

1. Born-again Christians have an obligation to let the Holy Spirit change them and lead them into holy living. *Why is this? What does it mean to be obligated to*

someone?

2. Humans are made to serve. We are driven by our passions and desires and so serve them. When we serve passions and desires that are not from God, this leads to death. This is the fate of humans without Jesus. Christians are given a new nature when they are born-again through faith in Jesus. Christians are a new creation and are adopted by God as his children. Jesus becomes their Lord and Savior. Jesus paid our sin debt so that we are indebted to him. (Jn 1:10-12; 2 Cor 5:17-20)
3. The Holy Spirit within born-again Christians gives them assurance of their salvation and love for God. This is what it means to have the Spirit of sonship. God is our father. We respect him and look to him for leadership and to provide for us. These are signs that testify that we are God's children. (2 Cor 13:5)
4. *What does it mean to be led by the Spirit of God? How has God changed you and how does he speak to you?*
5. *What is an heir? How does being a child of God make us heirs with Jesus? An heir requires the death of someone in order to realize the promises made.*
6. Christians share in the sufferings of Jesus as they follow his commands. One day Christians will become like Jesus and share in his glory. (Mt 10:37-39; Mt 16:24-25; 2 Cor 3:1-7; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 4:12-19)

The Hope of Glory (8:18-25)

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

1. Christians follow the pattern set by the life of Jesus. We suffer and are humbled in

the present life as the world, the flesh and demons persecute us and bring trials into our lives. However, just like Jesus, we will be glorified and made holy. The glory of being like Jesus will be revealed in us. (1 Jn 3:1-3) *What are some of the ways in which we will be changed when we have the glory of Jesus?*

2. Creation was cursed by God and became subject to corruption and death as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve. (Gen 3:14-19) Paul says that Christians and the world suffer death, decay and many other evils. However, Christians have the promise of God that he will restore us and creation to a state of holiness. There will be a new earth in which there is no evil, death or corruption. (Rev 21:1-5)
1. *What are the first fruits of the Spirit that born-again Christians have?*
 1. A sign of being born-again is the sense that we don't belong in this world. Also, there is a longing to be with Jesus, so death is viewed as a doorway to a better life. This is the longing and hope that Christians have that separates us from lost humans.

God Intercedes for Christians (8:26-34)

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

1. The Holy Spirit helps us to pray and prays for us. The Holy Spirit instructs us in righteousness which enables us to pray for the salvation of others and against evil. He gives us the desire to talk to God and feel the love and presence of God when we pray. *What are some other ways that the Holy Spirit*

helps us to pray?

2. Not only does the Holy Spirit help us to pray but he prays for us. He knows better than us what our deepest needs are and he brings these to the Father. In this way, he talks to God the Father about sins that we may not be aware of. Therefore, the Holy Spirit instructs us about his will, motivates us to pray and completes our prayers by covering every aspect of our needs (even those we don't see).
3. Born-again Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God has called them and has adopted them as his children through faith in Jesus Christ. Christians love God because he first loved them. God has plans for each of us that include good works and places in heaven. His plans may include enduring pain and trials but our places in eternity are secure. (2 Cor 4:8-17)
4. God knew before he created us that we would be his children. This is what Paul means when he says that God predestined us to become like Jesus. Likewise, God knew before he created lost people that they would not be saved. This may not seem fair, but God is sovereign, and his creatures have no right to question his will and his ways. (Rom 9:14-24; 2 Tim 19-20)
5. The doctrines of election and predestination do not eliminate the need for missions. Jesus commands his disciples to go into the world and share the gospel. We do not know the means by which God will choose to save his children. Christians are called to be witnesses for Jesus. Sharing the gospel is part of the good works that God has prepared us to do and for which we will be rewarded in heaven. (Mt 28:19-20; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Eph 2:1-10)
6. Born-again Christians cannot lose their salvation because Jesus is seated beside the Father in heaven, and he lives forever to intercede for those who have faith in him. Also, those who have been born-again are new creatures. Like a human birth, it is impossible to be unborn once you are born. (Jn 3:1-8; Heb 10:8-14; 2 Cor 5:17)

The Security of Born-again Christians (8:35-39)

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him

who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. Paul further develops his argument that born-again Christians will not lose their salvation. Jesus promised his disciples that he would be with them always. We do not see him, but we know that he is with us and within us. Jesus is with us in every trial of life to comfort and strengthen us through the work of the Holy Spirit. (Jn 14:15-23)
2. Christians are commanded to die each day to self and live according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We are living sacrifices to the glory of God. (Ps 25:4-5; Mt 16:24-25; Rom 12:1-2)
3. We have security in Jesus throughout all time. Death will not separate us from Jesus. There are no demons or supernatural powers anywhere in the universe that can remove us from being with Jesus. His love, his purposes for us and his authority are absolute. God does not change his mind or his promises. God is changeless, beyond influence and faithful. Not one word of his will be found to be false or unfulfilled. (Num 23:19; Mt 5:17-18)
4. False teachers say that you must do good works, or you could lose your salvation. They do this to get influence and power over people to direct their lives. *Do you know any false teachers?* If you do, leave them and seek teachers who faithfully teach the Bible.

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 9

The People of Israel (9:1-13)

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are

the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son." Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

1. Paul expresses his concern for his people, the Jews. His anxiety is so severe that, if it were possible, he would trade his salvation and be cursed, if it would save his people. The Israelites are God's chosen people through whom God established covenants and gave them his laws. Yet, despite these many blessings, not everyone who is a Jew would be saved. The Jews believed that they could be saved because they were descendants of Abraham. They believed that salvation could be earned by observing laws, customs and doctrines. There are some Christians who believe they will likewise be saved because they are members of a church and observe their laws, customs and doctrines. *Can you name some of these false beliefs?*
1. It was through Abraham's son Isaac and not his son Ishmael that the promised Messiah, Jesus was born. Isaac was a child promised by God in his old age, while Ishmael was born through the will and customs of Abraham's time. (He took his maid servant at the request of his wife to have an heir.) Likewise, Isaac had two sons but God chose Jacob and not Esau to be the ancestor of Jesus. Paul uses these examples to show that not everyone who is descended from Abraham is saved.
2. Paul also teaches that it is God who chooses to save some people while others are not. A person is not saved because of his religion, race or customs. A person is saved because God calls them and gives them the grace of faith to believe in Jesus. (Eph 2:1-10)

God Chooses Whom He Will Save (9:14-24)

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore, God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens

whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?” But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

1. Picture a crowd of people who intentionally overload a boat that is leaking. They set off anyway and, while at sea, the boat sinks. These people are lost at sea and drowning when another boat comes and rescues some of them. *Who is to blame for the deaths of those who drown? Is it the owner of the boat who rescues some of them?* No! it is the people themselves who made a bad decision to overcrowd a leaking boat. Likewise, God rescues some people because of his love and compassion. It is the people who sin and make bad decisions that causes them to perish.
2. God is holy and the sinful acts of men are an abomination to him. Picture a pure and holy God who sits patiently in the presence of filthy people who wallow in mud and their own excrement. God shows great love and restraint in not instantly punishing humans for their sins. Paul uses the example of Pharaoh who repeatedly defied God even when faced with miracles that demonstrated that he was rebelling against the power and sovereignty of God.
3. Paul next addresses the argument that God is unjust because he does not save everyone. *Why did God create sinful people like Pharaoh whom he knows will defy him to their own destruction?* Paul says that what is created has no right to question the purposes of the creator. This is to say that God’s plans and purposes are beyond our understanding. It is like trying to understand what the sun looks like by taking two pieces of paper and putting a pin hole in one of them. We can’t look directly at the sun so we take the pin hole paper and let a small amount of light shine through it onto the other piece. In this way, we can look at the image of the sun. However, this is a very limited view.
4. Paul says that God is like a potter who has the power and authority to take the same clay and make some vessels for honorable purposes while others are not.

Who has the right to object to what the clay becomes? Certainly not the clay!

5. The abundance of God's love and his patience are demonstrated by the fact that he allows sinful people to continue in their rebellious acts throughout thousands of years of human history. This is a path that brings God great glory. Those who are saved realize their hopeless and sinful condition. Christians have not only been pardoned for their sins, but they are being glorified and made holy through the blood of Jesus. Christians will sing eternal praise to God.

Prophecies of the Salvation of Gentiles (9:25-33)

As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called the sons of the living God." Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality." It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah." What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

1. Paul quotes statements by the Old Testament prophets Hosea and Isaiah to show that it was foretold that some Gentiles would be saved along with some Jews. He says that it is by faith and not works that people are made righteous with God.
2. Paul says that most people will not be saved from the wrath of God's judgment against sinners. He offers the example of Sodom and Gomorrah where only Lot and his daughters were saved from destruction. (Gen 19:15-26; Mt 7:13-14)
3. Israel pursued righteousness by trying to keep God's commands, but this path leads to failure and to the knowledge of the depravity of mankind. Our human nature has been corrupted by sin and desires ways that are contrary to God's commands. This sinful tendency is called depravity and it, like the law of gravity, binds us to our sinful ways. (Gal 2:15-16). *What are some of the ways that make humans sinful?*

(Gal 5:17-21)

4. *Who is the stumbling stone? How do people over-estimate their importance and righteousness through following religious doctrines and good works? (Is 64:6-7)*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 10

Jesus Fulfills the Requirements of the Law (10:1-13)

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the deep?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That is you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call upon him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

1. Paul has great concern for those Jews who rejected Jesus. He says that many of them are very zealous in wanting to do good to please God. They hope that by their good deeds and by following his commands and religious rules, that they will be made righteous with God. However, this is not possible. It is not God's way. Righteousness with God only comes one way: through faith in Jesus Christ. (Mt 7:13-14; Jn 14:6) *Can you think of some false religions whose members are very zealous in doing good works and trying to convert others? What generally motivates these people? Are they working for God or for their own benefit?*
1. Jesus fulfilled the requirements of God's laws. His unjust death justifies those who put their faith in him. Therefore, those who have faith in Jesus are made righteous with God, not by their efforts but those of Jesus. (1 Pet 3:18)

2. Born-again Christians totally believe in Jesus as their Savior and confess him as their Lord. There are no doubts about the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, nor of the changes in thinking and behavior as the Holy Spirit changes us. Those who doubt are either not born-again, or their faith is weak and their thinking has been corrupted by false teachers. (Col 2:8)
3. Sharing the gospel is not a condition of salvation but it is the inevitable outcome of a genuine conversion. If you are saved by Jesus, you are a new creation. You begin to think and act according to the will of God. This is not to gain favor with him but rather because you are becoming more like him. You love him and want to express this through obedience. If you are a duck, you quack and act like one. Also, birds of a feather flock together. *Are there habits or behaviors you have changed to be more like Christ?*

The Importance of Sharing the Gospel (10:14-21)

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course, they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." Again, I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

1. Paul asks a series of questions that show the importance of Christians sharing the gospel. Christians are commanded to go and tell others about Jesus. We are blessed to have the truth of salvation and to bring it to those who choose to believe. (Mt 28:19-20)
2. The gift of faith that results in being born-again is a gift carried by Christians who speak the truth of the gospel. God has chosen to work through Christians to save those who will respond to him with faith. (2 Cor 5:17-21)
3. Not everyone who hears the gospel will respond with faith. The Holy Spirit enables people to respond. Humans are spiritually dead and will not respond to

the gospel without the gift of faith. (Eph 2:8-10)

4. Paul uses the example of the Israelites to show that salvation is the work of God. It does not depend upon the efforts or knowledge of mankind. The Israelites had the correct knowledge of God and his commands but many of them refused to believe in Jesus. They remained a “disobedient and obstinate people” who chose their customs and religious rules rather than to change. *Do you know some very religious people who choose to be bound by their religious traditions instead of being justified by faith in Jesus alone?* (Rom 1:16-17)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 11

The Faithful Remnant of Israel (11:1-12)

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me?” And what was God's answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.” And David says: “May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.” Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

1. Today we are facing a world-wide pandemic that is disrupting many lives. There are terrorist threats everywhere and lawlessness is increasing. Church attendance is down and people seem to have more faith in science and technology than in God. Over 43 million babies are aborted each year. These are some examples of what appears to be an overwhelming tide of evil. Widespread evil and rebellion against God were present in the days of Elijah. God told Elijah that, his faithful

people are present even though Elijah did not know it. *What are some Bible stories that show that God chooses and uses a faithful few to accomplish his purposes?* (Jud 7:1-8; Zech 4:6)

1. Paul says that throughout human history God has chosen a small number of faithful people. These elect people are saved and made holy while the majority of people are not. Most Jews rejected Jesus. Their rejection was part of the separation of Christianity from Judaism. In this way, God's chosen people came to include all the peoples of the earth and not just the Jews.
2. Some false teachers say that the Church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. However, the Bible clearly teaches that this is not the case. In the final days described in Revelation, many Jews will accept Jesus as their Messiah. Jesus will return to the earth and fulfill God's promise that a descendant of David will reign forever on his throne in the new Jerusalem.

Christians are to Live with Humility (11:13-24)

I am talking to you Gentiles. In as much as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

1. Paul's hope is that the gospel of Jesus will cause Jews to want to be like Christians and so bring about the salvation of some. *What are some of the ways that Jews might see the gospel as being attractive?* (Acts 2:22-36; 28:25-28; Heb 7:18-28)
2. *Why did the Jews have to reject Jesus in order for him to become the way for*

God to reconcile mankind to God? (Gal 3:10-16)

3. Jesus is the first person to overcome death and so he is called the first fruits of a new righteous human race. (1 Cor 15:20-23) Jesus is the holy part of the dough and the root of righteousness described by Paul. (Jn 15:5-6)
4. The olive tree represents the descendants of Abraham who are saved by faith. Some Jews are like the branches that are broken off. Not everyone who is a Jew is saved. Likewise, some Gentiles have become descendants of Abraham through faith in Jesus and are grafted into his family tree.
5. Paul says that Gentile Christians should not look down upon Jews who reject the gospel. Gentile Christians should treat Jews with kindness in the hope that some of them might receive the gospel and be grafted into the family of God. *What are some reasons that Christians have looked down on Jews and have even persecuted them?*

Future Fulfillment of Promises to Israel (11:25-36)

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

1. “The full number of the Gentiles” refers to the salvation of every person who is not of Jewish descent. This refers to the age of the Christian Church. This age will end when Jesus returns to establish his kingdom on earth. The nation of Israel will be honored as his chosen people. (Is 9:6-7)
2. Those Jews chosen by God will be part of his earthly kingdom. Those who do not believe in Jesus will be perished. (Isa 59:20-21; Zech 13:8-9; Jer 31:33-34)

3. Those who reject Jesus are enemies of the gospel. They promote false religious teachings, or they deny that God exists.
4. God chose the apostles, prophets, kings and other Old Testament leaders. He also chooses his saints. God gives spiritual insights and gifts to those he chooses. His gifts and his call to those he chooses to save are secure and can never be changed. (Gen 18:18-19; Dt 7:6; Jn 6:70; 1 Th 5:9; 1 Pet 4:10)
5. Humans are all sinful and so bound to live in disobedience to God. Paul says that God extends his mercy to all peoples of the earth but not all will accept it.
6. Paul says that Jesus will come from Zion. *Where is Zion?* (2 Sam 5:7; Ps 74:2-3; Is 2:2-4; Joel 3:21)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 12

Service and Commitment (12:1-8)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

1. Jesus sacrificed himself for us so that we can become like him. He has given us mercy instead of wrath for our sins. He is our Lord as well as our Savior. Therefore, it is just to expect that Christians be committed to offering our lives in his service. *What sacrifices do Christians offer that are pleasing to God? How do these sacrifices differ from those of the Old Testament?* (Ps 51:17, 116:5; Heb 10:15-25)
2. Paul says that Christians are to change their thinking such that they act differently than non-Christians. The Holy Spirit changes our thinking. *What are some ways that we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit in changing our thinking and actions?*

What are some ways that Christians differ from the ways of the world? (Mt 16:24-25; 1 Cor 12:4-11)

3. Paul says that Christians who live in submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit have the mind of Christ. This enables us to know and follow his will for our lives. (Ps 25:4-5; 1 Cor 2:16; Phil 2:1-4; 1 Jn 1:5-10)
4. Every born-again Christian has at least one spiritual gift given by God for the benefit of building up others and growing his church. Just as the parts of the body differ, so Christians differ in the number and types of gifts that they have been given. It is the duty of every Christian to discover and use their gifts. *What are your gifts and how have you used them to glorify God?* (1 Cor 12; 1 Pet 4:10-11)

Christian Service (12:9-21)

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends upon you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1. Paul says that Christians are to love others in a way that is genuine and reflects their desire to do good for others. It should not be to gain something by doing something good. *What are some examples of Christian good works that are sincere and some that are motivated by reputation or rewards?*
2. Christians are to have strong negative feelings about evil deeds, thoughts and emotions. *What are some examples (and how do you overcome them)?*
3. Christians are to serve each other and treat others with respect. Being humble is having the attitude of a servant and doing good for others without drawing attention to oneself. (Lk 14:11; Phil 2:5-8)
4. Zeal and spiritual fervor are expressions Paul uses to describe energetic

enthusiasm for the gospel and love for God. Experiencing the presence of God, his love and his pleasure in response to our obedience are ways that this zeal is maintained. *What are some ways that we can experience God and maintain spiritual enthusiasm?*

5. Christians are to live in peace with others. They are to be people of good reputation who forgive others and do not keep grudges. Those who lived under the Old Testament laws exacted revenge. However, Jesus taught his disciples to be peace makers and be merciful to others because God has been merciful. (Mt 5:38-42; Jas 3:17-18)
6. Being gentle and kind in response to being abused can convict those who do evil and cause them to change their ways. This is one way that good behavior can overcome evil behavior. However, some people are so steeped in evil habits that they have seared their conscience. These people refuse to acknowledge and repent of their evil ways. God will bring terrible punishment upon them which is like coals of fire upon their heads. (1 Tim 4:1-2)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 13

Subjection to Governing Authorities (13:1-7)

Everyone must submit himself to governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you own him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

1. Christians are to obey God for he is their king. This requires knowing what the Bible teaches. God is the creator and supreme authority. He has delegated governments with authority to maintain order and suppress evil. Therefore, Paul says that Christians are to obey the laws of their country. The only time we are not to obey is when the laws conflict with God's laws. (Acts 5:27-29) *Can you name some examples of laws that conflict with the Bible? What is your response to these laws?*
2. Those who break laws live in fear of being caught and punished. God has given mankind a conscience that is self-convicting. Christians are called to be peacemakers and live in peace. This requires obeying the laws of God and man. (Prov 1:32-33; 2 Cor 13:11)
3. Paul teaches that Christians are to pay taxes to support their government. He says that this is a matter of being a faithful servant. This idea extends to every part of life in which we are under the authority of others such as parents, teachers, pastors and other leaders. When there are disagreements with leaders, we must respectfully state our ideas but not attack the person. (Acts 23:5)
4. Christians are to pray for those in authority. We must pray for their salvation and for them to govern according to God's laws. (1 Tim 2:1-4) *How do these prayers build unity and respect instead of tribalism and anger?*

The Law of Love (13:8-14)

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

1. Christians are to work diligently to pay off debts. They are not to be irresponsible regarding taking on too much debt. This would be inconsiderate and taking advantage of others. Paul teaches us to live modestly and within our means. The person who owes money is his (the servant to those that they owe money to). (Prov 22:7)
2. In contrast, Paul says that Christians should love others by treating them as you

would want to be treated. This love is for the good of others and so it keeps God's commandments, which tell us how not to treat people. *What changes do you need to make in your thoughts and behavior?* Pray for God to help you. He is the source of our strength and life.

3. Paul senses that life is short. This life is like the night that is giving way to an eternity of life in the light of God. Christians must live alert to opportunities to do good, for these opportunities are slipping away. Some day we will be judged on the performance of the good works that God has called us to do. (1 Cor 3:12-15) (*What has God called you to do?*)
4. Christians are to live in step with the Holy Spirit. This is walking in the light of God. (1 Jn 1:5-7) *What is the armor of light that God provides for us to do this?* (Eph 6:14-18)
5. Getting dressed in God's armor, takes self-control. We must focus on doing this correctly. This requires discipline. To put on Jesus means that our mind and effort are dedicated to be like him. This contrasts with setting our minds and effort on the desires of our sinful nature. (Gal 5:19-21)

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 14

Differences of Opinion (14:1-12)

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

1. Christians must not compromise the fundamentals of the gospel as summarized in the Nicene Creed. We are to seek unity and peace with other Christians in matters that are based on differences of opinion. Paul gives examples of such "disputable matters" like what to eat and sacred days. (Mk 9:50; Col 3:15; 1 Tim 4:1-5) *What are some other examples?*
2. Christians have formed different denominations over differences in the meaning of baptism and communion. *Are these essential or disputable matters?*
3. Paul says that those who tend to be legalistic are weak in their faith. Their consciences are easily offended by others who do not follow their beliefs and customs. The desire for structure, such as religious observances, can make a person feel good about themselves and support their faith. However, these things can also appear to become essential for salvation, which is a false works-based gospel.
4. Christians are not to be judgmental or look down on other Christians over disputable matters. God will judge every Christian according to what we have said and done. Therefore, we should be careful to humbly rely upon the Holy Spirit to guide us. It is important to continually seek God's truth through the Bible, prayer and fellowship with other Christians. (Lk 6:37; 1 Cor 3:11-15; Jas 1:22-25)

Respect Differences in Disputable Matters (14:13-23)

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep them between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what

he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

1. Christians must help other Christians to grow in faith and in service. They should not burden them with guilt or demand that they believe and act like them in disputable matters. Such things are stumbling blocks and obstacles. Requiring Christians to speak in tongues, observe certain days or ceremonies, say repetitious prayers, do prescribed works of charity or evangelism are examples of ways that religious groups define what it means to be part of their religion. These requirements can keep Christians from focusing on the leading of the Holy Spirit, discovering and using their spiritual gifts and growing in faith.
2. Paul says that Christians should seek peace and harmony among believers. This requires some to not judge or condemn others in disputable matters. Paul uses the examples of food and drink. Some Christians abstain from certain foods and do not drink alcohol. Those who do not abstain, should observe these customs when with these Christians. The focus of Christian fellowship should be on the essentials of the gospel. Build each other up on the major truths and do not dwell on minor differences.
3. *Can you name some problems that arise when Christians focus on minor differences? How can this weaken the faith of some or even cause some to leave the church?*
4. Christians must strive to have a conscience that is guided by the Bible. Spiritual growth is a process of becoming more like Jesus. We must respect minor differences because they represent sincere beliefs and different stages of spiritual growth. Christians are to focus on the fundamentals of the gospel and encourage other believers to grow in faith and in good works. However, this must be done by the Holy Spirit and not driven by humans. While there is one path to salvation, (faith in Jesus Christ), there are many ways to grow in holiness as directed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
5. Paul says that we are to follow our conscience as directed by the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The human conscience is not infallible. *Can you think of some examples where people believe that good is evil and evil is good?*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

41

By Warren M Mueller dba Crosslink Inc at www.warrenmueller.com

Bible quotes use New International Version

Romans 15

Christian Unity (15:1-13)

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves so as you follow Christ Jesus so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." Again, it says: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Christians are to live in love which means we should give up our desires and rights to benefit others. This is what Jesus did when he became human so that we might be made holy. (Phil 2:5-8)
2. Jesus lived in total unity with God the Father. When people insulted God, Jesus was insulted. Christians are called to live like this. We are to identify with God and believers and recognize them as dear family and friends. This is evidence of being born-again. *How do you feel when someone takes God's name in vain, mistreats Christians or slanders God's Word?* (Ps 69:9; Jn 5:16-20; Phil 2:1-4)
3. Paul quotes the Old Testament to show that it teaches that the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus is for everyone. Paul says that our God gives us hope, joy and peace. Hope is not uncertain regarding the promises of God. The hope of Christians is based on our patient perseverance until God fulfills his promises to resurrect us and make us holy. Meanwhile, we have joy in knowing that we have peace with God through the atoning death of Jesus. (Rom 8:18-25; Heb 11:1)

Seek to Share the Gospel (15:14-29)

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another. I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the

gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation. Rather, as it is written: “Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.” This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed you(r) company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

1. Paul stresses that the gospel is for everyone. He says that it is important to not target or restrict outreach to more desirable groups. This is still a challenge today in some areas where people of similar age, racial, ethnic or wealth tend to gather and live. *How diverse is your church? Are there ways to reach different people and become a more diverse church? What are some reasons that people may not want a more diverse church?*
2. *Why do you think Paul tended to preach in areas where no other Christian leaders were sharing the gospel?*
3. Paul recognized that his success in sharing the gospel was the work of God. God called and convicted people of their sin and gave them faith to believe in Jesus. This message was confirmed by miracles. Many successful Christian leaders have fallen because they became proud and came to think of their success as coming from themselves, instead of God. Christians must remain humble and realize that they are nothing without God working in and through them. (Prov 16:18, 22:4; Eph 4:1-3)

4. Paul says that Christians have an obligation to pray and help other Christians. The Christians of Macedonia and Achaia gave Paul money to help poor Christians in Jerusalem. We should not be only concerned for our local church, but also for those in other places around the world. Every Christian should pray and support those less fortunate. *What are some ways that you can help other Christians?*

Prayer Requests (15:30-33)

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

1. Paul wants Christians to pray for him. Even though he is an apostle, through whom God works miracles and converts many people, he needs help (and support). Paul was beaten, imprisoned and stoned by those who opposed the gospel. Therefore, he asks for prayers that God will continue to deliver him from Jewish zealots who seek to destroy him and the gospel. We should seek the prayers of other Christians to help us in sharing the gospel. We should also pray for other Christians. *Are there other Christians that pray for you and are there Christians that you pray for daily?*
2. Paul is concerned that the poor Christians in Jerusalem will not accept help because of pride. The Church started in Jerusalem and leaders like Peter ministered there. *Why is it sometimes difficult for people in need to accept help?*
3. Paul requests prayers for his safety so that he will be able to come to Rome and have a joyful and refreshing time with them. *How does being with Christians give us joy and encouragement?*

Off the Shelf

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 16

Greetings (16:1-16)

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me. Greet Priscilla and Aquilla, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful for them. Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first

convert to Christ in the province of Asia. Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. Greet my friend Perisis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and this sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

1. Phoebe is an example of a Christian who exemplifies self-sacrificing service for other believers. These Christians have the gift of mercy and are looking for needs in the church that they can help. *Do you know of some people in your church that are like her?*
2. Priscilla and Aquilla are Christians who practice hospitality and host a church in their house. Early Christian churches met in homes and not in formal buildings. *What are the advantages and disadvantages of meeting in homes?*
3. Paul calls Andronicus and Junias apostles. The word apostle means messenger and it generally refers to those first-generation Christians who preached the gospel—especially the twelve chosen disciples of Jesus.
4. Paul thinks fondly of certain Christians who are members of his family or who are devoted servants of the church. *Who are some special Christians who you admire and think fondly of? What makes them special to you? How can you follow their example and become special to others?*
5. A holy kiss was a sign of affection among Christians. Today it is like a handshake.

Final Instructions and Benediction (16:17-27)

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naïve people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings. Now to him who is

able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

1. Christians must study the Bible and learn to discern God’s will. Paul warns against false teachers who gather people around themselves because they are good speakers but inject false teachings. A sign of false teachers is that they add requirements for salvation beyond what the Bible says. In this way, they tell you what you must do to serve God. Paul says we must stay away from them. *Do you know of some examples of such appealing but false teachers? What do they teach that is beyond what the Bible says?*
2. False teachers who are popular, many times will live like rich people. They live in mansions and indulge themselves in pleasures like unsaved people. They are proud and do not take advice or correction. They crave the praise of men and so they preach what makes them popular, rather than what the Bible says. (2 Tim 4:2-5)
3. *What do you think Paul means when he says that God will soon crush Satan under your feet? (Gen 3:15; 1 Cor 6:2-3; Rev 20:4-10)*
4. *What is the mystery of God that was hidden but now has been revealed through prophetic writings? What are some other mysteries of the Christian faith? (Eph 3:6; 1 Tim 3:16)*