

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration of ancient Rome at sunset. The Colosseum is the central focus, with the sun setting behind it, creating a golden glow. In the foreground, there are several tall, classical columns on the left and a Roman coin (aureus) lying on a stone in the bottom right. The sky is filled with dramatic, golden clouds. The overall tone is warm and historical.

The Book of

# ROMANS

*Starters*

Understanding the Power of the Gospel  
and Living Out Our Faith

J. C. BROWN

*The Book of  
Romans  
Starters*

J. C. Brown

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## INTRODUCTION

This book was prepared as an introduction to a series of studies and group discussions based on Romans held in 2025 for the Mount Zion Young People's Camp in Queenstown, New Zealand. It is meant only as a "starter", an opportunity to whet your appetite on what the Book of Romans offers every believer, from understanding doctrine to practicing what we believe.

The book is divided into three main sections. The first section covers the doctrinal portion in Chapters 1-11, followed by a brief interlude concluding this section. The second section moves on to practical ways to live what we learned in those earlier chapters. We conclude these two sections with a summary of the whole Book of Romans.

The third section contains discussion questions with room for taking notes. These discussion questions particularly focus on ways we can bring the lessons from Romans into our daily lives.

This book would not have been written without considerable help from Brother John Owen and his wonderful set of studies on Romans available online.

### *How to use this book*

We recommend that you read each chapter of Romans from your Bible and then read the corresponding starter for that chapter. Each starter is divided into four parts:

1. Starting your reflection—get a taste of what the chapter is about.
2. Extend your reflection—delve a bit further into the chapter giving a bit more detail.
3. Deepen your reflection—pull the chapter together with final thoughts.
4. Things to think about—one or two short paragraphs designed to make us think about what the chapter means to us in our daily walk.

Make sure you understand the message that Paul has for us in each chapter and give some thought as to how you would answer the ideas in Part 4: Things to think about.

Once you have a good understanding of the Book of Romans, then turn to the final section of the book. This section gives you an opportunity to jot down your thoughts and ideas on each of the discussion questions, remembering to compare your answers with what Paul has been teaching us throughout the book.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 1

### The Power of the Gospel

Bible References: Gen 15:6; Rom 1:16-17; Jas 2:14-26

#### *Start your reflection*

The Apostle Paul began his life firmly on the side of those against Jesus. He did not recognize that Jesus was the Messiah and was even involved in the deaths of those who stood with Jesus. It took a personal experience with the Lord, a period of reflection whilst being blind, and the support of a reluctant disciple, Ananias, for Paul to understand the true Gospel message.

Paul had been dealing with forces within the Jewish and Gentile factions in the Roman Ecclesia that were often bitterly opposed to each other. The Jewish brethren insisted that some elements of the Law still needed to be kept such as circumcision and the food they ate. The Gentile brethren had to learn not to trample on the Jewish traditions but instead maintain a balanced view, a balance we should strive for in our dealings with those in our own ecclesias.

#### *Deepen your reflection*

The Book of Romans focuses on the power of the Gospel, at the center of which is Jesus Christ and our understanding of his mission. This is the Gospel that Paul was called upon to share with all the world's nations. We need to recognize that Jesus, being both Son of God and Son of Man, who shared our nature, was provided by God as our savior. It is through Jesus that we can have our sins forgiven. Paul felt compelled to preach this Gospel message to anyone who would listen (Rom 1:14-17).

The Gospel is the power of salvation. The Gospel message strengthens us and gives us a foundation (Rom 16:25-26). God's righteousness is revealed in the Gospel message. God has given us a way where His righteousness is upheld whilst allowing us to be brought back to Him, through faith, thus saving us from death. The righteousness of God is revealed through His faithfulness and is confirmed by Jesus who demonstrated God's faithfulness (Psa 40:10).

God's righteousness gives us every reason to have faith. The resurrection is the key to this faith because the fact of the resurrection cannot be challenged. It just depends on whether we want to believe it. God has given us every reason to believe in the Gospel because of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:30-31).

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS STARTERS

### *Extend your reflection*

The world has a universal problem with sin. The world has rejected God and morality has been thrown out. Mankind, as a whole, no longer knows right from wrong, so God has delivered them to their reprobate lives, as they wanted.

In contrast, God wants us to believe, to understand that we are sinners but that Jesus wrought a great victory over sin through the righteousness of God. If we believe in Jesus' victory then we can share in that victory. Our faith needs to go from commitment to a personal demonstration of our faith in action. Our faith needs to impact our lives. We must strive to be separate from those who go down the wrong path, ensuring we do not openly or subconsciously consent to their evil behavior. God only wants those who choose to serve Him in love and faith.

Consider the state of the world in Genesis 6:5. Evil is starting to grow and organize itself. It started individually with Adam and Eve, then moved to the family (Cain), before spreading throughout the whole earth. It was so bad that God chose to destroy all of mankind except for eight people.

The world is now like it was in the days of Noah. It is interesting that in our day, people are enacting all the evil that is in their hearts, and it is being perceived as normal and inclusive, rather than the evil that it truly is. Contrast the actions of those listed in Romans 1 with the prayer of David in 1 Chronicles 29:18. If we put God in all of our thoughts, our hearts will move away from evil.

### *Things to think about*

We often find ourselves hitting our heads against Christadelphian traditions that have been held on to for a long time. Whilst we need to hold on to sound doctrine, we also need to find a way to respect those who find it hard to let go of traditions passed down from parent to child, traditions that were there to bring order and dignity to our worship. We must discern between the two and find out what matters. What are some of the things that we think are good traditions, some

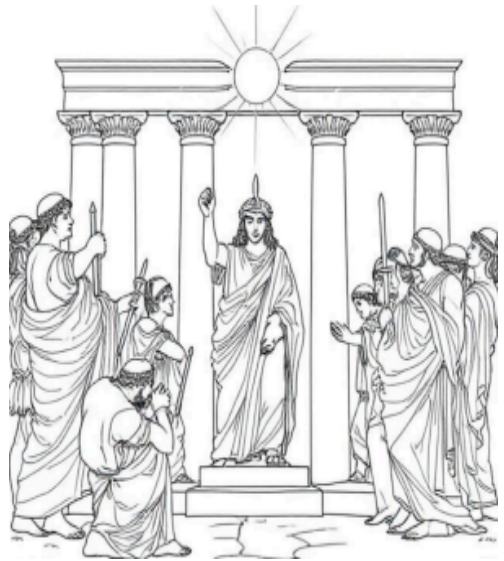


Figure 1





## ROMANS CHAPTER 2

### God Looks on the Heart

Bible References: 1 Sam 16:7; Psalms 98; Acts 10; Romans 2:15, 28-29

#### *Start your reflection*

In Acts 10 we read the story of the Apostle Peter and the Gentile man, Cornelius. God wanted Peter to preach the Gospel to a Gentile, something Peter struggled with. To get His message across, God used a series of visions to show Peter that he needed to let go of his traditions and his reliance on the Law, to be able to teach the Gospel to someone who was traditionally outside the faith. This was a difficult thing for Peter to learn. The message had to be reinforced three times before Peter could even begin to accept it. "I cannot eat anything defiled and ritually unclean," said Peter, but God's answer shook his foundations: "What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!" Peter had to learn that God doesn't look at outward appearances but rather He looks upon our hearts. This was a lesson that Peter had to learn more than once in his spiritual journey.



Figure 2

#### *Extend your reflection*

Paul, in Romans 2, shows that the problem of sin is universal. It is in both Jews and Gentiles, in those in the faith and those who are without. All of mankind has been corrupted and the world is filled with unrighteousness.

It is easy to think that the problem is with the world, that those in the world are the sinners and that we are better. The focus, though, needs to be on ourselves and where we fall short. We need to understand that we are sinners, not just those around us. But unlike them, we don't have any excuse for our sins because we know and understand the will of God. Whilst those outside the faith, without knowledge, are like the beasts that perish, we will be judged according to the things we have done. Knowing God should cause us to turn from sin. It should affect our hearts and our consciences. God's righteousness and faithfulness have been demonstrated to us through the provision of His Son. How do we respond to that faithfulness? (Rom 2:15).

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS STARTERS

We have a choice. Will we be amongst those who have responded to the knowledge we have been given and change our lives to reflect that knowledge? Or will we do our own thing, changing the truth of God into a lie? Have we allowed God's faithfulness and righteousness to work in our lives for good?

### *Deepen your reflection*

In his arguments in Romans 2, Paul quotes from Isaiah 52. This passage refers to the Syrians who oppressed Israel, causing God's name to be blasphemed. In Romans 2, Paul shows that it is the Jews who are now oppressing the Gentiles by using the yoke of the Law. Their actions were also causing the name of God to be blasphemed. In Acts 15:10, we read of the Jerusalem Council where the discussion was around forcing the Gentiles to follow the Law of Moses and the repercussions of these requirements.

What was the remedy for this oppression? Isaiah 52:7 shows that the Gospel was the answer to this problem—the Gospel's message was about peace (Acts 10:35-36; Rom 10:14-15). The Gospel is what we need. The Gospel is the good news of peace that sets us free from the problem of sin and death, from the oppression that happens when we live by the law. The Gospel is about knowing the Word of God and freely putting it into practice in our daily lives.

### *Things to think about*

What are some of the things that we insist on as being essential in our ecclesial life, things we can't do without? What do we say **must** happen for us to be good Christadelphians? What criteria do we judge others on, which, in our eyes, makes them not quite good enough? Is it the music we listen to at home or sing in our meetings? Is it the clothes we wear? Is it the classes we attend or the way we hold our meetings? Are there ways that we are oppressing our fellow brothers and sisters? Are there ways that our brothers and sisters are oppressing us?

“Oppression,” from a Biblical viewpoint, is any form of mistreatment, exploitation, or unfair dealing with our brethren and sisters in the ecclesia, especially by those in a position of relative strength or advantage. The Bible urges us to examine ourselves: Are we making life harder for our brothers and sisters through selfishness, legalism, gossip, or neglect? Are we treating our brethren the way we would want Christ to treat us?

One of the recent trends emerging within the ecclesial world is the notion of discarding old traditions and established practices in favor of a new paradigm centered on a humanistic concept of love, rather than how God demonstrates love. While this sounds appealing, could it merely be another form of oppression? Are we elevating ourselves as more loving or righteous, while judging those we perceive to be less loving than we are? Do our actions reflect





## ROMANS CHAPTER 3

### Our Faith in the Grace of God

Bible References: Psa 14; Matt 1:21-23; Rom 3:22-26; 2 Thess 1:8-10

#### *Start your reflection*

How much do we understand or appreciate what God has done for us? Do we just take this for granted? Perhaps we believe that we have greater rights than others because we are Christadelphians. This is what the Jewish believers held on to in the Roman Ecclesia. They felt that because they had the Law, they were above the Gentiles. Paul uses his time here to show them that, whilst they had advantages in being God's people, they were still sinners like the rest of humanity, sinners who rely on the grace of God. We, too, are sinners and, though our understanding of the Gospel gives us advantages, it doesn't, by itself, save us. We must have faith in God's gift for us, in the grace He has shown us, and then act on that faith in love.

#### *Extend your reflection*

Paul asks and answers a series of rhetorical questions that were designed to lead the reader to an understanding of the failure of humanity. At the time of Paul's message, some Jewish believers were suggesting that Paul chose to forsake the Law of Moses so he could justify sinning. Through a stepped process, he shows them that this is not what he is doing:

1. Is there any advantage to being a Jew? Yes, they were given the Word directly from God.
2. If the Jews are unfaithful does that undermine God's purpose? Of course not. Regardless of man's failures, God will always be true to His purpose. He has an eternal standard from which He will never be moved.
3. If our sin shows God is right then is He unjust in dealing with our sins? No! God has to deal with sin to judge the world.
4. If my sin highlights God's righteousness, can't I keep sinning so God looks good? No, that attitude is wrong. If you have that attitude then you are condemned.
5. Are the Jews better than the Gentiles? No. Morally we are all sinners.

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS STARTERS

We need to look at these questions and think about them concerning our lives as believers. Where do we stand? Paul is making it quite clear that God wants us to be counted righteous, but this righteousness is not our own. It is God's righteousness. Jesus shared our nature and put it to death; man was abased, and he made his life about exalting God's right ways. We can be counted righteous by acknowledging our sins, being faithful and trying to emulate the character of God and Jesus.

### *Deepen your reflection*

In this whole process, God's perfection and righteousness are never compromised. The Book of Romans emphasizes God's righteousness. He shows them that the Law was there to teach them about salvation, not to save them. Thankfully, God saves us not by the Law but by His grace. Our salvation is not based on ourselves or any other human standard of right and wrong. Rather, it is based on an unchanging, omnipotent, perfect God.

Every day of Jesus' life he declared God's righteousness, followed God's ways and showed God's character, eventually allowing himself to be put to death, showing that the nature he bore was only worthy of that. He wrought a great victory over sin because he had never succumbed to sin, putting his faith in God, and thus was raised to sit in power on the right hand of God.

If we truly believe in the sacrifice of God's Son and what that sacrifice meant to God, if we recognize sin in our lives but try to live according to God's will, then we will have a share in that victory and our faith will be counted by God as righteousness. This is the joy of the Gospel of God—the grace of God! Walking in faith and understanding the grace of God is what will bring us victory, through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Heavenly Father has offered us a wonderful gift. Let us not take that gift for granted.

### *Things to think about*

Do we ever look down on others because they aren't living the life we think they should be living? Conversely, do we ever think we aren't living as good a life as we should be and others are doing so much better than us? Perhaps it is time to go back and look at the sacrifice God and His Son Jesus made so that we might have life. Take a good look at what our thoughts and actions are and assess whether we are living a life that is truly based on our faith in God's grace.

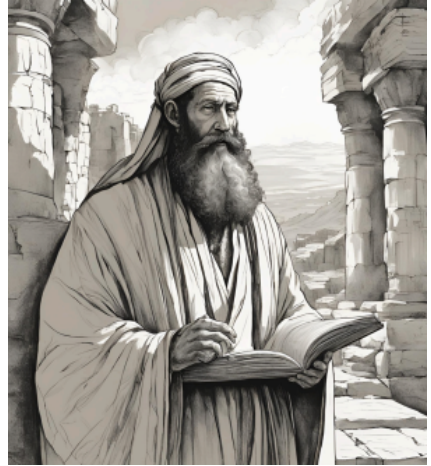


Figure 3





## ROMANS CHAPTER 4

### The Just Shall Live by Faith

Bible References: Gen 15; Psa 32; Acts 3:25-26; Rom 4:7-8; Gal 3:8

*Start your reflection*

Abraham was 75 years old when he was told by God that he would have a son, through the promises that God made to him. Yet it wasn't until he was 100 years old, 25 years later, that the promise was fulfilled. Throughout that time, Abraham had faith that God would fulfil his promises and would provide him with an heir.



Figure 4

In Galatians 3:8 we are shown that Abraham was taught the Gospel “All the nations will be blessed in you.” What was the blessing he was promised? The Gospel provides the forgiveness of sins. That’s the blessing that was available to all who are counted as Abraham’s seed (Acts 3:25-26).

David has already been alluded to several times in the Book of Romans. For example:

- Romans 1:32-2:1 linking to 2 Samuel 12:1-3;
- Romans 2:29 linking to 1 Samuel 16:8;
- Romans 3:4 linking to Psalm 51;
- Romans 4:5-7 linking to Psalm 32.

David understood that salvation could not come through the Law, only through faith. He was condemned by the Law for the sins he had committed—he should have been put to death. Once he had confessed his sin, though, he found that his sins were covered. He could be saved by God’s grace if he had faith. He could be forgiven for the sins he had committed. This was what the Gospel was all about. God accepts people based on faith.

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS STARTERS

### *Extend your reflection*

What did Abraham believe? He believed in the Gospel and the forgiveness of sins. What were the doctrines he believed?

- He knew he was a sinner who needed forgiveness.
- He understood that death is the consequence of sin. After all, he offered sacrifices which teach that the wages of sin is death.
- He would have had confidence that God would deal with sin and its consequences.
- Thus he would have had absolute confidence in the resurrection. Hebrews 11:19. He believed that salvation would be God's provision. He said this to Isaac. "God will provide" (Gen 22:8).
- He also believed that it was through his future seed that God would bring the blessing of the Gospel. He knew that salvation would come through a man (his seed).
- The blessing of sins forgiven meant that he, and others who shared his faith, would receive the earth forever. Romans 4:13. He believed in the Kingdom of God on earth.

These are all the key points of the atonement. If we put our faith in God just as Abraham did, we can share in this Gospel and be counted as Abraham's children.

### *Deepen your reflection*

Abraham was counted as righteous because of his faith. To be counted righteous is to have your sins forgiven. It is the belief that God's provision is sufficient for us. Paul asks, is this blessing only available to the Jews, those who are circumcised? Genesis 15:6 shows us that Abraham was counted righteous long before he was circumcised, an act which didn't take place until Genesis 17. Circumcision was there to show that the flesh is not worth anything and that faith is what is important. This means that anyone who comes in faith will have access to God's grace. As Romans 4:18-24 says, "Against hope Abraham believed in hope... Without being weak in faith... He did not waver in unbelief about the promise... He was strengthened in faith... He was fully convinced that what God promised He was also able to do."

The faith that Abraham had went far beyond what he could physically see. As Paul says in Romans 4:17, Abraham's belief was in a "God who... summons the things that do not yet exist as though they already do." Abraham trusted that God would provide him with a son, even though, humanly speaking, it was

impossible. He believed that God would raise his son from the dead and was prepared to kill Isaac in obedience to God.

We need to be fully persuaded and “walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham possessed” (Rom 4:12). Jesus was provided to deal with our sins and, in his resurrection, his victory over sin was complete. Our faith in this victory is what God is looking for. A faith such as this gives glory to God because with this faith we know that salvation doesn’t come through us but through God.

*Things to think about*

Our faith needs to be the faith of Abraham—a complete trust in God’s Word, even though man’s wisdom might say otherwise. Do we deny Genesis 1 and 2? Do we trust God completely when He says that He created the earth in six days or do we think that this was a fairytale, an allegory? When we deny God’s record it undermines the Gospel and the work of Jesus. Jesus declared God’s right judgement that sin should die. If sin had been around for millions of years, then how was it declaring God to be right? His sacrifice becomes meaningless. This is why it is so important that we have the faith of Abraham and completely trust in God’s Word. If God says something then we should believe it, just like Abraham did. What God has left on record for us, we must believe. That’s what it means when it says we should have the faith of our father, Abraham. This faith will allow us to share in the blessings that were given to Abraham. With God, all things are possible.

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## ROMANS CHAPTER 5

### Tribulation Working Patience

Bible References: Job 33:14-29; Rom 5:1-5; Heb 12:2-5; Jas 5:11; 1 Pet 1:3-9

*Start your reflection*

“Have you considered my servant Job?” (Job 1:8), says God to the adversary. Job, a blameless servant of God, went through trials that would be our worst nightmare. In one terrible day, he lost his income, then all ten of his children and finally his health. He would have been reeling from the shock. His life was on track and he was secure in his faith, but suddenly his whole world was ripped out from underneath him. Why would God do this to him? The lesson from the Book of Job is the same lesson we are learning from Romans: How should man be



Figure 5

justified before God? Job thought that he could be justified by his works. He thought he had covered everything, even to the point of sacrificing for his children in case they had missed something. Job had to learn, as we do, that we are not justified by works but by faith in the grace of God. Interestingly, James 5:11 tells us that we should look to Job for an example of God’s compassion and mercy. These terrible trials that Job was going through were there as a sign of God’s mercy.

This is the lesson we need to learn in our walk to the Kingdom. Once we are in a relationship with God we have to trust that the difficulties in our lives are being used by God to develop us for the Kingdom. Elihu’s words in Job 33 develop this idea further. In verse 14 we see that God speaks to man in two different ways. The first way is in visions or by His Word. The second way is by the challenges of our lives. Verses 16-21 are examples of trials that all of us go through. We need to see, though, that God is using our suffering to directly speak to us, to mold us, to teach us humility and to show us that we cannot put our faith in our strength. Hebrews 12:2-5 carries this thought on, further showing us what Christ went through and how God uses suffering because He loves us.

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS STARTERS

### *Extend your reflection*

Paul is telling us to rejoice in our sufferings, not just rejoice in the hope of the Kingdom, but how do we find hope or joy in the trials we are going through? Job 33:23-29 shows us how we can find that joy. The basis of our joy is in the knowledge that God has provided us with a redeemer who would show man God's righteousness. It is because of the work of the Lord Jesus, and the suffering that he went through, that God is gracious to man. He has graciously offered us salvation through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 20:28). We can be counted righteous because of the victory of Christ. How can we share in Christ's victory? Job 33:27-28 shows us that we can share in Christ's victory if we can acknowledge that each of us is a sinner and all require salvation. The recognition of our sinful nature and our desire to change leads us to God's grace.

Job 33:29 says: "Indeed, God does all these things twice, three times, in his dealings with a person." We started with two ways that God speaks to us but now we find a third way. This third way is in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has spoken to us through His Son (Rom 5:11).

### *Deepen your reflection*

Romans 5:12-21 emphasizes how great the grace of God is. When we understand what God offers, then we can rejoice in our sufferings and see the compassion and mercy of God in working to mold our characters. Christ did enormously more for man than what Adam lost. Christ reversed the problem that Adam created, but he didn't simply reverse the condemnation of Adam. Adam lost a very good life. Christ brought life and immortality. There is a contrast in quality. Adam sinned one sin. Christ brought forgiveness of many sins. There is a contrast in quantity.

We need to understand the scope of what we are looking at. One man's offence brought death and condemnation. It brought in a reign of death and brought all into condemnation. This all came through disobedience to God. One sin had a huge impact. It has affected every person since Adam.

In contrast, though, through the Lord Jesus, many have life. Although sin is so powerful that one sin can do huge damage, the grace of God is so incredibly powerful it can deal with many sins. It is an abundance of grace. It can cover everyone. And it came about through obedience to God. The grace of God can deal with all of our problems. It is far bigger than the impact of Adam's sin. This

is what we can rejoice in—the knowledge that God’s grace can cover us, even when we might feel that we are not worthy.

The lesson from Romans 5 is that God can use the challenges and difficulties of our life to mold us and to develop patience in us so that we can look in hope towards His Kingdom. This is how God’s grace, mercy, and compassion work in our lives. What a wonderful hope we have. 1 Peter 1:3-9 is a lovely summary of what we have been looking at.

*Things to think about*

What areas of your life can you see God working in? When you have trials, do you blame God and withdraw from Him or has it drawn you closer to God? Sometimes our trials come about because of something we have done to ourselves—like David and his sin with Bathsheba. Other times they come about through no fault of our own—like Joseph, being sold into slavery. Yet, all our trials are there to help develop our characters so that we become more like Jesus. What is our attitude towards our trials? How do the trials that Jesus went through impact our lives? It might be worthwhile to think about how we work through our trials. What does a positive mentality look like and what does a negative mentality look like during trials? How do these two ways of looking at trials impact our relationship with God?

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## ROMANS CHAPTER 6

### Who Will You Serve?

Bible References: Deut 15:16-17; Matt 6:24; John 8:31-51

#### *Start your reflection*

Under the Law, a servant was allowed to go free after seven years. Some servants, though, choose to stay with their master for the rest of their lives because they love their master and his household. As a symbol of their commitment, the master would take an awl and put a hole in the servant's ear. By thrusting an awl through his ear the master is symbolically saying that, from now on, the servant will always listen only to his master.

When we are baptized, we are doing exactly what that servant did. Baptism demonstrates our desire to put sin to death, to show that we believe in God's righteousness and that we want to associate ourselves with the death of our Lord as well as his resurrection. With this act, we choose to make God our master and live only to serve Him.

The word "obey" has "to hear" as its root. Romans 10:17 tells us: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Who are we listening to? Are we listening to ourselves or are we listening to God?

Baptism is a public declaration that we agree with God that sin is wrong, that the flesh needs to be put to death, and that God's will must be done, but baptism is only the beginning. We need to re-live our baptism daily by letting Christ live in us and by choosing every day to follow God. Our decisions and actions need to be based not on what we would do but on what Christ would do. Our aim should be to live a Christ-like life.

#### *Extend your reflection*

Having just spent five chapters saying that righteousness cannot come by the Law and that man cannot be saved by his works, Paul now demonstrates that works are vital. But they are not the works of law, they are the works of love.



*Figure 6*

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS STARTERS

They are not mere adherence to the Law but are a voluntary response to the love that God has shown us. Paul shows us this in three different ways:

1. Romans 6:1-11: Our commitment to a new life begins with baptism.
2. Romans 6:12-24: Our commitment to a new master.
3. Romans 7:1-6: Our commitment to a new husband.

By committing to these ideals, we are demonstrating our identification with the Lord Jesus Christ rather than keeping to our old way of life. There are two classes: Adam and Christ. We know which class we are in by our actions. Do we act like Adam or do we act like Christ? Whom do we serve? Ourselves or God?

The suggestion that salvation by grace means that you can now live as you please without any law whatsoever simply exposes a complete ignorance of the gospel of God. The freedom we have been so graciously given is the freedom to choose to follow God rather than being a bond slave to sin.

### *Deepen your reflection*

Whilst, indeed, we cannot earn our way to the Kingdom, and our works will not grant us a ticket to eternity, it is also true that when we understand that we are sinners, not worthy of salvation, God then reaches out to us in love to provide salvation through His Son. With this knowledge in our hearts, if we are truly grateful for what God has done for us, then we will use every day to serve our Lord in love.

What do we allow to influence our lives? Jesus tells us in John 8:31-51 that we are born as slaves to sin but we can choose to be with the Son and, if this is the choice we make, then we will be free. This is not a freedom to do whatever we want, but a freedom to choose to follow our new Master.

A life of serving God leads to holiness. The High Priest had “Holiness unto God” written on his mitre. We need to have this written on our hearts. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ affects our conscience. Make your baptism the reality of your life by putting the principles of God into your heart and choosing to obey Him every day.

### *Things to think about*

We can ask the question, like the Jews did, “Shall we sin that grace may abound?” (Rom 6:1 NKJV). Should we just love God and His grace will cover all our sins? Paul is telling us that this is not the answer. “God forbid!” Absolutely not! The gospel of grace preached in the churches often follows these principles:

1. God loves me unconditionally





## ROMANS CHAPTER 7

### A New Life

Bible References: 2 Sam 11; 12; Psa 40:6-8; Psa 51

#### *Start your reflection*

After baptism, we begin a new life with a new husband, our Lord Jesus Christ. Our first husband, sin, was put to death under the waters of baptism and we are free to marry again and devote our life to our new husband. We start this



Figure 7

marriage with excitement, with promise, with a desire to follow our new Lord but we quickly find that this new life is not easy.

Paul is using the example of marriage to show us that, even though we commit our lives to Christ with baptism, it is very easy to return to our old ways. In Paul's example, the believer is the woman and the two husbands are the two lifestyles of the believer. Her first husband is sinful, as shown by the Law of Moses. The second husband is Christ who lived according to the Spirit of the Law. The fruit of the first marriage is death whilst the fruit of the second marriage is life.

#### *Extend your reflection*

Paul spends some time in this chapter showing that the Law demonstrated what sin was. Before the Law, we lived a carefree life as we didn't acknowledge any wrong. Once we understood the Law and what God wanted, we could see how far we fell short. The Law was given to bring life but it led to death.

The Law wasn't the problem. We should understand that we are the problem and that sin has a hold on us. Sometimes we don't understand why we do the things we do. We want to do the right thing but we keep messing up and there is this constant battle going on inside us. Paul uses the example of coveting to show us what he means. Before the law, for example, you might not be aware that coveting was wrong. Once you know it's wrong, though, then you become aware of all the different ways you can covet and how that draws away from God. Thus the law showed how big the problem was.

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If I am making mistakes then I understand that the law is needed. This isn't Paul rejecting responsibility for sin. This is his point of frustration. His new life was about God and His righteousness, but he was still sinning, even though he didn't want to. We constantly fail to suppress sin because we are still mortal. Even though I delight in God's ways and my heart is in the right place, I am still in captivity under the law of sin. It is a constant battle. I want to serve God but I feel trapped by my sin-prone nature.

### *Deepen your reflection*

Fighting our sinful nature can be very frustrating, but this frustration tells us that we are alive and we are on the right path (Psa 40:6-8). If we delight in God's ways, which comes from an open ear to the Word of God, then that mindset will help us to focus on the spirit and not the flesh. On this side of the Kingdom, we will be frustrated by our mortality, but we can have confidence that in the LORD God there is a solution.

Romans 7 can feel very negative as it seems to concentrate a lot on our constant battle with sin, but dotted throughout the chapter are little gems that tell us where the Godly man's thinking should be:

(Rom 7:15) The Godly man wants to do the right thing. He hates it when he does wrong and feels better when he is trying to do what God wants.

(Rom 7:16) He understands and agrees that there is a right way to do things.

(Rom 7:18) He has a real desire to do the right thing.

(Rom 7:19) He has good intentions. Even though he fails often, his intentions are in the right place.

(Rom 7:22) He delights in God's way and demonstrates that in his life to the best of his ability.

(Rom 7:23) He feels wretched about his failings. This is important as we need to be able to see where we go wrong and feel bad about it, just like David did when Nathan confronted him about his sin.

(Rom 7:25) He serves God from his mind and feels peace within himself.

Whilst we acknowledge our failings, we need to focus our minds on what God has done for us—we need to put God first in our lives. "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:25).

### *Things to think about*

We need a balanced approach in our new life. We shouldn't put ourselves down all the time or concentrate on where we go wrong. This leads to an unhealthy

obsession with the flesh. It can also lead to forcing others to live up to our expectations. It can cause us to make others suffer when they go wrong. This can lead to controlling the freedoms of those in the meeting which can ultimately lead to witch hunts within the ecclesia when our members fail to follow unreasonable laws. If we follow this path then we are worshipping a God who is more like a parole officer than a father.

Alternatively, if we don't have real sorrow when we do something wrong and try to pretend that humans are good, then this will also drag us down to evil. Ecclesias may become highly liberal and refuse to judge themselves or their members for fear that they will become legalistic. They won't set any standards and prefer to assume that people will only do good if they are given complete freedom. They worship a God who more resembles a Santa Claus rather than a God who insists on truth.

Having a balanced outlook in our walk is essential. We need to recognize sorrow in our sinful natures, acknowledging where we go wrong but, conversely, we need to delight in the righteousness of our God and what He has done for us.

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## ROMANS CHAPTER 8

### Choose This Day Whom You Will Serve

Bible References: Josh 24:1-28; Psa 1:1-6; Gal 5:16-25; Eph 3:14-21; Phil 2:1-6

*Start your reflection*

The theme in the Book of Joshua is all about choosing who you want to serve (Josh 24:15). We have that same choice. We can choose to have a relationship with God or a relationship with the world. God's way leads to life but man's way leads to death (Psa 1:1-6). These two paths are clearly shown in the first two major battles that Israel undertook. With the battle of Jericho, everybody chose to do exactly what God said, and a seemingly impossible battle was won (Josh 6).



*Figure 8*

In contrast, during the battle at Ai the choice was made to disobey God, a choice which led to death. Before the battle of Jericho, Joshua met an angel (Josh 5:13). He asked the angel, "Are you on our side or the side of our enemies?" The angel replied,

"I am on God's side." It's not about us. We need to ask ourselves, are we on God's side? Do we seek to give God glory and fulfil his purpose or do we stand in His way? (Matt 6:24).

This choice is shown clearly throughout Romans 8. We can choose to follow the flesh and do what we want or we can choose to live by the spirit.

*Extend your reflection*

In our lives, we have three choices:

1. Do I reject God altogether?
2. Do I accept God but still trust in myself?
3. Do I accept God and trust in Him with my whole heart?

Trusting in self focuses on the flesh. Living a life focusing on ourselves leads to death. It will never please God. If we are not delighting in God's ways, then we don't belong to Him. In contrast, living a life focusing on God leads to life. This is what Jesus did. He condemned his human nature and focused on God and on

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“the things that are above” (Rom 8:5-8). When we follow Christ, even though we possess a mortal body, we are alive because we cultivate a spiritual mindset, which involves following righteousness and serving God (Rom 6:21-23).

Philippians 2:1-6 tells us that this is the mindset that we should develop, putting God and placing others before ourselves (Gal 5:16-25). The contrast is clear—we can choose to serve the flesh or we can choose to live in the spirit.

Even though we struggle with our mortality, if we choose to serve God and not ourselves, we can have confidence in our hope (Rom 8:18). All creation waits in eager anticipation for the Kingdom to come. We should be confident that we will be part of that future because we are trying to make the Word of God a reality in our lives. It is worth going through the challenges now because of what is coming. We need to keep the hope of our reality alive. Our glorious hope is to be completely set at liberty from mortality’s grip (Rom 8:20). There is a contrast between suffering and glory. Without hope, life is vanity. We live under the bondage of corruption. The hope of glory helps us because we know that we will be delivered in glorious liberty, we will be redeemed, and we will be saved (Isa 65:17). The Kingdom Age will be so supremely better than anything on offer today. We won’t even remember the troubles of this life on the other side of mortality.

### *Deepen your reflection*

If we choose to put God first in every aspect of our lives, as He asked the Israelites to do, then God will be there for us. He understands our hearts and can see exactly what we need (Rom 8:6, 26). We will have struggles in our daily lives. We will struggle to express ourselves, but God knows our innermost thoughts (Psa 38:8-9).

God is working with us to transform us, to help us become more like His Son. The Lord Jesus Christ wants us to be in the Kingdom. He has done the work by dealing with sin and conquering death. He now sits on the right hand of God, above principalities and powers, above the angels. The choice he made and the love that both he and God showed provide us permanent access to God. We, by choosing to follow self, rather than God, are the only ones that can separate us from God’s love.

The spiritual mindset, which we should be trying to cultivate, can help us in all circumstances. God, who knows our hearts, knows exactly what we need (Rom 8:6, 26). We struggle to put what we need into words sometimes, but God knows our innermost thoughts (Psa 38:8-9). God is working with people who are willing to be remolded by the renewing of their minds. Don’t be conformed to the image of the world, but be transformed by the image of His Son. We should be trying to be like Jesus (Rom 8:31). In all the difficulties of our lives, God is molding us for

the Kingdom. We are more than conquerors because God is working in our lives for good. “All things work together for good for those who love God” (Rom 8:28). God won’t budge from His purpose. In the struggles of our lives, if we keep on going, good will follow.

Ephesians 3:14-21 is a lovely summary of why we should choose to serve God. What we will receive is beyond human knowledge and experience. It transcends everything we know in our present existence.

*Things to think about*

What is our focus in life? Who do we enjoy spending our time with? What gets our time and attention? How much do we appreciate what God has done for us? What choices do we make? These are all questions we need to think about. The choice we make at baptism is an ongoing action that we must make every day. When we wake up tomorrow then we should choose to follow God. We should make that choice every day. Every morning we can wake up and start afresh. What can I personally do to become closer to God? What choice or change can I make in my life to give glory to God each day? Will my actions bring others closer to God or will they hinder others? Think about how our actions impact others around us. What does choosing to be on God’s side look like?

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## ROMANS CHAPTER 9

### God is in Control

Bible References: Exod 9:11-35; 33:16-34:7; Isa 45:9-13; 1 Pet 2:4-12

*Start your reflection*

God's plan has two major principles. Firstly, salvation is God's provision, carried out through His Son. Secondly, man has free will to accept or reject God.

God is the master potter. He molds people into vessels, either for honor or for dishonor. Is this fair? Of course, it is. God's mercy and compassion are integral to Him. If it was anyone else doing the choosing then we might be concerned but it is God, our righteous judge, who is in control. God, through His foreknowledge, chooses people who He knows will respond to His Word. God's mercy and grace will only be extended to those who choose Him. If people continue in their ways then God won't be merciful to them. In contrast, if they faithfully abide in His goodness, then He will be good to them. Thus God's character is resolute for there is no unrighteousness with God.



Figure 9

*Extend your reflection*

Paul gives us several examples that demonstrate these principles. Our first example is Isaac, the promised heir. Though Abraham had many other children, only Isaac was called. The calling wasn't based on being a natural descendant of Abraham but rather on being someone prepared to put God first.

Esau and Jacob were both sons of Isaac but only Jacob was loved whilst Esau was hated. God knew while they were still in the womb that the elder (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). Esau's life precluded him from being part of the promises. He despised what God offered so he was rejected. God's purpose with us depends on how we respond to Him. God alone makes the choice based on His principles. We have no right to question God's justice. As Abraham said, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25 KJV).

Our history lesson moves on to two starkly contrasted individuals: Pharaoh and Cyrus. Whilst going through ten extremely difficult plagues, Pharaoh had every

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chance of acknowledging that God was more powerful than any Egyptian god. Instead of recognising God's supreme power, Pharaoh continued to harden his heart so he could do what he wanted. In Exodus 9:11-16 we see that finally, God confirmed or strengthened Pharaoh in his own pre-existing stubbornness and rebellion. Even then, God gives Pharaoh one last chance to stand up and do the right thing. God did this to show His mercy and His long-suffering attitude towards mankind, but Pharaoh once again rejected God. Whilst Pharaoh acknowledged his sin and intention to change, his heart wasn't in his words. He hardened his heart so God gave him over to his depraved mind. This brings us back to Romans 1:28. If we choose to reject God, then God will reject us.

In contrast, we have Cyrus, who also saw God's power and heard the Word of God, but chose to respond appropriately. Cyrus was a vessel fit for honor whilst Pharaoh was a vessel raised to dishonor. Opportunities were given to both of them but only one chose to follow God and was called "God's servant."

Those vessels made in dishonor prepare themselves for destruction. Those vessels made in honor are prepared by God for glory. We need to remember that God is equally as long-suffering with us as He was with Pharaoh. He wants to mold us into characters that honor and love Him. We can never stop responding to the hand of the Potter. We may often find ourselves fighting with the Potter because we want to become different kinds of pots than the ones the Potter is trying to shape. But we need to be malleable. We need to be aware of what God wants, not what we want.

### *Deepen your reflection*

In each of the examples we are given, we can see that some have chosen to respond to God's Word and are then shown grace and mercy whilst others choose to reject God's Word and are consequently rejected by God.

Israel thought, because they were the chosen people, they would automatically be accepted. But that is not the case. God doesn't need to save everybody. God has always been prepared to work with a remnant, both Jews and Gentiles. Even when Israel was a vast nation, God would have destroyed them for their wicked ways if it wasn't for a small remnant who strived for a relationship with Him. God will not change and He is always consistent in what He is looking for. We can be confident in the knowledge that the prophecies will come to pass, that the Potter will fulfil His Word and will complete what He has started: "For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil 1:6).

The basis of God's selection is crystal clear. The only way we will be saved is if we have faith and we choose God. Paul mixes citations from Isaiah 28:16 and 8:4 showing us that if we make Christ our cornerstone, the building block of our

lives, then God will be able to work with us to mold us to be like our Lord. On the other hand, if we don't put our faith in that provision then Christ will become a stumbling block to us. If we believe that salvation is all about the strength of human flesh then a suffering savior makes no sense. Once we recognize that the flesh needs to die, then Christ and his sacrifice can become the cornerstone of our lives. 1 Peter 2:4-12 sums this up beautifully for us. The example of Israel is one we can hold on to. Though Israel has walked away from God time and time again, God has and will show His mercy and long-suffering towards them, bringing them back to being "my people" once again.

*Things to think about*

How do we respond to God's Word? Are we like Pharaoh, choosing to follow our pride, or are we like Jacob who, whilst flawed, always tried to allow God to work in his life? As Jacob discovered, it is very hard to let go of our desires and let God work in our lives. Do we often try to do what we want, and then justify our decision-making by making ourselves look better than we are? Do we act like God is in control in our lives and accept how He is trying to mold us? Or do we constantly fight against Him and put our wants first?

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## ROMANS CHAPTER 10

### The New Covenant

Bible References: Deut 30:6-14; Psa 19; Isa 28:15-18; 52; Jer 31:29-34; Gal 3:1-14

*Start your reflection*

Having a zeal for God is useless if it is misguided. Israel did not submit to the righteousness of God. They were too worried about establishing their righteousness (Rom 1:16-17). God has always wanted us to develop faith in His righteousness (Rom 3:25-26). God's plan and purpose have always been that the Law, which pointed to Christ, would come to an end in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nobody achieved righteousness by following the Law, even though it was in place for 1,500 years. The Law could never provide eternal life (Gal 3:10-12).



*Figure 10*

In Deuteronomy 30, Moses is talking about the written word of God. Paul applies this passage to Christ, who is the Word made flesh. Go back to Deuteronomy 29:1. The covenant which was made in Horeb was the Law. Moses is talking about a different covenant—a new covenant. Deuteronomy 29:10-15 tells us that this new covenant, separate from the Law of Moses, will stretch into the future. This new covenant concerns the promises God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Deuteronomy 30:6 is cross-referenced to Jeremiah 31:23; Jeremiah 32:39; Ezekiel 11 and Ezekiel 36. These crucial passages speak of the new covenant that Israel will eventually come into. Moses is giving the people a taste of the fact that God is bringing them into a new covenant, one which is different to the Law.

How is this new covenant different to the Law of Moses? Deuteronomy 30:11-14 tells us that the children of Israel had to cross a sea and go to the mountain into heaven to receive the law (Exod 20:22). This new covenant did not require them to cross the sea or go to heaven (into the mountain) to receive it. This new covenant is provided for them. The work would be done for them. They simply had to make a choice—do I want to live or do I want to die? In Deuteronomy 30:19 Moses tells them to choose life, to put this new covenant into their hearts. God deals with the problem of sin for us through Christ. All we have to do is put our faith in him.

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### *Extend your reflection*

How is this new covenant different to the Law of Moses? The Apostle Paul utilizes Deuteronomy 30:11-14 to show us these differences and adds his own inspired commentary for us so that we can understand. Unlike when Israel received the Law, Paul tells us that nobody has to go to heaven (up a mountain) to receive Christ. The Apostle then changes the word for “sea” to “abyss”—the bottomless pit. Whilst Israel had to cross the sea before receiving the Law, Paul is telling us that nobody has had to go to the grave (the sea) to receive salvation through Christ. God has raised Christ from the dead to provide salvation. What we need to do is believe that God provided His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to deal with sin, that he died and God raised him from the dead, and with that belief, we shall be saved (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:8-12; Heb 10:16-17).

The new covenant isn't passive. We need to hear and we need to do. The Jews mistakenly believed that they could earn their salvation through works. Fortunately for us, God has made salvation His work. This opportunity is available to whoever believes whether Jew or Gentile; it is available to anyone who believes in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul goes on to quote Isaiah 28:15-18. In the days of Ahaz, the rulers made a covenant with the Assyrians and the Jews thought they would be safe. This was a mistake as they were relying on lying men. God challenges them and says, I will build something for you that you can trust in, a sure foundation, built on judgement and justice. If you put your faith in this, you will be able to stand firm. If you don't, your covenant with the Assyrians will mean nothing as they will come like a flood and you will be trodden down. Make your choice—life or death.

The sure foundation that God has put into place is our Lord Jesus Christ who is going to rule by judgement and justice (Isa 9:7). These are the standards of our Lord (Isa 32:1). A man would come who would demonstrate God's righteousness in action. Jesus is the one to whom we should turn, he is the key. He is the one we should have faith in. This is our sure foundation.

### *Deepen your reflection*

Paul moves on to quote Isaiah 52:7 which is looking forward to preaching in the Kingdom. The message of the preacher is: come out of the nations. Don't be scared. For all those who are willing, go and see that God is reigning in Jerusalem, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jerusalem has been redeemed. The salvation of God is there (Isa 52:13). We need to look on the Lord Jesus, God's servant, who will be exalted, King over the whole earth (Isa 52:14-15). Just as the Jews suffered down through the ages, Jesus also suffered more than any man (Isa 52:15). Many nations will have the opportunity to see the Lord and recognize

the wounds on his hands and feet, finally understanding that he is God's provision as the Messiah.

How will they hear? The answer is that preaching will take place throughout the earth. Unfortunately not all will receive the message. Not all will believe the report (Isa 53:1). Even in the Kingdom, some will fight against God's ways. In the end, true faith will come through those who are willing to listen to the Word of God. This opportunity has been provided for all who want it (Psa 19:1-4).

The creation around us gives abundant testimony to the existence of the Creator. It testifies to design. Creation speaks of the existence of God—something every single person can see. This beautiful sound has gone out to all willing to see it.

Paul asks a rhetorical question. Didn't Israel know this? In other words, didn't the Jews know that the Gentiles, too, could be saved based on faith? They should have known, as Moses had told them in Deuteronomy 32. They were without excuse. God tried very hard and for a long time to give Israel the message but many didn't listen. They lacked faith, and thus God turned to the Gentiles to offer them this gift of salvation. All God has ever wanted is for people to show faith (Isa 65:1-7).

### *Things to think about*

If we can't put our trust in God into action, then we don't trust as we should. As we learn about God, read the Bible and hear examples of faith such as Noah, Abraham, and David, to name a few, it is quite easy to gain an understanding of what it means to trust in God. We might believe we trust in God if that trust is never tried. It isn't until we are tested that we act outside of our logic and experience, stepping out in faith and truly trusting God with all our hearts and minds. This can be a huge challenge. Trusting God from the heart as well as the mind is what David did. He said, "The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped" (Psa 28:7 NASB). So let's grow our faith and trust in God from our heads to our hearts so that we can put our trust in Him into action.

The story of Peter in Matthew 14:22-32 shows us this faith in action. Peter focused on his Lord and was able to walk on the water in faith. As soon as his focus shifted, he saw the wind and immediately started to sink. The Lord caught him and took him back to his brethren. Our lesson is that we must come to Christ by faith, not a belief in our own abilities. We need to recognize when we need help and pray for that help. We must also lead others to Christ, not just focus on ourselves.



## ROMANS CHAPTER 11

### A Redeemer Comes to Zion

Bible References: Psa 69; Isa 29; 59; John 12:37-43

*Start your reflection*

Grafting an olive tree can occur when the main tree produces very poor or no fruit. When this happens, the farmer would select a healthy branch from another tree and graft that branch into the existing tree. Often that new branch would be taken from a wild olive tree as they are more resistant to disease and are more vigorous, helping the tree become stronger and revitalized. The branch and the rootstock of the existing tree would be cut so they fit together and then the two plants would be bound together with twine or tape.



*Figure 8*

This is an example of Israel. God gave Israel a special place in His heart and multiple opportunities to show their faith and commitment to Him. In the final analysis, their constant failure caused Him to cast their branches off and bind in a new, wild olive branch—the Gentiles, who would then allow the olive tree to be strengthened. This is what happened after AD 70 when God brought the Gentiles to the Gospel.

Israel, as a nation, has a special place in the purpose of God. They have been chosen to be His witnesses and are proof of His existence and His purpose. Unfortunately, Israel is no better than the rest of the world. Does this mean they are no longer a part of His purpose? Absolutely not. God will preserve Israel by His grace. They have remained a witness to God by their removal from the olive tree but they will have the opportunity to be grafted back into the olive tree when the time of the Gentiles comes to an end

*Extend your reflection*

When we look back in history we see that the nation of Israel never received what they were looking for. They were looking for righteousness based on works, rather than righteousness based on faith. Because of the wrong choices they made

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and their lack of faith, God blinded them, or hardened their hearts, to His purpose (John 12:37-43).

Paul uses Isaiah 29 to tell us that Israel refused to listen to God and was too wrapped up in their importance. Consequently, judgement would come to the nation, beginning with the terrible events of AD 70. Contrasting the blindness of the Jews, we have the Gentiles who would see the truth of the Gospel without the traditions of the Law.

Psalm 69 talks about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. The Jews, who knew what happened at the cross, couldn't see that Jesus was the center of God's purpose. They wanted to earn salvation by upholding the Law and thus God brought judgment upon them. The Jews did not accept the table, the provision, that God gave to them in the Lord Jesus Christ and this became a snare to them. Christ's crucifixion became their stumbling block (Luke 21:22-24).

Does the stumbling of the Jews preclude them from God's grace? No, God still has a purpose with them. In a manner of speaking, we are saved by the example of the Jews. The nation of Israel is a copy of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ had to die so that we might be saved. If Christ was not raised we are yet in our sins. It is the same for Israel. If they are not brought back into favor then we have no prospect of eternal life. In that sense, Israel is nothing more than an unwilling, unbelieving national messiah.

### *Deepen your reflection*

Elijah believed he was the only faithful person left out of all Israel. Even though the nation of Israel had rejected God's prophets (Matt 21:35-37), God knew there was still a remnant who were the subject of God's grace. There were still 7,000 who did not worship Baal but were true to God.

God called the nation of Israel and, apart from a remnant, they did not respond. So He sent His Son into their midst, and they killed him. Because of that God took that nation and He crucified them before the Gentiles. For the next 2,000 years, they suffered to prove to the Gentiles that God had a purpose with the earth. When Christ returns he is going to restore national Israel and he is going to give immortality to the Gentiles. When Israel eventually responds to God and puts their faith in Him, then that will be a time of blessing for all nations.

The resurrection of Israel is the greatest sign we have of the nearness of the return of our Lord. We believe because we see prophecy fulfilled before our eyes. Even though Israel failed so many times, it was always God's intention that Israel would be offered the opportunity to be saved in the last days. Israel has always been beloved for the sake of the fathers of old. Because of Abraham's

faith (the root), Israel (the branches) are special to God and they have been set apart as witnesses for all nations to see that God means what He says.

The promises to Abraham concern a seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would provide salvation. They talk of a Kingdom which would be set up in Israel and would fill the whole earth, bringing forgiveness of sins and eternal life. We've been invited to share in this hope, the hope of Israel. God's purpose with Israel has certainly not come to an end. Once the times of the Gentiles have been fulfilled then the Lord will return and save the nation of Israel from the invader, the Gogian host. The Jews will have the opportunity to be grafted back into the olive tree if they respond to their Messiah in faith. At that time, they will look upon the one they pierced and mourn and God will extend His mercy to all who trust Him.

Isaiah 59 provides a summary of what Romans 11 is showing us. Isaiah 59:1-8 talks of the problem of sin with the Jews; Isaiah 59:9-15 shows us that we all have the same problem with sin. Isaiah 59:16-21 tells us that God is the only one who can provide salvation and take away the sins of all those who believe, whether Jew or Gentile.

Everyone has fallen short of the glory of God. We all have the same problem with unbelief, rebellion, or disobedience. God has allowed that (Gal 3:22) so that He might have mercy on all of us. The Scriptures bind us all together in our sin, but a recognition of our distance from God will show us more fully His mercy. How wonderful are God's ways? If we don't try to justify ourselves, and if we acknowledge that God alone can deal with the beast of sin and repent of our ways, then God will willingly show us mercy.

*Things to think about*

Israel has gone through and will continue to go through some horrific times before they recognize their Messiah. Elijah will be sent out to the Jews who are scattered throughout the world and a mass exodus will begin. The Jews will return to their land and at that time the Gentiles will ask to join in. This is the time that we should be looking for the Lord Jesus Christ, our deliverer, to come. Have we looked at the witness of the Jews and seen how God fulfils His promises? The nation of Israel is part of the Gospel of God, from the time of Abraham right through until the Messiah returns. Do we feel compelled to preach the Gospel to everybody like Paul did? Do we see the witness of Israel as something we can talk to others about? Are we ashamed of the Gospel or is it something that we are excited about?

We have been granted this wonderful opportunity. Unlike the world's miracle cures, the Gospel message can truly save people from death. Do we have problems with sharing this with other people? How do we set ourselves to



## INTERLUDE

### The Big Picture

Romans chapters 1 to 11 concentrate on Paul's doctrinal argument. It is worth summarising these chapters to give an overall view of Paul's argument and what he is leading up to.

Chapter 1 contains these key words: "The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17). These words come from Habakkuk 2:4 but the phrase is picked up here, and also in Galatians and Hebrews. It is fundamental to understand that we can only come to the Kingdom by God's grace, and this wonderful opportunity is only ours if we come in faith.

We live in a wicked world but it is not separate from us, as if we were something different. We are also sinners so we should not have pride in ourselves as if we are something better. Instead, we need to confess our sins. By doing this, we recognize that we are in the wrong and God is in the right. We can't save ourselves because we are all sinners and all fall short of the glory of God. We cannot earn our salvation by our actions. We can only look to God in faith for His provision, the point of mercy, in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is not a new idea. God has always wanted mankind to have faith in Him. David and Abraham are great examples of this, both having understood the Gospel and choosing to live by faith. We, like them, are made righteous by our faith. It is in God's grace that we can stand. We are putting our faith in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, who showed that sin should die and what God's character truly is. If we can get our heads around the enormity of Adam's sin and that the world is full of sin, then we can understand how great God's grace is. Therefore we should strive to live in faith, have a new life after baptism, serve our new master, and love our new husband. Is that easy? No. The things we don't want to do, we do. The things we want to do, we don't do. But we need to make sure that we continue with the battle and, in doing so, we can see how much God is on our side. God wants us to be in His Kingdom. He has not left us to battle this on our own. We are adopted into the new covenant and our mindset should be one with our Lord Jesus Christ. Putting our trust in God will give us the strength to cope with the challenges of this life, which are there to help us develop our character for the Kingdom.

God has always wanted faith and always will want faith. The nation of Israel helps us understand this point. Even though the nation as a whole did not do what God wanted, there was always a remnant who tried to live in faith. Because of that, God would provide a deliverer for the whole nation after the Gogian host

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comes down. He will also grant immortality to those individuals who have faith in Him. This shows God's great plan and purpose. He has worked with both the Jews and Gentiles, enabling all to have that opportunity to be part of His promises. None of us can do anything that will mean God owes us. Instead, we all depend on His mercy. How amazing is the depth of God's wisdom in being able to bring all of us into His mercy?

Now that Paul has established his argument and shown us what a wonderful hope we have (if we only have faith in our Heavenly Father), he moves on to the practical implications of putting our faith into action.

## ROMANS CHAPTER 12

### Be Ye Transformed

Bible References: 1 Sam 24; 25; Gal 5:13-26; Phil 2:1-3

*Start your reflection*

A butterfly begins life as a pin-head egg and hatches as a caterpillar whereupon it sheds its skin four times in that life cycle before turning into a chrysalis. As a chrysalis, it dissolves its own body before reconstructing itself as a butterfly in as few as ten days. This is nothing short of miraculous.



*Figure 12*

We don't want to conform to the world, staying in the shape of the caterpillar. Instead, we need to be transformed into a butterfly by developing a spiritual mind through hearing God's Word (Rom 10:17). As JB Phillips's translation says: "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould your lives from within," (Rom 12:1-2 PHILLIPS). We are transmuted when we look into the face/life of Jesus and see how he completely manifested God's glory. This is a transformational process. The more we

think about him and meditate on him, the more likely we are to make changes in our lives to become more like him (2 Cor 3:18).

How are we changed? Paul tells us that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. This is the key to our transformation—our metamorphosis. This is an incredible change.

How often should we renew our minds? 2 Corinthians 4:16 tells us that this is something we should be doing every day.

What should our minds be transformed by? Colossians 3:8-10 tells us our minds need to be renewed in knowledge—not just random knowledge, though. Colossians 1:9 tells us that our minds need to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. We should put off the old ways but immediately replace them with positive new ways (Eph 4:22-24). We need to be giving ourselves to God—to walk in love and to look after each other as our Lord did for us (Eph 5:1-2). This

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is not a walk we do on our own but one we should be taking with our brethren and sisters.

### *Extend your reflection*

God wants us to see the world as it is and not be conformed to it. He wants us to change our lives for good, which we can only do by renewing our minds in His Word. It is there that we see the character of the Lord Jesus who brought about the New Covenant. The Word of God is where we find out how to cleanse our minds. It is there that we think about God's ways. The Word of God invigorates us and shows us who Christ is and how we should emulate him.

It is through listening to God's Word that we find out God's will, which shows us how to live according to that will. If we are not renewing our minds then we will be struggling. We need to daily think of the changes we need to make in our lives. If we are attempting to make God's spirit our spirit, that is then going to affect the relationships we have with those around us (Phil 2:1-3).

Our treatment of one another is crucial in the renewing of our minds. The mercies of God should impact each relationship we have. Part of the reason we are exhorted to serve one another, the reason we have been put into an ecclesial family, is that we all need each other, even though we are all different (1 Cor 12:18). We all need to serve each other with a Godly spirit and without murmuring.

Paul picks up seven aspects of ecclesial life where we can serve: prophesying (expounding the Word), service (practical ecclesial service), teaching (instruction), exhorting (encouragement and comfort), giving (welfare), ruling (standing in front, working on a committee) and showing mercy (having cheerful compassion). People excel in differing ways, but all should be able to serve in at least one of these aspects. These are all areas that we should serve in humility, not choosing places to serve that make us look good to others, but rather choosing places to serve that provide the most good within the abilities God has given us.

“As your spiritual teacher I give this piece of advice to each of you. Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all.” (Rom 12:3 PHILLIPS).

### *Deepen your reflection*

Paul moves on to show us ways that we can serve our ecclesial family in love. If there is ever a reason to condescend to the lowly, it is because we all have fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 11:29). Our service to one another is our service to the Lord. We should look after one another by opening up our

houses, by showing empathy, and by being a true family. This is a real test that shows us how much our ecclesia is our family. Do we rejoice with our brethren when good things happen to them? Do we sorrow with our brethren when they are suffering? We must understand our brothers and sisters in the faith as closely as we know our natural brothers and sisters. We should be aware of when they are suffering and when they are rejoicing. Galatians 5:13-26 gives a detailed idea of how we can love our brethren as ourselves.

One area the Apostle emphasizes is our need to be constant in prayer. If we pray for the things that we should do and ask God to help us with the things we have problems with, then it makes us more responsive to our actions. Praying constantly helps us to keep away from tribulations and to focus on the things we should be doing. It also helps us to focus on our brethren and their needs.

The Apostle concludes this chapter with “Do not be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21). We have a great example of right and wrong in this with David whilst he was fleeing from Saul. In 1 Samuel 24, we read that Saul was tracking David to kill him. David unexpectedly finds an opportunity where he could kill Saul but he chooses not to do so. In 1 Samuel 24:6 and 12, we read that David firmly acknowledges that vengeance belongs to God. In 1 Samuel 24:17, Saul recognizes that David has returned good for evil, just as the Apostle Paul recommends.

In contrast to this, we have 1 Samuel 25. David wanted to live peaceably with Nabal but Nabal rudely denied him this. Nabal was a fool. He was not given to hospitality but instead repaid David’s good deeds with evil. Unlike David’s attitude to Saul, David decides that vengeance doesn’t belong to God—it is his right to avenge Nabal’s rudeness. It’s so important to understand that we should never make our anger about ourselves. We can be angry for God but not for ourselves. Even when someone does something wrong, we need to be the ones to return good. This is exactly what Abigail does. She shows hospitality and recommends peace (1 Sam 25:28-31). After Nabal dies, Abigail offers herself up as a lowly servant to David, recognizing David as God’s anointed. Abigail behaved as God wanted, showing faith and kindness.

These two examples demonstrate that we need to return good in the face of evil, no matter who the other person is. We can’t be a respecter of persons, choosing who we want to do good to, but instead show mercy to all.

### *Things to think about*

In what ways are we renewing our minds so that we can become more like the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we working every day, praying every day, spending time on God’s Word every day, so that the transformation can take place? How are we involving ourselves in our ecclesia to help our brothers and sisters in their faith?





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## ROMANS CHAPTER 13

### Overcome Evil with Good

Bible References: Matt 22:34-40; Gal 5:13-25; 1 Pet 2:13-24

*Start your reflection*

We live in an age where the authorities appear to be going down paths that are diametrically opposed to God's Word. We are inundated with messages concerning gender, sex, race and so much more. Our schools teach acceptance for all, regardless of their morality. Shouldn't we be aiming to try and change the world for the better?

Paul tackles this problem head-on by showing us that we should be subject to our ruling bodies. The authorities of the land have been put in place by God. They have a role to play in stopping the chaos that would quickly ensue if everyone did that which was right in their own eyes. God is working to make sure there is some order in society.



*Figure 13*

For example, when people involve themselves in such things as protests, they can quickly turn to anarchy in the name of standing up for supposed good. We should aim to avoid getting caught up in the ideas and dramas the world is constantly pushing on us, ideas that change daily because man doesn't have the solutions to the problems that they cause. Colossians 2:8 (paraphrased) says, "Be careful that no one allows you to be carried away through the hollow and deceptive wisdom of men, which is based on the thinking of the world rather than Christ."

We are supposed to be different from those in the world. We trust that God is in control of the powers that be. We should be trying to change ourselves, not trying to change the world for what we see as good. Ultimately, we would only be working with the weaknesses of men. Instead, we should be doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God. The big problem of sin isn't going to disappear without God's intervention, no matter who protests (1 Pet 2:13-24). We should obey the laws of the land where we live as long as these don't conflict with the Laws of God. Our conscience needs to be driven by the Word of God. We shouldn't look for loopholes in the law (Luke 20:25).

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We must strive to obey God over our earthly rulers. Thus, if our earthly rulers are asking us to do things that are against God's principles then we should not do what they are asking. Our primary aim is to love God and to serve Him with all of our being. If we do this then all things will work together for good.

### *Extend your reflection*

Our love of God has to be shown in our interactions with one another. These verses cut right to the heart of what we should be focusing on. If we love one another then everything else will fall into place. Our love for others should be based on our desire for them to come closer to God. If we base our love on this strong foundation, then we won't commit adultery or murder, we won't even hate, steal, or covet. And, if we have to deal with a problem, we will do so with the loving aim of helping our neighbor come closer to God. Love overcomes evil with good.

The Jews thought they had to keep every part of the Law without exception but they could never manage it. All the Law did was expose their failings and their inability to keep it, which illuminated the enormous gulf between them and God. Paul tells us what the solution is. To keep the law all you need to do is truly love God and express this in loving your neighbor. This covers everything needed to keep the law (Matt 22:34-40).

With the law done away with, man now had freedom from the law—but the freedom was not to do whatever you liked, but rather, it was a freedom to love your brother (Gal 5:13-14). We've been given that freedom. Now we are free to be servants to one another (Matt 5:4). Jesus is very explicit—we have to love even our enemies, making sure we pray for them. This is how we show our love for God and serve Him.

### *Deepen your reflection*

Paul goes on to show how important it was for the Roman Ecclesia to show this love. The Apostle is trying to shake the Ecclesia to its senses, to wake them up from their spiritual drowsiness. Paul was writing not long before AD 70. He knew that this time of trouble was coming soon to the ecclesial world. We are in the same position. Christ will return any day now so we must ensure our hearts are right with God.

Things were creeping back into the Ecclesia. Brethren were becoming liberal and losing their love for the things of the Truth. The Ecclesia was becoming a little frayed around the edges with people not looking after each other as they should. Standards in the Ecclesia were slipping, apathy was creeping in. Brethren were indulging in practices that should have no place in the Ecclesia. This is why the Apostle says that we must lay aside the works of darkness. When sin becomes a

part of the Ecclesia, relationships break down and conflicts arise. People stand on their so-called rights and try to force the rest of the Ecclesia to compromise the truth and accept the world into the Ecclesia. The Ecclesia was suffering enormous conflict.

This wasn't just a problem with the Roman Ecclesia. We see the same things happening in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, where members of the Ecclesia insisted that they had a right to engage in sexual immorality. In Galatians 1:6-9, we find that brethren were turning to another Gospel, other than the one that Paul gave them. And we can't go past the letters to the seven Ecclesias in Revelation, where brethren had lost their first love, tolerated false teaching, allowed sexual immorality to creep in, being dead on the inside, and being lukewarm towards the Truth and towards God.

The point of overcoming evil with good shines through these verses in Romans 13. We must choose to put off the works of darkness, but the void must be replaced with our Lord Jesus Christ. We are part of a spiritual battle fighting the evil in and around us. Salvation is God's special provision. We cannot attain salvation by our merit, but we can share in the battle and share in the victory.

Our armor is faith, hope and love. If we put this armor on, then we will cope with the challenges that come in life (Isa 59:16-17). Do we agree that Jesus was right to deny self and follow God's right ways? Yes, we do. So, let's join that battle, making every effort to build others up and overcome evil with good.

Daniel, having been taken to Babylon and made a eunuch, was still willing to obey God. He didn't compromise on his conscience. He always prayed to God, regardless of the trouble that caused him (Dan 2:19-23). Daniel understood that God was always in control. God is the one who removes Kings and sets up Kings. He is working in the kingdoms of men to bring about His purpose. Daniel is a wonderful example of what we should be like.

### *Things to think about*

As believers in Christ, we know that love is paramount in our dealings with each other. That is why it is often easy to get caught up in thinking we should be involved in trying to stand up against the wickedness of those in the world and push for what we think is right. We might want to get involved in protests, sign petitions, or vote for a political party that we think is more "right" in their commitments. But does God want us to "love our neighbor" in that way? Paul is telling us, no. Instead, what we should be doing is helping individuals on a personal level, perhaps by giving them food or drink, hospitality, love and care, perhaps by involving ourselves in Christadelphian charitable organizations. Our ultimate aim, though, is to personally help our neighbor become closer to God, to help them in their walk towards the Kingdom.



## ROMANS CHAPTER 14

### Whatever you do, do it for the LORD

Bible References: Dan 6; 1 Cor 8:1-13; Gal 5:22-26

*Start your reflection*

Every single day, three times a day, Daniel would kneel before his open window which faced towards Jerusalem, and pray to his God. There was nothing in the Law that stated that Daniel should do this but Daniel's conscience was such that if he didn't pray this way then he would consider he had done wrong. He was prepared to follow through with this even to the point of death. If we were with Daniel, would we have encouraged him to just forego his practice whilst the King's decree was in play? After all, it was only a matter of conscience, not a first principle.



Figure 14

Was a matter of conscience a thing worth dying over?

Throughout the ecclesial world, some issues are not based on first principles but are a matter of conscience. These could be related to the format of the meeting, clothing, music, language, prayer, holidays (such as Christmas), the food we eat, social drinking, leavened/unleavened bread, and so much more. Sometimes these issues of conscience cause huge disruptions in the ecclesia with brethren opposing each other.

In Romans 14, Paul acknowledges these matters of conscience and also shows us how to deal with them. To have good relationships with one another we need to bear in mind that, as mortal beings, there are matters of conscience that some see as extremely important and others don't.

Paul mentions "judge" eight times in Romans 14, just as he does earlier in Romans. In Romans chapter 2, God is incredibly firm with the Jews who weren't practising what they preached. They couldn't see that they were part of the problem of sin. The Gentiles, who hadn't grown up under the Law, were shaming them. In Romans 14, the focus changes to the Gentiles, who are being told not to judge. The Jews might be holding on to certain aspects of the Law for reasons of conscience and the Gentiles should not be judging them.

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Paul speaks of the need for mutual respect and tolerance of individual consciences in non-fundamental matters. This is not about doctrine, not about the statement of faith. We are to uphold the point of the Law through loving one another. This was the principle that Israel should have taken hold of and implemented in their lives.

We are not under the Law of Moses. That came to an end in Christ. However, there are aspects of the Law in any society that are good to uphold because they make for better living. If someone is upholding something because they strongly believe it to be important for God, don't judge them.

### *Extend your reflection*

Everything is about God. Paul emphasizes ten times in this chapter this key phrase “for the LORD.” We need to be very careful not to make a fuss about something and claim that it is a matter of conscience for us without reason. Matters of conscience should be based on the Scriptures, not just feelings. Everything must be “for the LORD.” That is the crux. Conscience is irrelevant if it is not about the LORD. The LORD is the One who should affect our conscience. Our whole life must be governed by the LORD. Where a brother or sister feels that something is scripturally important, even if they recognize that it is not a first principle, we must respect that. This was what was going wrong in the Roman Ecclesia (Rom 14:10-12). There is no room for anything in our lives that isn't to the LORD. All our hearts, all our minds, and all our strength needs to be in service to God.

We must be very careful that we are not judging another who is trying to do something from their conscience. We all have to give an account of ourselves before God. Paul mentions the word “despise” twice in this chapter (Rom 14:3, 10). This word is used regarding the Lord Jesus in Luke 23:11. This is where it hits home. This is how Herod and the soldiers treated Jesus—they despised him. We will all stand before the judgment seat and we will be judged on how we treat each other. Never fall out with anybody on a clear conscience issue.

### *Deepen your reflection*

A weak brother is a brother who has a sensitive conscience on an issue and makes rules for himself to live according to his conscience. The strong brother is a person who doesn't have a sensitive conscience on that issue.

For example, a brother or sister feels uncomfortable that musical instruments associated with pop music are at the memorial meeting. This might be because they feel pop culture is churning out songs that glorify sex, drug use, and violence, which are against scriptural teaching. Another person might say, the instrument has nothing to do with anything. It is an inanimate object. The

“weaker” brother is concerned. It is a matter of conscience for them. How should the strong brother act? Would it be right to look for every opportunity to play the instrument when the weaker brother is there? The stronger brother may feel it is up to him to show the weaker brother that his conscience is wrong. This would be the wrong attitude. If the stronger brother’s mind is clear about the issue, he should support his weaker brother.

Another example might be around what we choose to wear to the memorial meeting. One brother may feel that brothers should be dressed as if they were going to visit the Queen, and therefore you should always wear a suit and tie. Others may feel that there is nothing in the Scriptures to say that a suit and tie are important, only modest dress is important. It would be important to identify whether our attitude and actions, on either side, are causing grief to our brethren, possibly even putting up a barrier in their walk in Christ.

We must not be stumbling blocks to our brothers by causing them to fail over something they feel is important (Matt 18:7). We must tread carefully when dealing with these kinds of issues because our actions might end up destroying our brothers. How can you destroy your brother? By either inflaming his anger so he judges you, which he ought never to do or by emboldening his conscience against what he sees as right, he copies you and subsequently sins. The strong person is being asked to make a small sacrifice. If he refuses, then he might invalidate Christ’s major sacrifice because the salvation of the weak is in the balance, and that would then be his fault.

We are to develop the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22). God is looking to develop these characteristics of peace and joy in us. They are the fruit of His Spirit—His mind. If we start getting riled over a matter of conscience and feel ourselves getting worked up and irritated, we are better off stepping back and making sure we are dealing with the problem in a manner that is befitting the Kingdom of God—one that displays the fruit of God’s Spirit. The Kingdom of God is one of righteousness, peace, and joy so we need to develop those characteristics now.

We should try to build up others, recognizing that God, who is the strong one, has built us up (Rom 5:6). We should pursue peace as peacemakers. A peacemaker is someone who seeks to join others together, to resolve differences. God is the ultimate peacemaker. This is what we should be trying to emulate (Matt 5:9. Rom 8:16). We should bear His Spirit as peacemakers so we can be called the children of God.

We know that within ecclesial families some members will have conscience over some things that others don’t. Whilst a non-doctrinal issue might be important to them, we mustn’t get cross about it and try to bully them into following our way. We must be sure not to cause someone to stumble because we are too hung up

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about the fact that it doesn't matter. For the sake of something small, we should not destroy the work of God.

You might believe there is nothing wrong with what you are doing. Keep that between yourself and God. The person whose faith is compromised could end up in a situation that they don't think is right—they end up in a mess. If they are not acting following their faith then they are sinning. We are once again, even in matters of conscience, seeing the importance of faith. God is looking for this consistency in faith from us by our actions. We must do the things we do always in faith, as unto the LORD.

### *Things to think about*

As a group in the Ecclesia, you might be looking for change but there are members in your meeting who are very hung up on keeping things as they are. That's the way their parents and grandparents did it. That's the way they've always done it. Change is unnecessary, they feel. They can give you reasons from the Scriptures as to why they feel the way they do, but you know that if there is no change you will lose some of your members because they don't feel like they actively belong in the Ecclesia. Is the change necessary? Is it unto the LORD? How fast should you bring about the change? How can you suggest change in such a manner that you bring everybody along with you happily and without offending?

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## ROMANS CHAPTER 15

### What would Jesus do?

Bible References: Psa 69; 1 Pet 2:21-24

*Start your reflection*

The Apostle Paul, as apostle to the Gentiles, tried to follow his Lord in every way that he could. He had a very special commission to spread the gospel amongst the Gentiles and he pursued this commission with all of his being in the face of some very real dangers and nasty opposition. “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ,” Paul states in 1 Corinthians 11:1. Paul served his brethren throughout all his life, just as his Lord did. We need to do the same. We need to ask ourselves in all things, what would Jesus do? We need to remember that the things that are impossible with men are possible with God and that our entrance to the Kingdom is based on the strength of God’s love, not our strength, but we demonstrate God’s love in our actions towards our brethren.

We are trying to take on the mindset of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is how we make the atonement a reality in our lives. We should reach out to others and bear their burdens (Matt 8:17). The spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ must be seen in our lives. He was criticized, mocked, accused, and reproached for his faith. When taking on the reproaches of godless men, his only comfort and hope was from God’s Word and his awareness that God was at work. He was sustained in his greatest hour of trial by the Scriptures. All other comforters deserted him.

Psalm 69 is a Psalm about Christ. In verse 3 Christ talks about his hope in God. In verse 7 he is encouraging himself to wait patiently on God. In verse 20 he looked for comforters in men but there were none, instead his comfort came from the Scriptures. This is what we also need to do—take comfort and hope from the Scriptures as Jesus did. We need to develop the same mindset as Christ (Phil 2:1-2).

Paul quotes directly from the second half of Psalm 69:9. Christ quotes this verse in John 2:17, but only from the first half of the verse where Jesus is cleansing the temple. Sometimes we only think about the first half of the verse where we talk about respecting the house of the LORD but the second half of the verse is just as important, the half that Paul is now quoting. This second half tells us that we should take insults on the chin, just as Jesus did. If we are going to develop the same mindset as Christ then we must expect that the same kind of people who reproached Christ will also do that to us. We need to have the same attitude as he

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did when he said, “Forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34 KJV). (See 1 Pet 2:21-24).

### *Extend your reflection*

The mind of God and the mind of Christ was to reach out to others, something we should follow. A lot of the challenges facing the Roman Ecclesia were around the difficulties between the Jews and Gentiles. Instead of fighting amongst each other, they should have been there for one another. Any Gentile who thought he couldn't support the Jews, who may have been struggling with their conscience regarding the Law, needed to remember that Jesus came to the Jews first. At the same time, it had been made clear to the Jews that the Gentiles were an integral part of God's purpose. Abraham was the father of many nations, not just one. Christ came for anybody who understood that the flesh was no good and who came to God in faith. This is the point Paul is making, and he shows this by quoting four passages:

Psalm 18:49: This Psalm concerns the sufferings of the Lord on the cross. The Psalm goes on to show the Lord's prayer of triumph having been delivered from death. It speaks of Christ's victory for ALL nations (Ps 49:43-44, 47).

Deuteronomy 32:43: God would bring judgment on the Jews because of their lack of faith. In AD 70 God, in bringing judgement upon Israel, would bring an opportunity to the Gentiles. Notice that the Gentile is rejoicing in the hope of Israel. The Jews need the Gentiles and vice versa.

Psalm 117:1: This is a Psalm whose background is in the days of Hezekiah. During the time of the great feast, the Gentiles also came and joined in with Jews during the Passover. All nations were rejoicing in God's mercy and truth. This is the type of mercy we should be portraying, no matter who we are dealing with.

Isaiah 11:1, 10: This chapter is all about the Kingdom to come when ALL nations will be able to come and worship God.

God's purpose will encompass all people. The work of the Lord Jesus Christ was always going to be there for everybody. Even when God brought Israel out of Egypt when he set up the kingdom of Israel, right through to the future Kingdom, God's purpose was, is, and always will be with ALL people. Our God is a God of hope. Hope is faith made real. Faith believes the Kingdom is coming but doesn't tell you whether you will be there or not. Hope is what decides whether you will be in the Kingdom. Hope is the substance that makes faith personal.

### *Deepen your reflection*

Paul wrote this letter to put the Roman Ecclesia in remembrance of the doctrinal implications of the atonement and what it meant for them. He was reminding

them that Christ came for both the Jews and Gentiles. Christ had established Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles so they needed to accept that what was written was as if it was from Christ himself. They needed to understand the authority he had through God. With that authority, Paul wanted them to see that they needed each other. The Jews needed the Gentiles and the Gentiles needed the Jews.

Paul saw his ministry as a gift, but his ministry was not a cushy job—it was very difficult, tumultuous, scary and painful (Eph 3:1-13). Paul was told from the beginning that he was to suffer. All three accounts of his conversion draw on the suffering servant prophecies in Isaiah (Acts 9:15-16). Paul was happy to die for Christ. There is a very strong link here between the grace of God and suffering (Acts 20:20-24; Acts 21:10-14; 1 Pet 1:10-11).



*Figure 15*

This is a different work than the one in Romans 15:8. The key point of difference is that the Lord was the servant who came to Israel to bring in the New Covenant. The Apostle was the Lord's servant for the people—he was a public servant. He was going to travel everywhere, preaching the gospel to all peoples, a role similar to the one the Jews will have in the Kingdom—to bring others to the gospel and to provide them with the comfort and encouragement they will need to stay strong in their faith. Throughout his whole life, Paul tried to bear the burdens of his brethren. At this time he was on his way to Jerusalem to bring contributions from the Gentile brethren to help the Jewish brethren in need in Jerusalem. Paul stuck to this task faithfully, taking up the collection and making sure the money got where it was needed (Acts 19:21). This was another reminder to the Jewish brethren that their Gentile brethren were there for them.

Paul is asking the Roman Ecclesia to unite in prayer with a common aim. He is asking them to put their energy, which they were currently using against one another, into prayerfully working together. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ's work was all about. It was about reaching out to others. It was about sharing in the love that God had shown them. Are we picking up the challenge now? Do we have the faith to make the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ a reality in our lives to make us of one mind with him?

Ecclesially, we must have consideration for one another. There are some non-fundamental matters upon which there may not be agreement. Liberty is well and good, but it should not be exercised at the expense of love. Christ always





## ROMANS CHAPTER 16

### Final Thoughts

Bible References: Gen 3:1-15; 2 Sam 23:8-39; Gal 3:26-29; 2 Thess 1:5-2:12

#### *Start your reflection*

There have been many illusions to David throughout the Book of Romans including this last chapter. We have learnt that we have to be warriors for the LORD, battling against our desire to do what we want and throwing ourselves into the service of God. Romans 16 mentions 37 men and women of faith, mighty warriors who have all stood up for Christ. In 2 Samuel 23:8-39, we read of warriors who served David and fought for him. In all, 37 mighty men of valour stood with David, in the good times and the bad.

Paul loves people who are serious about the truth. Many here had risked their lives in preaching work. Paul had probably met them on his journeys, but they were very well known throughout the ecclesial world. This is the key. We are bound together in Christ. When we run through our Ecclesial address roll, do we see our brethren as those that we need to treat like Christ, as people we know and love, whatever their background? It doesn't matter what our background is, we are united in Christ. In this list of brethren, we have possibly seventeen Gentile members, nine Jewish members, five households, ten sisters and at least one slave. They were a mix of people from all walks of life and yet they all worked in service to the LORD.

We don't have to be prominent members, at the front and centre of the ecclesia, but we do need to contribute as best we can. Serving in our ecclesia can be carried out in many different ways. We should be enthusiastic in our service and bolster the enthusiasm of others in their work. We should support as many as possible within our ecclesia and in the wider brotherhood, just as Paul did and as so many supported Paul throughout his ministry (1 Cor 16:15).

#### *Extend your reflection*

Though Paul is very appreciative of the endeavours of those who have supported this important work, he now takes the time to warn those in the Ecclesia of many who will undermine it from within or without. Some, who forget we are one in Christ Jesus, may bring the truth into disrepute. We need to mark them out and be aware of any potential problems. Some prefer to undermine from within the Ecclesia, using smooth talk and flattery to deceive the brethren.

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This reminds us of Genesis 3 where we have the deception of the serpent. Paul alludes to the events of Genesis 3 several times in this chapter. He reminds the brethren that these deceptive brethren aren't serving the LORD. They are serving their bellies. They are associated with the serpent, with sin. They are not holding on to the Word of God and obeying His commandments (2 Cor 11:3).

Unlike the serpent, who professed to know good and evil and imparted wrong doctrine, Paul tells us to hold on to God's Word. We need to be wise concerning all good things and harmless concerning evil things (Rom 16:19). Instead of desiring knowledge against God's will, we should desire to be filled with an understanding of God's will and renew our mind with this knowledge every day.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, we read of the apostasy which came into the Christian world and had its roots right back here in the first century (2 Thess 2:7). The apostasy was

restrained during that time because political Rome was pagan and therefore a restraint on the ecclesial world. Under Constantine and up to Phocas Christianity became official whereupon the restraint was taken away and the full Roman Catholic system of false doctrine took hold.

The apostasy is doing what the serpent did in the Garden of Eden and it continues with this aim. The apostasy works from within and without, deceiving the brethren with words that sound good but are evil, words that ultimately lead people away from God and His grace. We need to hold on to our faith and the things we have learned from the beginning, not letting these wicked people draw us away from what is right.

Even though many are trying to draw us away from God, we as individuals are responsible for our own choices, just as Adam and Eve were. We can never blame our sin on someone else, even a system that is working directly against God. We will all stand as individuals before the judgment seat of Christ. We do need to be aware that such systems exist and avoid them. We must try not to be deceived by serpent thinking.

As Genesis 3:15 promises, there will come a time when our Lord Jesus Christ will return and crush Satan under his feet (Rev 20:1-3). We hope that we will be with him when he fulfils this prophecy.



*Figure 16*

*Deepen your reflection*

Hopefully, we have seen the importance of this letter both for the Roman Ecclesia and for ourselves. Legalism was manifested here as a Judaistic problem where some were conceited in their approach, believing that they could come up with a system that would justify them before God. This Judaistic thinking would migrate to Babylon and Rome. It was so crucial for all believers, to see that the flesh cannot save us and to instead look for God's true provision in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The letter to the faithful in Rome has the clear message that the just shall live by faith. As we come to the end of this letter we realize that we have come in full circle. In these last verses of the letter, we can see many connections to the first chapter of Romans.

The gospel is for everyone, for all nations, for all those who will follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is willing to save all people. Paul has shown us that everybody can share in the promises made to Abraham (Rom 11:15; Eph 1:9-15; 3:3-12; Col 1:26-28).

Anybody willing to put their faith in God will not perish but will have everlasting life. We have every reason to trust in God's faithfulness because He has fulfilled His promises.

In these last days, let's not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Let us acknowledge sin in our lives and understand that God's grace is sufficient. Each day, let us develop the spirit of Christ, holding on and persevering in the face of adversity, just as Christ and Paul did. We must remember that ours is the hope of Israel, a hope that was promised to Abraham and to all his faithful seed, whether Jew or Gentile. Let us serve our high priest through serving one another in love as unto the LORD.

*Things to think about*

How well do we know our brothers and sisters in our own Ecclesia? Do we just come to the meeting on a Sunday and leave soon after without fellowshiping with those we are meeting with? Do we prefer to meet online, which allows us to have the outward trappings of fellowship without actually talking to our brethren? Are we given to hospitality, taking the time to get to know our brethren in a more informal setting? Are we willing, thoughtful and kind, putting others first? Are we doing everything as unto the LORD? There are many things to consider if we want to support our Ecclesia and be of service to our brethren.

Paul has warned us that many would love to take us away from the Gospel and away from God. Many use words that sound good and even sound loving or exciting, but are we checking what they are saying with what God is truly telling



## THE BOOK OF ROMANS SUMMARY

- Chapter 1:** Paul has been separated by God to preach the Gospel. The Gospel is the good news concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. He was made of the seed of David, and he was declared to be the Son of God. The Gospel is the power of God to save. The Lord Jesus Christ has come. He is God-provisioned and enables us to be saved from the problem of sin and death. Whilst we can't save ourselves, we can live if we have faith.
- Key Verse: Rom 1:17*
- Chapter 2:** This chapter focuses on a key issue in this ecclesia where some of the Jews felt that some of the Gentiles were full of sin, but they, the Jews, were okay. This attitude was wrong. He is a Jew if he is one inwardly. Circumcision is of the heart.
- Key Verse: Rom 2:1*
- Chapter 3:** So what advantage is there to being a Jew? The word of God came to them. The fact that they didn't all respond appropriately in faith to that Word didn't undermine God's purpose. It proves that God alone is righteous. We all share the problem of sin, but we can be justified freely (made righteous—have our sins forgiven) if we put our faith in God's provision, Jesus Christ and his victory over sin.
- Key Verse: Rom 3:23*
- Chapter 4:** Faith is the key. God has always wanted faith. Abraham wasn't righteous based on his works. God imputed righteousness to him because he saw that Abraham had faith in him. According to the Law, David should have been punished for what he had done. He was forgiven because he had faith in God. We are exhorted to follow in the steps of Abraham.
- Key Verse: Rom 4:5*
- Chapter 5:** We are putting our faith in the grace of God. That's what we are standing on. If it wasn't for that, we would be falling, because we all fall short of the glory of God. Understanding that God's grace is sufficient for us can be a struggle to get our minds around. God's grace has more power than Adam's sin. Jesus died

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to bring us into a relationship with God. Now that Jesus is alive, we should have confidence that we can be helped into the Kingdom.

*Key Verse: Rom 5:8*

**Chapter 6:** If we can get our heads around the impact of Adam's sin, then we can understand that God's grace is even more powerful. God is there to help us on our walk to the Kingdom. So, let's get on with living the life of a disciple; make your baptism a daily reality in your life. We have a new life. We have a new master. Don't make your life about serving sin. Put your energy into seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Sin's wages are death, but the grace of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. Our loyalty needs to lie with God.

*Key Verse: Rom 6:23*

**Chapter 7:** The Law has no hold over us. If we try to live by the Law, then this will lead to death. Not that the Law was at fault. Rather, it is the fact that we are unable to keep it, and thus it leads to death. Instead, we need to serve in a newness of spirit. We need to take on the challenge of living our whole life in the spirit of God. Even though it is a battle, we need to make God's ways our delight. If that is our delight, then there is no condemnation for those with the right mindset.

*Key Verse: Rom 7:22*

**Chapter 8:** We must have the confidence that, if we are trying our utmost to implement the mindset of God in our lives, then God will help us to the Kingdom. Those who recognise that the mind of the flesh is deadly and instead look to cultivate a spiritual mindset, that is trying to develop God's spirit (Christ's spirit), will have confidence in God's grace. God is on our side. God will use the difficulties in our lives to help us conquer. Nothing can separate us from God's love.

*Key Verse: Rom 8:28*

**Chapter 9:** What about Israel? God had dealt with Israel since the time of Abraham. They are immensely privileged and have had many blessings, but it is crucial that they come to understand that God will not save them based on their heritage. God has always been

consistent in electing people who respond in faith to His Word, whether Jew or Gentile.

*Key Verse: Rom 9:15*

**Chapter 10:** God wants faith, which comes from hearing the Word. We are taken back to the new covenant, which Moses prophesied would come to them through faith. God had been showing Israel for years not to trust their relationships with false gods but instead to put their faith in Him.

*Key Verse: Rom 10:17*

**Chapter 11:** Has God's relationship with Israel come to an end? Absolutely not! God has always preserved a remnant. At this time, the Gentiles have an amazing opportunity to respond, but they are joining the hope of Israel. When Jesus returns, God has prophesied that the Jews will respond, but the basis of their salvation will always be faith in God's provision. They will look to the Lord Jesus Christ, their Messiah.

*Key Verse: Rom 11:1*

**Chapter 12:** Having given this praise to God about His plan of salvation and understanding how amazing His plan and purpose are, there needs to be a reaction. If we understand God's purpose and have grasped the depth of his love and mercy, then this must elicit a reaction from us. This is only reasonable. We need to be separated from God. In practice, what God wants to see from us is our care for one another.

*Key Verse: Rom 12:2*

**Chapter 13:** Our relationships go beyond Ecclesial life. We need to respect the state and those who rule over us. God has put rulers in place to rule over us, so we should not fight or protest against these rulers. God is in charge, so for this reason, we do not vote.

*Key Verse: Rom 13:1*

**Chapter 14:** Paul brings us back to the relationships that we can influence. We submit to those in authority, but those we can influence are those in the brotherhood. We are exhorted to support one another over issues of conscience. Some may feel that a Bible principle that isn't a fundamental doctrine is still very important to uphold.

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We are exhorted to respect that and remember the principles of the Kingdom in how we conduct ourselves. The principles of the Kingdom are righteousness, joy and peace. We need to be peacemakers—bring people together.

*Key Verse: Rom 14:10*

**Chapter 15:** Having seen how our God and the Lord Jesus Christ have treated us, we should remember that this is the basis of our relationships with one another. We are developing a fellowship of spirit. The atonement has to be outworked in our lives. What that means is that we all work to support others to come to God, to bring people together. The apostle is doing that with the Jews and Gentiles in this Ecclesia and wherever he preached. If we do that, then we are emulating the God of peace. The God of peace brings people together.

*Key Verse: Rom 15:7*

**Chapter 16:** There is a list of names that gives us some idea of who the Roman Ecclesia was. The focus was on one another. If we are given to providing hospitality, distributing to the necessities of the saints, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep, then we will get to know one another better. Our relationship with the Lord Jesus is demonstrated through our care for one another.

*Key Verse: Rom 16:20*

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