

Acts 1: Lesson Eleven, Romans, Part 1

Romans 1 – 8

Subject: Paul wrote the Romans about human depravity, justification by faith, and new life in Christ.

Main Idea: To know God and to experience real life, we must be made righteous.

Principles:

1. *All people (the morally “good” and the morally “bad”) are sinners and deserving of God’s wrath in judgment.*
2. *God graciously justifies all who put their faith in Jesus, that we might have eternal life.*
3. *The successful Christian life can follow the pattern of Christ only by the power of Christ.¹*

Introduction

If there is one book of the Bible everyone should regularly study, it’s the book of Romans. In 1988, Robert Fulghum published a book entitled, “*All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.*” Similarly, every foundational truth about the gospel that we need to know is present in the book of Romans. It has long been recognized as one of the most important theological documents ever written. It is no wonder that our fathers in the faith placed it first in the canon of New Testament epistles. Although Romans is foundational, it is anything but simplistic. In it, Paul spells out God’s plan of salvation in detail, exposing our utterly hopeless natural state, detailing the mysteries of justification and sanctification, emphasizing the continuity of salvation history, and ending with implications for daily living.

Following several lessons on Paul’s three missionary ventures, our last six lessons in the *Acts 1* study cover the letters Paul wrote on his third journey. As we have learned, 1 and 2 Corinthians were written during that trip. We’ve discovered that after spending three years in Ephesus, Paul went through Macedonia to Corinth. There, he stayed in the home of Gaius (16:23) and during that time, he apparently received word that Phoebe was traveling to Rome. Paul took this opportunity to write the Romans (16:1). At the end of the letter, he sent greetings to people he knew personally. Perhaps some of them were his own converts who had relocated to Rome. Paul communicated his plans to carry a love offering from the Gentile churches to Jerusalem. After that, he planned to visit Rome, eventually going as far as Spain (15:23-29). It was his great desire to expand the gospel’s influence deeper into Europe.

The theme of Romans is the gospel, the good news that God has provided a righteousness for us based on what He did in sending Jesus to die for our sins, a righteousness that is entirely unrelated to anything we can do for ourselves. Righteousness simply means *right-ness* in God’s sight. Unrighteousness cuts us off from God, and since He is the source of life, we must be made righteous in order to personally know Him and experience the rich life He intended. In this lesson, we cover the first eight chapters of Romans and learn of God’s plan to restore us to what He created us to be. Do you want a richer life? Then consider the gospel more carefully! The gospel is not only what we need to come to Christ but also to grow in Him. The greater our understanding and application of it, the more abundant our lives will be.

I. **God's Judgment Deserved** – Romans 1:1-3:20

A. **Introduction** – 1:1-15

i. Writer, Subject and Audience – 1:1-7

1. Paul identified himself as a servant and an apostle of Christ Jesus. An essential qualification for apostleship was a face-to-face encounter with Jesus, which Paul had experienced on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-5).
2. Second, Paul introduced the gospel of God as his main subject. Verses 3-4 present one of the clearest statements in the New Testament about Jesus' unique nature. He was fully human and also fully divine. This Jesus had called Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

- ### ii. Paul's Desire to Visit Rome – 1:8-15: Paul stated his long-time desire to visit the church in Rome. He had apparently tried unsuccessfully to get there on several occasions and intended to go soon after delivering the offering in Jerusalem. Eventually, Paul did in fact get to Rome, but not in the way he expected. Paul went to Rome as a prisoner!

B. **Theme Verses** – 1:16-17: Romans is unique among Paul's letters because he introduces a clear theme right at the beginning in verses 16 and 17. He then carefully works out this theme in a very logical fashion.

- i. The Gospel: The Power of God for Salvation: In verse 16, Paul said the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. The scope of the gospel is wide, including both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had been best prepared to receive the gospel, so the news had been delivered to them first. But from the beginning, God planned to also include the Gentiles. However, only those Jews and Gentiles who believe experience the power of His salvation.
- ii. The Gospel: The Righteousness of God Revealed: Verse 17 is a most important verse. It says "For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed, *a righteousness that is by faith* from first to last..." 500 years ago, the Roman Catholic monk Martin Luther was plagued by the question of how good one needed to be to get to heaven. He had gone to great lengths to discipline himself to meet God's standards, but he lived in constant fear that it was never enough. Finally, Luther turned to the Bible for the answers. In his day, the church had become corrupt and the message of the gospel was largely unknown. When Luther came to this verse, affirming that God indeed has a righteous standard but also explaining that this righteousness is imputed to us *by faith, apart from works*, he was (in his own words) reborn.¹ He couldn't help but share his amazing discovery, and thus the Protestant Reformation began, with God rescuing His gospel message from extinction.

C. Man's Depravity and God's Judgment – 1:18-3:20: As is often stated, the gospel can only be good news if one first acknowledges the bad news. After briefly introducing his subject, Paul set forth an indictment against the Gentiles (or “the heathens”) in the balance of chapter 1, and against Jews (or “moral, religious people”) in chapter 2.

i. Gentiles – 1:18-32: Paul explains that all people are under God's wrath because of their guilt in rejecting Him.

1. *God's Wrath*

a. God's wrath is His holy revulsion against all that contradicts His holiness. It is the right reaction of the Creator's moral perfection toward His creatures' moral perversity.ⁱⁱ He would not be just if He did not judge sin. His wrath is our punishment for our rebellion against Him.ⁱⁱⁱ

b. Paul did not say that God's wrath *will be* revealed but that His wrath *is* being revealed” (1:18). Although it will be revealed in future judgment, it is currently being revealed in God's handing us over to the natural consequences of our choices (1:24, 26, 28).

2. *Suppressing the Truth*: We all have inherent truth about God, but Paul says we suppress it. I dare say that every one of us must acknowledge we have done this at one time or another. When something about ourselves that we do not like comes to our attention, isn't our first impulse to defend ourselves and attack the truth?

3. *General Revelation*

a. Paul explains that God has given every person two evidences of His existence. First, every person has the opportunity to know certain truths about Him from creation. His eternal power and divine nature are evident in creation's beauty and complexity.^{iv} The second proof (given in 2:14-15) is the human conscience. Since a moral code has been programmed within us, we can conclude that a moral Being exists outside ourselves and that He created us.

b. These two evidences (creation and the human conscience) constitute what is sometimes called general or natural revelation. Even those who have never heard the gospel have general revelation about God. Those who never hear the gospel in their lifetime will not be judged on the basis of things they do not know but according to what they *do* know, and that information is sufficient to convict them of failing to glorify God and give Him thanks.

4. *Neither Glorified God nor Gave Him Thanks* – 1:21: Failure to exalt God and be grateful to Him lies at the root of man’s rebellion. This is why the Bible says so much to believers about the importance of thanking and praising God. In the words of one commentator, “It is a sad mark of depravity when all that is designed and fitted to melt only hardens the heart.”^v
5. *Human Depravity* – 1:22-32
 - a. Paul explains that in God’s wrath against human rejection of Him, He hands us over to the sinful desires of our hearts. Human depravity is the natural result of our choice to reject God. Paul does not say that we are all equally sinful or that we are as bad as we could be. Human depravity just means we are all bad by nature. Outside of Christ, we all need to be saved.
 - b. Do we want to know how depraved we really are? We need look no further than the two inclinations Paul names: our inclination to idolatry (1:22) and immorality (1:24-32). Paul says that we know in our hearts that these things are wrong, yet we not only continue to do them but also encourage others to practice them. Verses 26-27 are one of the Bible’s clearest denunciations of homosexual practices. It is important to specify that temptation to homosexuality (or temptation to any other sin for that matter) is not sinful, but yielding to temptation, in fantasy or in practice, is.
- ii. Jews – 2:1-3:9
 1. “*You*”: The Old Testament presents all people as in two categories: Jews and Gentiles. In chapter 1, Paul indicts heathens (those with only general revelation and no knowledge of the Scriptures). To Paul’s immediate audience, these were Gentiles, but it applies equally to all people who are ignorant of the Scriptures. In 2:1-3:20, Paul indirectly addresses Christ-rejecting Jews (the majority) as if debating them, but his point applies to all moral, religious people. He knew that those who read about depraved individuals would immediately be tempted to judge them without first looking at themselves, so he wrote, “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else [because you do the same things].”
 2. *Also Under God’s Wrath*
 - a. The typical Jew thought of himself as exempt from God’s judgment on the basis of his national identity. Paul argued that while the heathen are without excuse because of general revelation, the Jews are doubly without excuse since they also have special revelation. Special revelation is a term that

- describes the written word of God (the Bible) and the living Word of God (Jesus Christ).
- b. Paul's conclusion is that since God is impartial, "good" religious people are also under His wrath (2:5). The heathen and those with knowledge of the Bible will be judged alike, according to how they have responded to what they know (2:12-16).
3. *Circumcision*: Paul says that identification with Judaism (which came by the rite of circumcision) will not save anyone. Rather, we are saved when the Spirit of God circumcises our *hearts* (2:29). It is an inward matter, not merely outward conformity. When we put our faith in Jesus, He progressively cuts off the sins we formerly held dear.
 4. *The Jews' Advantages* – 3:1-9
 - a. We have said that Paul is writing as though in a debate. Beginning in chapter 3, he asks a series of hypothetical questions. Considering that Jews and Gentiles alike are under God's wrath, Paul's first question is whether Jews have any special advantage (3:1-8). Much in every way, he says, since they have the "very words of God" (the Scriptures [3:2]). The Old Testament gave them the opportunity to recognize Jesus as Messiah when He came and to put their faith in Him. The Jews also had collectively experienced God's faithfulness (3:3). These are advantages in that they give opportunity, but they are not advantages at all when it comes to judgment if the opportunity is not taken. Having advantages means being held to a higher standard and being all the more guilty if they failed to have faith (3:9).
 - b. What about those who have had these advantages but never claimed to have faith (3:3-8)? Is God wrong for judging them according to the higher standard? Not at all. He is just in bringing His wrath on them (3:6). Can they use the excuse that their unrighteousness has the positive benefit of magnifying God's righteousness (3:5-7)? Paul says that is an absurd argument against judgment (3:8). Sin is never justifiable. God is faithful in bestowing blessings and equally faithful in judging sin.
 - iii. Paul's Conclusion – 3:9-20: Paul's conclusion is that the heathen and self-righteous alike deserve God's condemnation. He quotes the Old Testament to support his premise that not one person has ever measured up to God's holy standard (3:9-18). Both the Mosaic Law and the law of our conscience convict us of our sinful state (3:19-20).

Summary Statement: Jews and Gentiles alike are sinners and under God’s wrath.

As foretold from Genesis to Revelation, God’s wrath will be displayed in future judgment. Paul says it is also evident in His present, ongoing, personal response to sin. It is what naturally occurs when we separate ourselves from His life-giving power: we become depraved, we disintegrate physically and morally, and ultimately, we die. People insist on living their own way despite their instinctive awareness that they are indebted to God. In “handing us over” (1:24, 26, 28) to the natural consequences of our own choices, He is essentially letting us have our way.

To be under God’s wrath is to be separated from the source of life. Those who are separated from Him do not experience His life-giving power in daily living and future judgment will result in permanent separation from Him. Hell is separation from God and thus, separation from all of His gifts: love, joy, goodness, creativity, energy, and so on. In short, separation from God is separation from life.

Principle: *All people (the morally “good” and the morally “bad”) are sinners and deserving of God’s wrath in judgment.*

Application: It is important for us to present the truth of God’s wrath in evangelism so that individuals understand the weight of their offense against the Creator. But the wrath of God must also be understood and presented in the Church so that we take sin seriously. When we focus on the love of God to the exclusion of His wrath, we develop a false picture of Him. He becomes a soft God who “winks” at sin and merely “sweeps it under the rug” when He forgives us. *The more we understand our condition and what God has done in saving us, the greater our love for Him (Luke 7:47), our appreciation for Christ in bearing the full weight of God’s wrath against our sin on the Cross, and our desire to lean into Him and His life-giving salvation.*

Paul wasn’t interested in convincing his readers to be more religious. The gospel must settle down deep within us, transforming our thinking and shaping our hearts. When was the last time you pondered your lost, empty, depraved condition apart from Christ? Has it been a while since your heart melted with gratitude to Jesus for saving you? Are you putting much effort into resisting your depraved nature or have you learned the secret of leaning into Jesus? When our hearts are circumcised, changed behavior will naturally result.

Transition: Paul presented the futility of earning our own righteousness. On our own, we can never meet God’s righteous standard and know Him and His gift of life. We need to have His righteousness imputed to us and beginning in 3:21, Paul explains the basis on which God is willing to do this: “But now, apart from law a righteousness from God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This *righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ* to all who believe.”

II. God's Righteousness Imputed (Justification) – Romans 3:21-5:21

A. Means of Obtaining Justification – 3:21-31

- i. God's Gracious Gift of Christ: According to 3:22, Jews and Gentiles alike can receive the righteousness of God through faith *in Jesus Christ*. Verse 25 explains that God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. Christ's sacrificial death for our sins pacified God's wrath. In the words of J.I. Packer, "Jesus Christ has shielded us from the nightmare prospect of retributive justice by becoming our representative substitute, in obedience to His Father's will, and receiving the wages of our sin in our place... Redeeming love and retributive justice joined hands, so to speak, at Calvary, for there God showed Himself to be 'just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus'."^{vi} Amazingly and mysteriously, God not only considers our sin debt paid through Jesus but also credits us with His righteousness.
- ii. By Faith Alone: The basis for our justification is God's gracious gift of Jesus. Paul also emphasizes the means of accessing this gift: "A person is justified *by faith* apart from the works of the law" (3:28). Since we can only be saved by faith, no one can boast that they have earned their salvation. It is promised to "all who believe" (3:22). No salvation exists apart from a personal choice of faith in Jesus. Some have wrongly supposed that Paul was teaching universalism, a view in which God ultimately saves everyone. Such a view doesn't take seriously the offense of our sin, not to speak of Paul's clear teaching that salvation comes "through faith in Jesus Christ *to all who believe*" (3:22). We must make a personal choice in this life to put our faith in Jesus.

B. Examples of Salvation by Faith – 4:1-25

i. Abraham

1. Paul proved from the Old Testament that God's salvation has *always* come by faith and not by works. God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations and that this would happen through Abraham's own natural descendants (Genesis 15:1-6). Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham "*believed* God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Abraham exemplified saving faith by his unwavering confidence in God's promise, despite the contrary circumstances. By the time the child was born, Abraham was already an old man and his wife Sarah was beyond childbearing years.

2. Saving faith is confidence that God is righteous and will keep His promises. God will “credit” with righteousness all who share this kind of faith. We must believe His promise to save us and give us eternal life, despite the trials of life that sometimes make God seem absent or uncaring. We must believe that Jesus was “delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification” (4:25).
3. The Jews claimed favor with God based on their Jewishness, as evidenced by circumcision. But Paul showed that the time at which God credited Abraham’s faith as righteousness preceded the time of Abraham’s circumcision. Circumcision was merely an outward sign of what had transpired in Abraham’s heart. Since Abraham was saved prior to his circumcision and several hundred years before the giving of the Law, he was not “credited with righteousness” because he was Jewish or because he kept the Mosaic Law. Since his salvation was by faith, it is a fitting illustration for both Jews and Gentiles of the means of accessing God’s gift of salvation.
 - ii. David: David also testified to the truth of salvation apart from works. In Psalm 32, he said that the Lord did not count his sin against him but instead blessed him by forgiving his transgressions. God’s blessing can’t be earned. It is a matter of being forgiven by God.

C. Results of Justification by Faith – 5:1-11: Paul’s emphasis in this section is justification by faith. Chapter 5 begins with two specific results of our justification. These results are the believer’s treasures.

- i. Peace with God (5:1): First, we have peace with God. Paul isn’t speaking of inner serenity in this verse. He is referring to the objective state of our relationship with God. Formerly, there was enmity between us, but once He justifies us, there is a new relationship that is peaceful.
- ii. Hope in God (5:3-8): In addition to peace with God, our justification results in hope and joy.
 1. *Joy in Reflecting His Glory*: Apart from our justification and Christ’s imputed righteousness, we fall short of God’s glory (3:23). But in Jesus, we have joy *in the hope that we will progressively reflect His glory* (a subject Paul takes up in chapters 6-8).
 2. *Joy in Our Sufferings*: Paul also says we have joy in our sufferings. Christians need not merely bear up bravely in suffering but can actually rejoice in it, knowing that God uses our suffering to develop our character. We have this hope. It is a hope that never disappoints and it is a hope that reminds us of God’s great love for us. Why would He who demonstrated His great love by sending Jesus when we were His enemies not also demonstrate His love by bringing good from our sufferings now that we are His friends?

3. *Joy of Christ's Life Within Us*: Paul wrote, "For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!" (5:10). Christ did more than just die for us and thus assuage God's wrath, He also lived a morally perfect life and in so doing, became our righteousness. With our sins forgiven, we were in a morally neutral state and still not worthy of eternal life. It is on the basis of Christ's perfect life that we merit heaven.^{vii} The joy of this hope is ours in the present and throughout eternity!

- D. One Man, Adam, and One Man, Jesus – 5:12-21**: In these verses, Paul discusses the power of Christ's obedience to overcome Adam's disobedience. Both men figuratively represent the destiny of others.
- i. **"In Adam"**: There exists a mysterious corporate union among humanity, so that we are not only sinners because of our personal sin but we were born sinners because we were born from the loins of Adam. Sin and death entered the world through Adam and we are "in Adam."
 - ii. **"In Christ"**: The good news is that Christ became the head of a new race, and when we put our faith in Him, God justifies us and sees us "in Christ." We are part of a new race! The application of Jesus' atonement to us is equally mysterious. Why would God choose to consider Christ's death and righteous life as a substitute for our own? We can only say that it pleased Him to do it and express eternal gratitude!
 - iii. **The Place of the Law**: Paul has been discussing our sin and the gift of God in Christ. At the end of chapter five, he briefly summarizes how the law fits into all of this. Of course, the law serves as a moral guide for sinners, but Paul explains that it was also given that we might recognize our sin. Where no law exists, there is no measure of our wickedness. Conversely, the presence of the law is like a mirror: we look into it and see how short we are of God's standard. The good news is that God's grace immeasurably exceeds the extent of our sin.

Summary Statement: After explaining human depravity, Paul presented justification by faith in Jesus.

Principle: *God graciously justifies all who put their faith in Jesus, that we might have eternal life.*

Justification is “an instantaneous legal act of God in which He (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in His sight.”^{viii} He can do this because of Jesus’ death on the Cross. In a way that is mysterious to us, He has chosen to credit Jesus’ death in place of our own and to also credit Jesus’ righteousness to us. The moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, He justifies us and we no longer are in His debt.

Application: Have you ever owed a great sum of money? Do you remember the relief you felt when you made the last payment? Our sin debt to God is immeasurable, but Jesus paid it all! When we put our faith in Him, His payment completely clears our account with God.

How frequently do you ponder your justification? Have the full implications of it sunk in? Is it something you meditate on regularly, or are you like those who “neither glorify God nor give Him thanks” (1:21)? Salvation is God’s work from beginning to end! We are completely undeserving. It is a gift of His mercy and grace. It is the gift of life!

Transition: Paul is covering the complete scope of our salvation. He began with our depravity. In chapters 3-5, he explained that God’s righteousness is mysteriously imputed to us in the process of justification by faith. In chapters 6-8, he talks about another aspect of our salvation: God’s righteousness being imparted to us in the process of sanctification. Sanctification means being separated from sin and set apart for God. While justification is a one-time act of God in declaring us righteous, sanctification refers to a continuous process in which we experience His righteousness. It is the process of being made holy (Christ-like). While our sanctification has a definite starting point at conversion and is brought to completion at death, most of the time the term sanctification is used in the progressive, ongoing sense of what is happening in the believer’s daily life. We *were* saved but we are also *being* saved.

III. God’s Righteousness Imparted (Sanctification) – Romans 6-8

A. Dead to Sin and Alive in Christ – 6:1- 7:25: Chapter 5 ended with Paul stating that where sin increases, grace increases all the more. He expected some would then ask, “If sin causes grace to increase, why don’t we just sin all the more?” Paul answers that it is ludicrous to say that, as redeemed people, we should sin more. We have been freed from bondage to sin *in order that* we might be slaves to God’s righteous ways (6:22). Everyone is a slave to something but slavery to God is good and life giving! In everyday experience however, we do not always seem to have been liberated from sin. Thus, Paul starts this section on sanctification by explaining that our liberated position in Christ is a fact, regardless of our feelings or experience.

- i. Position Versus Present Experience – 6:3-10: In the first ten verses, Paul affirms that our death with Christ is a historic fact. Think about this: as members of the new race, we were figuratively “in Christ’s loins” when He died on the cross. In His representative death, we died and were buried with Him. But being “in Christ” also means that we were united with Him in His resurrection and raised to new life with Him (6:2-7)! We know this because the Bible tells us so. While it is a matter of fact, it must become a matter of experience. In addition to acknowledging the truth doctrinally, we must also “reckon” or “count” it to be true by faith (6:11). Paul shows this by first speaking of our freedom from sin as a completed action and then saying we must “count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ (6:11). This “reckoning” is what Paul urges us to do in verses 11-14.
- ii. “Reckoning” – 6:11-14: Reckoning is a matter of adopting an attitude that will impact our choices. We might illustrate “reckoning” or “counting” this way: someone enrolls as a student in a university and thus, they are in fact a student. But the question remains, will they *be* a student? Will they study? On the one level, the moment they have enrolled they in fact *are* a student by position. However, the daily choice must be made whether or not to adopt the attitude of a student and take up both its privileges and responsibilities. Adopting the attitude that we are “in Christ” is reckoning or counting ourselves dead to sin but alive in Him. But even “reckoning” cannot be done in our own strength. The Spirit of God must open our eyes to the reality of our position and thus, we must offer ourselves to God.
- iii. “Offering Ourselves to God” – 6:15-7:3
 1. *A Second Hypothetical Question*: In verse 15, Paul answers another hypothetical question, “If we are not under the law, does it matter if we sin at all?” Our positional freedom from the law doesn’t mean doing as we please. We have been given the freedom *not* to sin and that is what we must choose by offering ourselves to God as slaves of righteousness.
 2. *His Part and Ours*: Salvation is God’s work from beginning to end. He has justified us and He will sanctify us. Our works did not justify us and neither can we muscle our way to sanctification. Our tendency is toward our inward, subjective experience. By looking within, we see our failures and grow anxious. *We mature by leaning upon the outward reality of our unity with Christ and continually offering ourselves to God.* As He enables us, we experience spiritual growth and freedom from bondage to sin. In heaven, we will be perfected and never have to concern ourselves with sin again. For now, we must continually *offer ourselves to Him* and allow Him to do the work in us.

3. *An Illustration from Marriage*: Paul has repeatedly said that since believers have died to the law, they are free to belong to Christ. In the beginning of chapter 7, he illustrates this by the freedom of a widow to remarry.

iv. The Struggle Within – 7:4-23

1. *Serving in the New Way of the Spirit*: The motivation of redeemed people to live righteously does not come from any code of conduct but from the Spirit of God Himself. Our freedom from sin and from the law is in order to permit a new attachment to the Lord and to his Spirit. The Holy Spirit allows us to experience a fruitfulness of life that is unattainable under the law. We used to be in the realm of the flesh. In the flesh, the law is at work, so that when we try to effect changes in our lives, we wind up feeling condemned. But now we serve “*in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code*” (7:6). I have personally experienced this change as follows:

- a. First, I have noticed that I sometimes feel frustrated with myself for lacking discipline in one area or another of my life, and that frustration can easily lead to self-condemnation. This condemnation is not from God (Romans 8:1). On the other hand, when the Holy Spirit convicts me of sin, *it is an altogether different experience*. I sense a real change in my desires and a delight in the idea of leaving the sinful way I had been behaving and taking up a new, life-giving way. This new way is not only suddenly more appealing to me than the sin, but I also have a sense of empowerment to make this change. The way of the Spirit is far superior to self-condemnation because it transforms more than my outward behavior; it also transforms my thinking about my behavior.
- b. Second, it is my experience that it rarely works to simply say “no” to myself when I am tempted. Determining to do what is right simply does not work! What *does* work is prayer that God will cause me to *love Him more* than I love the sin that is tempting me. Sometimes He answers this prayer immediately. More often, the change is gradual. The key is reliance on Him.
- c. Whether I am praying for victory over sin or spontaneously experience the Holy Spirit’s inspiration to make a change, in reality, both are His initiative. The bottom line is, just as our justification is a free gift of God’s grace when we place our faith in Jesus, our sanctification is also completely the work of God.

2. *A Third Hypothetical Question:* Paul is still on the subject of death to sin and freedom from the law. In 7:7, he introduces a third hypothetical question: If we have been freed from the law, doesn't that imply that the law is a bad thing? Paul's answer is that the law is certainly not evil. Its purpose is to hold up a standard before us that shows our guilt before God and makes us aware of our need for rescuing. The law is therefore good.
3. *Trying to Live as a Believer By the Law:* All of us can agree that even as believers, our behavior often falls very short of God's expectations. Paul personalizes the issue in chapter 7 by describing the way it feels to try and serve God while still having sinful desires present within us.
 - a. As believers, we deeply long to live up to God's standard. In our inner being, we delight in God's law (7:22). But as long as we remain in these bodies, another law is also at work: the law of our old nature. The struggle between the two results in agony. Paul cries out, "What a wretched man I am" (7:24). We cannot change ourselves and are only frustrated when we try.
 - b. Paul's point is that only Jesus can rescue us (7:24-25). We must continually cast ourselves on His Spirit for power and victory. "Sanctification is a gradual process that repeatedly takes the believer through this recurring sequence of failure through dependency upon self to triumph through the indwelling Spirit."^{ix} This leads Paul to discuss the victorious life that is ours in the Spirit in chapter 8.

B. Life Through the Spirit – 8:1-39

i. What the Law was Powerless to Do, God Did – 8:1-17

1. Paul explains that freedom from the law means freedom from trying to be Christ-like by our own effort. The law leads to condemnation but rather than condemning us, the Spirit of God frees us. Only He can accomplish our sanctification. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit affirms our position in Christ. Although we are not sinless in practice before our physical death, the Holy Spirit continues to testify within us that God has adopted us as His children. We are His, regardless of how quickly we are making progress.

2. When we live according to the flesh, we will constantly find ourselves defeated. Watchman Nee tells of watching a friend nearly drown while another friend who was a strong swimmer stood and watched. The drowning man called and called for help to no avail, but once he started to sink, the good swimmer adeptly reached out and rescued him. Nee later accused the rescuer of allowing his friend to suffer longer than necessary and learned that his friend was much wiser than he. “Had I gone earlier,” he said, “he would have clutched me so fast that both of us would have gone under. *A drowning man cannot be saved until he is utterly exhausted and ceases to make the slightest effort to save himself.*” Nee concludes, “When we give up our case, then God will take it up. He is waiting until we are at the end of our resources and can do nothing more for ourselves.”^x We live according to the Spirit by saying, “I’ll not be able to obey You; I’ll trust You to do it for me.” Constant reliance on the Holy Spirit is the key is to sanctification.
- ii. Four Encouraging Truths – 8:18-39 Although we groan awaiting the full redemption of our bodies (the final state of being sanctified, known as glorification), Paul offers four encouragements in verses 18-39.
1. *Glory Awaits*: Sin did not only impact humans but all creation. After the Fall, God said, “Cursed is the ground because of you...” (Genesis 3:17). But a day of universal restoration is coming (Acts 3:21, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1). Like us, creation groans while waiting for that final phase of redemption. The future restoration of all creation and our new heavenly bodies is our hope. Glory awaits us!
 2. *The Holy Spirit’s Intercession*: The Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for us in accordance with the will of God. What an encouragement!
 3. *All Things Work Together For Good*: The third truth relates to God’s will: His ultimate purpose is to conform us to the image of His Son (8:29), and He works all things together to that good end. He has predestined us for glory and taken upon Himself every step in the process of getting us to that goal.
 4. *More Than Conquerors* – 8:31-39: We can never be separated from God’s love and His promises. Nothing can give us greater security than His love. He will justify, sanctify, and ultimately, glorify all who put their faith in Jesus. To God’s glory, in all these things, we are more than conquerors!

Summary Statement: Chapters 6-8 discuss the aspect of our salvation known as sanctification. Although it will one day be complete in our experience, presently, we are in process.

Principle: *The successful Christian life can follow the pattern of Christ only by the power of Christ.*^{xi}

When we try on our own to be more Christ-like, we only exhaust ourselves. That is operating “in the flesh.” We become more Christ-like by offering ourselves up to God. That is operating “in the Spirit.”

Offering ourselves to God doesn’t mean we are free to sin as we please while we wait for Him to transform us. “Shall we go on sinning?” Paul has already answered that question. Truly offering ourselves to Him is a matter of continuous, inner trust. It is keeping our eyes on Him in faith at all times.

Illustration: I am tested in this area weekly as I write and teach. I often find myself in a position where I cannot possibly meet my deadline, not for lack of trying but because the Holy Spirit hasn’t yet made the passage plain to me. I daily give the Lord lip service, “offering” myself to Him in prayer. But in practice, when my writing slows and my brain gets fuzzy, in desperation to save myself I start to flail, like Watchman Nee’s drowning friend. I forget dependence on the Lord and try working harder to reach my goal. As much as I hate to admit it, my trouble is that I’m not patient enough and often don’t trust God enough to stop exhausting myself and intentionally wait for Him. When I hear His voice and He empowers me to write, it is exhilarating! My way leads to discouragement and fatigue. His way is life giving.

Application: Christian, has trying to save yourself become your daily struggle? Are you tired and admit with Paul, “What a wretched man I am”? God justifies us *by faith* and He also sanctifies us *by faith*. What struggle with sin do you need to offer Him? Our salvation is His work from start to finish.

Conclusion

Paul spelled out the full scope of salvation from depravity and God’s wrath. God justifies those who put their faith in Christ, imputes us with Christ’s righteousness, sanctifies us throughout our lives on earth, and then glorifies us in heaven. To be made righteous by Him is to know life. His life is *real* life, not the fake life offered by stimulants and other temporary pleasures that make us feel good for a short time. They are indeed poor imitations of the true life that God gives.

The greater our understanding and application of the gospel, the more abundant our lives will be. Will you offer yourself to Him by faith this week and experience the life Jesus died to give you?

-
- ⁱ Bainton, Roland H (1950). *Here I Stand* (p. 56). New York, Mentor Press, as quoted by Erwin Lutzer (2016) in *Rescuing the Gospel* (p. 42). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- ⁱⁱ Packer, J.I. (1973). *Knowing God* (p. 184). Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press (includes partial quote from John Murray's *Epistle to the Romans*).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1997). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (543). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.
- ^{iv} Mounce, R. H. (1995). *Romans* (Vol. 27, p. 78). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ^v Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 227). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.
- ^{vi} Packer, J.I. (1973). *Knowing God* (p. 189). Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press (includes partial quote from John Murray's *Epistle to the Romans*).
- ^{vii} Grudem, Wayne (1994). *Systematic Theology* (p. 570-571). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- ^{viii} Grudem, Wayne (1994). *Systematic Theology* (p. 723). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- ^{ix} Mounce, R. H. (1995). *Romans* (Vol. 27, pp. 167–168). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- ^x Nee, Watchman (ed., Angus I. Kinnear, 1961). *The Normal Christian Life*, Third Edition (p. 109-110). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.
- ^{xi} Reinke, Tony (2015). *Newton: On the Christian Life* (p. 139). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.