

LIVING IN CHRIST

Paul's Letter to the Roman Church

**A Bible Teaching Commentary
for personal or group study**

by Fred Morris



**Romans Part 2
Chapters 9 to 16**



To the reader or leader

These commentaries help to explain the Bible in a way that is easy to read and understand. They are also easy to translate. You can use these books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. Each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible.



Bible reading: Where you see this, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible passage first before reading this book.



Talk about this: Where you see this, there are questions to prayerfully answer yourself or to discuss in a group study. They also help the reader to remember the Bible verses.



Think about this: Where you see this sign, the question requires more time for personal meditation.



Ruled teaching boxes: Where you see this sign, the information gives extra teaching about life at the time the Bible was written and for today's believers.

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Romans Chapters 9 – 16: LIVING IN CHRIST

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Old Testament writings and the Christian faith• Warnings against religious rules and traditions• Receiving power to live by faith in God's salvation plan• Serving God and serving others in love	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to serve those who rule over us• All peoples, nations, cultures joined 'in Christ'• People with different gifts must work together• A passion for mission to help new and weak Christians
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ROMANS is about knowing God personally and receiving His righteousness. In part 2 we move on from Paul's teaching, which says that we are all sinners from birth so we cannot be saved through being "good" or "religious". Our salvation is possible only by faith in Jesus Christ who was punished in our place to save us from the result of sin. Throughout, Paul warns us not to trust in church laws and religious traditions to strengthen our faith. His practical teaching of living by faith in Jesus Christ alone opens the way for the power of the Holy Spirit to use our gifts. This is at the heart of God's plan to save the world through His Son. Paul urges us to follow the simple guideline to serve others in love as part of living 'in Christ'.

MANNA PUBLICATIONS supply Bible teaching commentaries written by Fred Morris. For many years Fred, and his wife Lorna, travelled round the world teaching and preaching. When they returned home they wrote these notes for printing locally wherever there was a need for basic Christian teaching.

THIS EDITION is written in easy-to-read Worldwide English which is easy to understand and easy to translate into other languages.

THESE BOOKS are to use on your own or to talk about in a group. They will help to teach you God's truth. They will help you to know God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as your personal Saviour. They will help you to talk and pray about your faith. They will help to guide you from going the wrong way in life. They will tell you how you can live a new life pleasing to God.













WE PRAY that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you read the Bible and use these commentaries.









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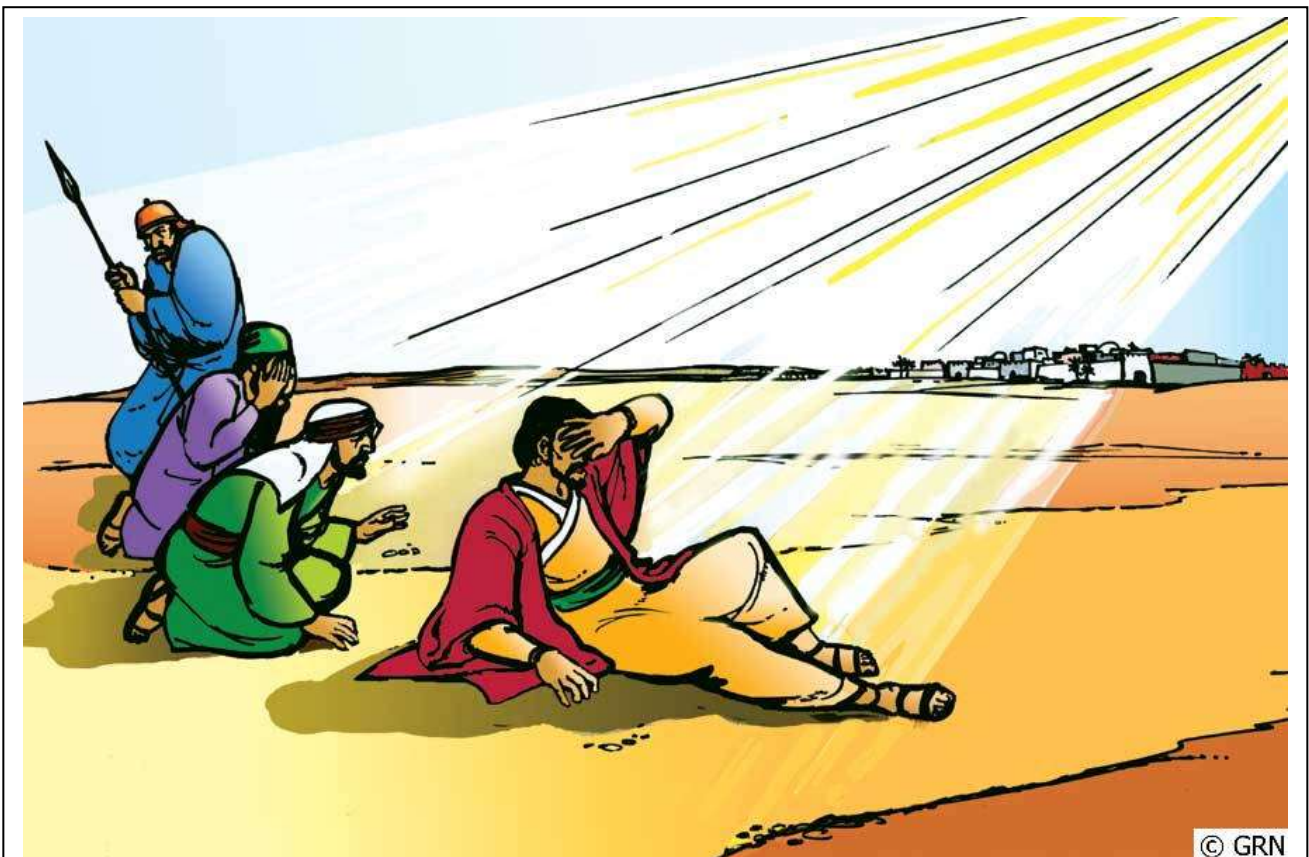
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ROMANS PART 2, CHAPTERS 9 – 16

INTRODUCTION

In Romans part 1 we explained how Paul prepared the way to meet the Christians in Rome. He had a strong desire to speak to the believers there. He knew that they were led by Jews who believed in Jesus Christ but who tried to keep their old religious traditions. He wanted to help them to fully understand the purposes of God given in the Old Testament writings and to become strong in their New Testament faith in Christ alone.

Because of the change of Paul, a Jew, to Christianity, he had a sudden desire to share God's Good News of salvation through Jesus. He believed that Jesus was the Son of God, the promised Messiah. He met the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:6-16). Paul believed that Jesus fulfilled all the purposes and promises of God given in the Old Testament. He wanted to share what God's Holy Spirit had taught him from these holy writings.



The conversion of Paul (formerly Saul) on the road to Damascus

Paul's main teaching was that the salvation and righteousness of God is received only through faith in Jesus Christ. This teaching was the foundation for the early Christian Church. This was taught again at the time of the Protestant Reformation in Northern Europe which rapidly spread around the

world in the 16th century. It means that we are all sinners from birth and cannot claim salvation through the faith of our parents or through obeying religious traditions. Salvation is through Christ alone. This was a difficult teaching for the Jews who were Christians and still is for some branches of the Christian Church today.

In Romans part 2, Paul continues to teach about the need for the Jews to receive the full Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ and also the importance of God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles – the rest of the world who are not Jews. Many Jews had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. However, as a nation, they were God's chosen people and He did not reject them. They are the 'children of Abraham' but so are the others whom God chooses who are not from the Jewish race.

In Romans part 2, Paul also teaches the need of accepting others in love, working for unity in service to God, obedience to the State and discipline in personal matters. These things open up the way for the power of the Holy Spirit to use our various gifts. They are the things that Jesus taught. It is what 'living in Christ' means.



Bible reading: Romans 9:1–5

PREACHING THE TRUTH 'IN CHRIST'

Paul commences the second part of his letter with much boldness yet much humility. Both qualities demonstrate spiritual maturity. He boldly claims that what he says is truly from God and is guided by the Holy Spirit (9:1). In 9:2-3 he humbly shows his concern for his own race, the Jews. His heart is full of sorrow for them. He is prepared to sacrifice his life and even his salvation – everything to get his message accepted.

From the beginning God promised a 'seed' (a person) who would save all men and women of every nation and race from sin and bring them into a right relationship with Himself (Galatians 3:16). God promised this blessing would come to all the world through Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:29). The promised Saviour was Jesus Christ, the seed from Abraham. Christ was the 'seed' the Anointed One, the Messiah. Israel's Messiah was born in the line of Abraham, and was born to Mary of the family of David, through whom God promised an everlasting Kingdom (2 Samuel 7:16).

God's blessings have always been there for men to take and enjoy, but they have to be received by faith. The blessings came to mankind in a special way through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:19–20).

This then, is the truth of God 'in Christ' that Paul preached (9:1). His conscience did not allow him to lie because the Holy Spirit was guiding him to know right from wrong. Our conscience is a reliable guide when it is open, not closed, to the Holy Spirit. Paul's mind was in tune with God's voice. God's Holy

Spirit worked with Paul's spirit to present the truth of the gospel or Good News to the believers in Rome. He was fulfilling God's purpose 'in Christ'.

PAUL'S GREAT SORROW

'My heart is full of sorrow', he said (9:2-3). The Messiah, Jesus Christ, had come. Jesus, the Son of God, had given His lifeblood for Paul's people, the Jews, and for the world, yet most of his fellow Jews still looked for a national hero who would defeat the Romans and restore the nation of Israel to its former glory. But God's plan was to use the Jews to be a blessing for all nations through the Good News of their Messiah – without a war.

Paul wanted them to know that the real blessings of God are received by faith (Hebrews 11:1-2). Their ancestor, King David, was a man of faith. So were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All these ancestors received God's blessings by faith and every new generation must do the same. Paul is here preparing the way to shock his readers to understand that fewer Jews will be saved by faith in God than Gentiles (9:27). He claims this further on in Romans 9:30–33. Their trust must be in God and in His Son, not in their religious traditions, nor their former glory, nor their hope of future glory.

A PRIVILEGED PEOPLE

As God's people, Israel had received many special privileges (9:4,5). Paul writes down his understanding of these purposes of God regarding the people of Israel: they are God's children; they were shown God's glory; they received God's Covenant and His Law; they had God's temple; they were given God's promises; and finally they were chosen to bring salvation into the world through God's Messiah – all this was given to them.

God had cared for them as a man cares for a vineyard, as a precious vine that He had planted. Paul said all the blessings of God came to the Jews first. But they had not received them by faith. Nor had they lived up to their calling to be a blessing to others as God's chosen people.



Talk about this:

1. Describe how the mind, heart and spirit of Paul were guided by his desire to teach the truth of God 'in Christ'.
2. How can we test what preachers say is truly from God (9:3)?
3. Do we share God's love for the Jews as expressed by Paul?
4. What blessings have we inherited from God through faith in Christ (9:4,5)?
In what ways can we be a blessing to others?



Think about this: Are your hopes for the future based on daily trusting in God's salvation 'in Christ'?



Bible reading: Romans 9:6–13

GOD'S FREE CHOICE

Long ago, God chose to show His love and mercy to the world through men of Israel who had faith. This was God's purpose from the beginning of Jewish history through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God brought many other sons and daughters into His Kingdom who were not Jews (9:8). Jesus told all his followers that He had other 'sheep' to call into the Kingdom (John 10:16). God's plan for Israel looked beyond Israel (2 Chronicles 6:33). His love reached out to 'all whom the Lord your God will choose' (Acts 2:39).

Jesus gave God's message of love to the Jews first, but few people had faith in their hearts to receive it (Hebrews 4:2). Did this mean that God's promises to Israel were not fulfilled?

Paul knew the sadness of Israel at that time – they were persecuted and controlled by the Romans. So he encouraged his readers to know that God's promises or purpose had not failed (Romans 9:6). When God announced His plan to Israel, every word was true. God is love and His plan was to show His love to His people Israel first, and then to the whole world. 'For God so loved the world...' (John 3:16).

Paul reminded his readers that God did not choose to fulfil His promise to Abraham through his natural son Ishmael who was born to Hagar. Nor did He fulfil His promise through his natural sons born to Keturah (Genesis 16:3; 25:1–4). They are not the 'children of God' (Romans 9:8). Instead, God chose to fulfil His promise through the 'son of the promise' who was Isaac, born to Sarah through a miracle using Abraham's seed (Genesis 17:16; 18:10–14; 21:1-3).

The Jewish Pharisees argued with Jesus about this same thing. Jesus told them, 'If you obey my teaching, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free... You are Abraham's children... but Abraham didn't do the things you want to do. You are doing the things your father does' (John 8:41). They had faith in the traditions and beliefs of their parents and could not understand the things their father Abraham believed. God accepts as His children all who have the same faith as Abraham (Galatians 3:6,7). This was so then, and it is so now. His word does not change. Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, 'You who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed' (Gal. 3:29). They are the true sons of Abraham – by faith (Gal. 3:7,29).

In this way, Paul wants to remind the Jews in the Roman church that only through faith in Christ can they be saved and made right with God. He teaches this in the next chapter (10:3,4). This teaching is true for unbelievers but is also true for religious people who believe in God but only trust in their church and family traditions.

God is in overall control but only acts within His purpose and will. Paul illustrates this with an Old Testament family. The twins Esau and Jacob were born to Isaac and before they had done anything good or bad, God told their mother 'the older will serve the younger' (Romans 9:11–13; Genesis 25:23).

God chose Jacob (later called Israel) to bless all mankind. This was God's choice (Romans 9:13; Malachi 1:2,3). Notice how Paul quotes a lot from the 39 books of the Old Testament writings. (The 27 books of the New Testament writings were not added to the Bible until much later.)



Talk about this:

1. Why did many of Christ's own people, the Jews, not welcome Him (John 1:11)?
2. Were the Jews chosen for blessing other people? Has this been fulfilled?
3. Why does Paul quote from the Old Testament writings so much? How important is the Old Testament to Christians today (2 Timothy 3:16)?



Think about this: In Romans chapter 9, Paul prepared the way to tell all his readers that without faith in Jesus Christ, it is not possible to please God (10:3,4). Living a religious life is not enough. How can you prepare to tell this same news to traditional Christians, new Christians, other faiths and people who seek God in their lives (1 John 5:12)?



Bible reading: Romans 9:14–33

WAS GOD UNFAIR?

Was God unfair when He chose Jacob over Esau (9:13)? Paul says, 'Not at all' (9:14). Perhaps we should ask, 'Why should God be merciful to anyone?' for all have sinned (3:23) and deserve to be punished. Instead of punishment, God shows mercy and love (9:15; Exodus 33:19).

God created mankind; therefore we cannot tell Him what to do with our lives (9:20). Paul then gives his famous example of how God is free to choose what he does with us: we are as clay, which is made into different kinds of pots for a variety of uses (9:21). Shall the human clay say to the Creator, 'Why did You make me like this?' (9:20). That is unthinkable! He had every right to prefer Jacob to the first-born son Esau (9:13) or to choose to work through stubborn Pharaoh (9:17). He is free to use anyone for His own glory. He is free to make and use different kinds of pots out of the same lump of clay. He is free to show His love, or His anger; His power or His mercy (9:21-26). God enjoys using the weakest or the least wanted pots or people to do His will.

GOD'S GREAT PATIENCE IS FOR ALL PEOPLE

It is easy to feel Paul's own impatience as he writes to the believers in Rome. But he knows that God shows great patience towards those with whom He is

angry and who deserve His punishment (9:22). When men continue to reject Him, however, He often stands aside and lets them suffer and destroy themselves in their evil ways (1:24–32). But to all who repent He shows His mercy (9:23).

Paul next confirms that it is 'not only the Jews but also the Gentiles' who received God's mercy as His special chosen people (9:24). Paul follows this with quotations from the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament writings: the Gentiles will become 'children of the living God' (Hosea 1:10) and also be called 'My people' (Hosea 2:23). Paul thus shows to his readers that all people from any nation or culture can be saved (Romans 9:25-26). This is Paul's great understanding of God's message through the prophet Hosea.

Paul longed for his own people, the Jews, to put their faith in Christ. Yet he risked his life many times to take this Good News throughout the world for the Gentiles. He also had a great desire to encourage believers and their leaders in the new churches (Philippians 1:1). This shows in Paul's great teachings in Romans and in his other letters in the New Testament.

ONLY A REMNANT OF ISRAEL WOULD BE SAVED

Paul next uses the words of the prophet Hosea to show God's love and mercy to the Gentiles (9:25-26). God did not give them any special help, yet a great many would become 'children of the living God' through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the fulfilment of Bible prophecy. And it reveals the greatest theme of the Bible – God's purpose and promise of a Saviour for all mankind through Father Abraham's 'seed' in Sarah (Genesis 17:16) and later through the Holy Spirit creating a seed in Mary (Luke 1:26-35). The birth of Isaac in Sarah's dead womb was a miracle promised by God. So was the birth of Jesus in Mary's virgin womb over 2000 years later.

Paul then quotes the words of the prophet Isaiah: though the number of Israelites were 'like the sand by the sea', only a few would be saved – a remnant (Romans 9:27-29; Isaiah 1:9; 10:22,23). The church at the time of Paul contained both Jews and many others who were not Jews (9:24).

WHAT SHALL WE SAY ABOUT THE GENTILES?

Paul asks, 'What then shall we say about the Gentiles?' They did not look for God's salvation and righteousness, but many received it (Romans 9:30). These godless people were made right with God through faith. Paul said this earlier in his letter to the Romans 'The one who is right with God will live by faith' (1:17; Habakkuk 2:4).

Before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, there was no great turning to God among the Jews or the Gentiles. But after the resurrection of Christ and the sending of His promised Holy Spirit, God filled His Kingdom with believers from

many nations and language groups. They accepted the 'righteousness of God' as a free gift by faith in Jesus Christ and came into the family of God. None were shut out; all were special to God. In God's mercy, that includes everyone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God who died to save us from God's punishment for sin.

In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul says these famous words, 'There is no Jew or Gentile, no slave or free, no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, you are all Abraham's children and heirs of God's promise' (Galatians 3:28–29). Paul knew that in many towns and cities, the Gentiles did not know God yet many were quickly saved. However, many Jews, who thought they were saved, were not right with God and remained that way (Romans 9:30,31).

God wanted the Jews to love Him and show His mercy to others. 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' God told His prophet (Hosea 6:6). Jesus used these same words (Matthew 9:13).

WHAT SHALL WE SAY ABOUT THE JEWS?

What then shall we say about Israel? Israel had followed their own form of righteousness by trying to keep the Law. But they were not living by faith in God. They were trying to gain their salvation 'by working for it' (9:32). Again and again in Romans, Paul explains to his readers that faith in the Law of God and doing good works for God is not sufficient to know Him. He also explains this in his other letters: Ephesians 2:8 and Colossians 2:14.

The Jews were his chosen special people but they did not have the faith that Abraham had in God nor did they have faith in the 'seed' of Abraham, God's Son. Yet the Gentiles, who were not the chosen special people of God, were given this faith to get right with God. They accepted the salvation of God through faith in the Jewish Messiah whom most of the Jews rejected.

This great mystery of God has saved millions of people from sin, which destroys life, and restored them to live forever with their Creator and Saviour.

Paul said that the Jews stumbled over the 'stone that makes them fall' – Jesus Christ (9:32). He quotes the prophecies of Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 (Romans 9:33). In Isaiah 28:16, God said, 'I am laying a stone ... for a firm foundation. The one who trusts in that stone will never be shaken.' The Good News which Paul preached is Jesus, the cornerstone, or the foundation stone of the church. This is the stone the Jews stumbled over. The nation of Israel tripped over this stone [Jesus Christ] as God said they would in the Old Testament writings. Peter quotes the same prophecy in 1 Peter 2:6-8. People stumble and fall when they fail to put their trust in God's Son.

Jesus was Israel's Messiah. But their traditions and laws set them against Jesus and His teaching. He wanted service for God that grew out of love and

faith. Faith first, then works done in love; the two must go together (James 2:26).

Chapter 9 verses 30 to 32 are key verses in Paul's letter to the Roman church: salvation through faith in Christ Jesus alone. Believers who put their faith in religious traditions and laws often fail to see this power of God at work in their lives. Paul feared this had happened in the Roman Church because of the Jewish traditions. Sadly, we see this is still true today in many of the traditions and rules of our churches.



Talk about this:

1. Does God prefer one race of people to another (9:15,16)?
2. How did many Jews try to be right with God? Why did they fail?
3. Why does Paul describe us as clay in God's hand (9:20,21)?
4. Why should we pray for God's mercy (9:22)? Why should we pray for people to repent (9:23)?
5. Why did the leaders in Israel stumble over their Messiah, Jesus Christ (9:32-33)? Do we?



Think about this: Are we guilty of trying to earn our salvation (9:32)? Is there anything in our church traditions which hinder us from living by faith? Why is living by faith so important in personal and church life?



Bible reading: Romans 10:1–21

PAUL PRAYS FOR THE JEWS

The Jews were expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius (41–54 AD). This left Gentile believers to lead the small house churches. After the Emperor died, the Jews began to return to Rome. It was at this time that Paul wrote to the believers in Rome. He waits no longer to say what is on his heart. He speaks freely about his desire for the 'people of Israel to be saved' (10:1). The Jews were the special people of God and yet Paul tells them that many were not saved! Why? Because they were trying to be 'right with God' but in a wrong way (10:3).

Paul wrote the first nine chapters in his letter to help the Jews to understand that their salvation must be through faith in Jesus Christ alone. His life, sacrifice and resurrection fulfil all the laws that God gave to Moses (10:4). Their faith must now be in Christ alone (10:6, 9). Without Christ they cannot be saved! Jesus Himself said, 'No one comes to the Father but through Me' (John 14:6). The Law can only be fulfilled in us through Christ after our salvation: in Christ alone.

Paul also wants them to agree with him that this truth about Christ brings salvation to 'everyone who believes' – not just for the Jews (10:4).

Paul prayed for his own people (10:1). They were God's chosen people and they were Jesus' people. They were Paul's brothers and sisters and he did not give up hope that they would be saved like him.

Before he met Christ, Paul was no different to his brother Jews. He was like them. They worked hard to keep the Law and be righteous, but their good works failed them. They had great love for place, position and power. They remembered Sabbaths, held on to religious traditions, obtained important jobs and titles, and raised funds for charity. But after Paul met Christ, he realised that in all their work for God, love of God and obedience to God were left out. The love God seeks is written in His command, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength' (Deuteronomy 6:5). Paul discovered that this love came by the Holy Spirit as he followed the example of Jesus.

CHRIST IS NOW THE LAW

Paul said that, for the Christian, the struggle to be right with God is now finished (10:4). Christ enabled us to fulfil the Law. His life, which is at work within us through the Holy Spirit, makes us right with God (Galatians 2:20). Christ is the final goal of the Law or the end result of the Law. He is the purpose behind it. No-one could fully meet the requirements of the Law except Christ. Everything in the Law points to the need for Christ to come into the world to save us from sin.

This is why it is so important for us to understand the purpose of God in giving the Ten Commandments to Moses (Exodus 20:1-17). The Law gives God's standard of holiness. But Christ is our Saviour: He alone meets the requirements of the Law. So through Him alone, God's righteousness is now freely given to all who believe (3:21,22). Jesus did not come to cancel the Law. 'I come to give full meaning to what is written' (Matthew 5:17).

Paul says that salvation from our old sinful ways requires:

- 'doing what God requires' (10:5)
- by 'having faith in Him' (10:6)
- and responding to 'the word [Good News] we are preaching' (10:8).

Paul says that the word of faith is very close to us (10:8) and we must learn to speak it out to see the power of God in our lives. Salvation is as close as your own lips and heart. People think it must be a complicated process, but it is not.



Talk about this:

1. Why was Paul so anxious for his Jewish brothers to be saved?
2. Do our good deeds save us? Why not?
3. Could keeping God's Law make Jews righteous? Why not?
4. How can we be sure of our salvation (10:6)?



Think about this: Are we guilty of trusting in our service to God for our salvation instead of trusting in God for our salvation? Do we truly love God 'in Christ'?

FAITH IN SPEAKING THE WORD OF GOD

Paul preached that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be forgiven and saved (10:9). This is the main message of the Gospel or the Good News of God about His Son, Jesus Christ. The message is not too hard to follow. Even a child can understand and do it. But only those who hear it, speak it and receive it in their hearts can be saved. 'For it is with your heart that you believe and are made right with God, and it is with your mouth that you say that Jesus is Lord. And so you are saved' (10:10). This is not just the decision of a moment, but a decision to keep following Jesus Christ. 'The word of God which we are preaching is near you', Paul said. 'You must put your faith in it' (10:8).

Truth may seem distant and unreal, but it is not. It is nearby and real and personal. Paul states clearly his message of truth, faith and salvation in verses 9 to 13. We may not fully understand the mystery of the love of God who allowed His only Son to be punished for our sins. But we can all be part of His salvation plan for the world.

Paul's letter was written around AD 57. It was important news for all Jews who believed God and for all ungodly people who wanted to know God. It was also a clear warning to all believers in the churches who followed religious traditions. This is why the letter to the Romans is important for the Church today. Paul uses many words to say what he wants to say, but the truth is simple:

- all have sinned and do not meet God's standards;
- the worst sinners can be saved, including those of other faiths and no faith;
- believe and live only by faith in God's salvation plan through Jesus.

This letter is famous for explaining these truths from God (10:9-13).

PAUL'S GREAT DESIRE TO PREACH THE GOOD NEWS

Paul again quotes from the Old Testament writings: 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (10:13; Joel 2:32). This quotation from the prophet Joel leads Paul into an outburst of his love for the Gospel – the Good News of God in Jesus Christ. Paul told the Romans at the beginning of his letter that the main reason for planning to visit them was to preach this Good News to Jews and Gentiles (1:14-17).

Paul's love for the Gospel or Good News is a characteristic of Paul's letter to the Romans that is famous. You can sense the great desire within Paul to preach and to save those who are far from God. He asks these four questions (10:14-15):

- How can people call on the Lord [to be saved] unless they believe?
- How can they believe in Him unless they hear about Him?
- How can they hear about Him unless someone preaches to them?
- How can anyone preach without being sent?

Paul then supports the urgent need to preach the Good News to all by quoting six more verses from the O.T. writings (10:15-21).



Talk about this:

1. Why did Paul say: 'The word is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart' (10:8)?
2. Describe Paul's Good News in your own words (10:9–13).
3. What are the four requirements that Paul gives for a successful preaching ministry (10:14–15)?



Think about this: Have you fully confessed your sin to God, believed in your heart that Jesus is the Son of God and are ready to tell others that they, too, can be saved?

HOW WILL THEY HEAR THE GOOD NEWS?

Paul stressed the importance of preaching God's Good News of salvation: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News' (10:15; Isaiah 52:7).

Throughout history, God's plan to save mankind from punishment for sin was gradually revealed. It was revealed in seven stages, which take on new meanings for those who are now 'in Christ'.

1. The sacrifice of animal blood, for example, a lamb (Genesis 4:4).
2. A new beginning with God after the flood (Genesis 9:11-13).
3. The family of one faithful man, Abraham (Genesis 12: 1-3).
4. God's escape plan for Israel (Exodus 2:23-25).
5. The ten commandments and other laws (Exodus 34:27-28).
6. Moses and all the prophets (Luke 24:27).

7. The sacrifice of the blood of Jesus who is called the Lamb of God (John 1:29-34).

God's plan of salvation has never been withdrawn and remains today for all who find faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Salvation 'in Christ' is explained in the New Testament writings and encouraged by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the followers of Jesus.

Paul reminded Timothy of the importance of reading and understanding the plans of God in the Old Testament writings as a foundation for teaching and preaching the Good News of Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

God and His promises haven't changed from the beginning of time and the final fulfilment of His plans was accomplished on the cross by the New Covenant 'in Christ'.



Talk about this:

1. Has God given up on the Jews (Joel 2:32)?
2. What of sinners who reject the gospel (Romans 1:24-32; 2 Timothy 4:3-4)?



Think about this: What are your views on the seven stages of God's salvation plan for mankind listed above? Are there other stages? Are we in the final stage now? What place does sacrifice, obedience, worship, mercy, forgiveness and love have in each stage of God's plan?



Bible reading: Romans 11:1–14

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE OF GOD

In the first ten chapters of his letter, Paul told the Jewish Christians in Rome that they were wrong. Now he helps them to know that they are still God's chosen people. He asks two questions:

1. Did God reject His people Israel (11:1)?
2. Did they fall so far from His mercy and grace that they could not be saved (11:11)?

The answer to both questions is 'No!'

God's love toward Israel (and all peoples and nations) has not changed. His love for the Jews cannot change – nor must we ever forget that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Paul said that there was a faithful remnant 'chosen by God's grace' (Romans 11:5).

The eight persons saved in Noah's ark is a picture of this remnant. They were saved by God's mercy and their response to it.

In every age, there has been a remnant of faithful men and women whom God loved and it is true in His Kingdom now. He is faithful even when we feel lonely, fearful, isolated or part of a persecuted minority.



We are all true sons of Abraham through faith and repentance

In Paul's day, many Jews were faithful to God – they lived by faith (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17). Paul was an example of those who believed in Yahweh, the Almighty Creator God worshipped by Jews and Christians today. Paul was a Jew by birth, one of Abraham's children from the tribe of Benjamin (11:1). But even Paul was not 'saved', just because he was a 'son of Abraham'.

The Old Testament prophets preached repentance and faith in God (Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 55:6-7; Ezekiel 18:30). At the time of Jesus, John the Baptist said 'Repent and believe!' Peter said, 'Repent and believe!' Jesus used exactly the same words: 'Repent and believe the Good News' (Mark 1:15). This is why Paul said, 'Everyone who believes [in Christ] can be made right with God' (Romans 10:4). As a child of Abraham (11:1) he realised that salvation is for all who have the faith of Abraham and is made complete in Christ through faith and repentance.

GOD WILL BLESS MANY THROUGH TRUE BELIEVERS

In the reign of wicked king Ahab, the prophet Elijah thought he was the only man of faith left in the land (Romans 11:3). But God told him, 'I have 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to idols' (1 Kings 19:18). And Paul knew there were many faithful believers chosen by God at that time (Romans 11:5–7). The rest were unfaithful so God made their hearts stubborn.

God promised great things to men of faith long before there was a nation called Israel (Genesis 12:2–3). But Israel did not obtain what it wanted so much – the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Romans 9:30–32). Yet those who were chosen (the believing remnant) did obtain it (11:7; John 1:11–13). When the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, the Jewish nation came to an end for the next 1850 years. (The modern state of Israel was established by the League of Nations in 1948 following their orders given in 1922.)

Many Jews at the time of Paul refused to believe God's truth when it was told them. They were cursed with stubbornness and blindness (Isaiah 6:9–10; Acts 28:25-27). They were left with the huge burden of trying to keep their religious rules and regulations, many of which were man-made (Luke 11:46).

Paul used words from Moses and the prophets to show the Jews what God had said about them. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Moses told them, 'With your own eyes you saw... the miraculous signs and great wonders' that God did in Egypt and in the desert. 'But to this day the Lord has

not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear' (Romans 11:8; Deuteronomy 29:3,4). 'They grew old and sleepy, their eyes dark and their backs bent forever' (Romans 11:10; Psalm 69:22–23). This warning in Psalm 69 tells of the terrible judgements of God on the Jews if they reject Jesus as their Messiah.

Paul asked, 'Did they stumble and fall for all time?' (Romans 11:11). 'Not at all,' he said. But because of their sin, God would save Gentiles whom He also loved and wanted in His Kingdom. Paul hoped this would make the Jews jealous and willing to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

Paul believed that through the Jews the whole world has been blessed: what the Jews had lost, the Gentiles had gained. If Israel's rejection of Jesus Christ means blessing to the rest of the world, there will be even greater riches when all Jews believe the Good News (11:12). Paul remembered the promises of God to Abraham to bless the Jews and bless the nations through them (Genesis 12:2-3).

God has not withdrawn His grace from the Jews, nor from any other people group. All who have believed will be included in the Christian Church and resurrected to glory when Christ comes again. Paul longed for the time when His own people would seek the salvation of Christ.

He said he hoped 'to save some of them' (11:14). But all his quotations from the Old Testament writings show doubt about Israel's response to the Good News. Paul only expected to see 'some of them,' not many, saved: a remnant. Meanwhile, Paul's calling by God was to preach to the Gentiles, but he longed to see his Jewish brothers saved.

Paul said plainly that 'when anyone turns to the Lord, the veil over our minds is taken away' (2 Corinthians 3:16). The word 'anyone' indicated Paul's understanding that the Jews would probably be saved one by one and not as a nation. The Good News hardens the hearts and blinds the eyes of those who refuse it (Romans 11:8-10; Hebrews 3:13–15). There can be no hope of salvation for those who have rejected God's grace and continue to do so (11:8).



Talk about this:

1. What two questions did Paul ask (11:1,11)?
2. Did Paul believe many Jews would be saved (11:14)?
3. What happens to hearts that refuse the gospel of Jesus Christ (11:7)?



Think about this: How should we behave towards believers who are stubborn and blind (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)? How should we pray for Israel?



Many people of God did not trust in Him (Romans 11:5–8)

Paul's sad words showed that Israel had little faith in God's mercy and grace. The Jews ate and drank what the Lord provided for them daily in the desert on the way to the Promised Land of Canaan, later called Israel. They saw the miracles of God performed by Moses and Aaron; they saw the presence of God in the cloud and the pillar of fire; they had the commandments of God written on tablets of stone. These things should have led them to a deeper trust in God. Later on, the Ark of the Covenant was a reminder of these things. It was a box that contained a sample of manna, which was God's miracle food provided for forty years in the desert; also Aaron's rod and the tablets containing the Ten Commandments. These were reminders of God's provision, God's power and God's presence and purpose through His word. But many were not thankful. Instead, at the time of Paul, most of the people trusted in their own laws and their own reminders of God through their religious traditions.



Bible reading: Romans 11:15–36

PAUL'S HOPE FOR ISRAEL

Paul now asks what will happen when the Jews accept Christ. It will be like life from the dead! (11:15).

The Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ is the power of God at work:

1. It works unseen by the human eye (11:16; Matthew 13:33).
2. It cannot be stopped by Satan or by men (Acts 5:39).
3. When received, it brings the light of Christ into our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:6).

So there was still hope for all those living at that time to be made holy. Paul used not one but two illustrations to show that God still accepted Israel as His people: bread and a tree root (11:17).

The yeast in one small piece of bread dough spreads through the whole lump of dough. If the remnant of believers were called 'holy' by God, there was still hope for them all to be made holy in His sight.

If the root of an olive tree is holy, the branches are holy also. Branches broken off cannot live but the root feeds the whole plant. This includes any wild branches (the Gentiles) joined to the tree.

When Gentiles accept God's Good News and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God joins them with the remnant of Jewish believers who live by faith. All live by faith in Jesus Christ under the New Covenant of God. We are all 'branches' joined together with the original 'branches'. We are all 'the people of God', not just the Jews, and are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

At this point, Paul warns the Gentile believers not to think that they are better than the Jewish believers (11:18). They did nothing to gain acceptance into the 'olive tree'. They could do nothing to earn God's salvation and righteousness. Both groups hold their position in the 'olive tree' by faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Paul warns the Gentile believers to remember that they are saved by the kindness of God (11:22). Any boasting is wrong; any sense of being better than other believers is dangerous, for they risk knowing the anger of God. They live by faith and are saved by God's goodness.

THE DAY OF SALVATION

Under the New Covenant of God, the door was open even wider for the world to be saved and to join God's family – 'joined to the olive tree'. So God did not close the door to Jews. It was not too late (11:23). They can believe and be grafted in again. 'How much more easily will the natural branches be joined to their own olive tree' (11:24).

In the last great day, the 'olive tree' will be complete. Jesus Christ will come in the clouds to gather His Church from the four corners of the earth (Matthew 8:11). 'They will sit with Abraham.' But Paul knows that many who called themselves sons of Abraham were hardened in their unbelief and refused to listen to God's word about Jesus their Messiah. This caused Paul great distress to the day he died (Acts 28:23–29).

A disciple of Jesus wrote these words:

"Jesus came into the world He created, but the world didn't recognize Him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected Him. But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave them the right to become children of God. The law was given through Moses, but its grace and truth were fulfilled through Jesus Christ." (John 1:10–12, 17 adapted)

Those who live under the Old Covenant fall short of God's blessing. Paul knew that under the New Covenant, the way of salvation was through Christ alone. And he believed that one day all Israel would be saved in the same way (Romans 11:26).



Talk about this:

1. How did the Jew's rejection of the Messiah benefit the Gentiles?
2. Who are the 'wild branches' that God joined to the 'olive tree'?
3. When Paul preached the Gospel to Jews they disappointed him. How? Do we share in Paul's sadness?
4. Yeast, when used in the Bible, normally stands for evil (Matthew 16:6). Why does Paul say the Gospel or Good News is like yeast?

THE KINDNESS AND JUSTICE OF GOD

This same just and loving God still pleads with the Jews to be saved. He loved them so much that He sent His Son to die for them. Jesus Christ did not come to condemn the hard-hearted, tradition-bound Jewish nation. Christ came 'to seek and to save those who were lost' (John 3:17; Luke 19:9-10).

When Jews accept by faith the Messiah Christ, God is willing 'and able to join them to the tree again' (Romans 11:23). God will work to save the Jews in a way that is just the opposite of the way in which man works (11:24).

The prophets told how the Gentiles – many nations – would be brought into the house of God (Zechariah 2:11). Paul called this 'the mystery of Christ' which has now been revealed (11:25). And then in the same way, all Israel will be saved (11:26). But those people of Israel who are enemies of Christ are still loved by God (11:28). 'He does not change His mind about those whom He has chosen' (11:29).

Paul ends Chapter 11 with several quotations from the Old Testament writings. Paul wants his readers to know the wonderful love and purposes of God are beyond human understanding (11:33-36). God's wisdom in 'the way He deals with people is more than we can understand'.

All things come from God in heaven and serve His purpose. And all things work together for His good (11:36). Paul adds, 'May God be given the glory! Amen!'



Talk about this:

1. Why should I praise God for His wisdom (11:33)?
2. Do you see everything in your life bringing glory to God (11:36)?
3. Why is there hope that the Jews will be saved?



Bible reading: Romans 12:1–8

GIVE YOURSELVES FULLY TO GOD

Chapter 12 of Romans marks the beginning of his teaching on practical Christian living. Now for the first time since chapter 2 verse 17, he speaks to the church members at Rome as 'brothers and sisters' (12:1). We must always remember that Paul wrote mainly to believers – his brothers and sisters in the faith. He did not usually write to non-believers.

Paul pointed his readers to God's greatness and glory. He reminded them that 'God has shown you His mercy' (12:1). By this he meant that Jews and non-Jews in the New Testament church were all God's special people, loved and forgiven by Him.

Paul asks his readers to trust God fully and to yield our whole lives to His will and purpose. God has a perfect plan for everyone but we only find that plan

and walk in it as we 'offer ourselves, as living sacrifices'. This is our true worship of God, through serving Him. This is why we are called and saved.

Later in this chapter, Paul explains that serving God involves serving others in love (12:9-21).

First, Paul urges the Christians in Rome to give themselves a new start in life (12:1-3):

1. Do not live the way non-believers of this world live.
2. Be different: think differently.
3. Find out what God wants for you.
4. Prove that what He wants is right and good and pleasing and perfect.
5. Keep your bodies and your minds fixed on God.
6. Be aware of false pride and false humility.
7. Keep the faith that God has given you.

Under the Old Covenant, God's people brought animals to sacrifice. They presented the animal to God as part of their worship (Leviticus 1:1-9). Under the New Covenant, Jesus Christ, by his death on the cross, made the one final sacrifice for sin and the old system of animal sacrifice quickly came to an end. Now Paul strongly urges all believers to offer their own bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God in service to Him (12:1).

God's will is perfect for each one of us. We must seek to follow the path He has set down for us. As we do this, we discover what it is and prove that His will is best for us. God's plan for us is always good, pleasing and perfect. It may not feel that at the time! To those who give themselves fully to Him it is the only life worth living (12:2).

BELIEVERS HAVE DIFFERENT SPIRITUAL GIFTS

It is through the mercy of God that very different people have received His salvation (12:1). And it is through the grace of God that very different gifts are given to His people (12:6). Paul asks the Romans to completely change their way of thinking so that they can work together in the Church to do God's will (12:2). He encourages the believers to serve God together even though they have different backgrounds and different gifts – they are all part of the same 'body' and belong together (12:5).

Paul warns his readers: 'Do not think of yourselves better than you are, but live within the amount of faith God has given you' (12:3). We should not try to do God's work in our own strength.

Faith develops and learns to trust God fully. Any group or 'body' of believers is a small part of the whole Christian Church. And every person is a small but important part of the local body. Each part has a different purpose in the Church (12:4). 'But in Christ, we are all one body' (12:5). Each member 'belongs to all the other body parts'. Each person in the group must behave in a

way that will build up the group and bring glory to God. We are from many cultures; we are all very different; but each one needs all the others. Living 'in Christ' involves working together in love.

The Roman Christians needed to know how the Church, which is the 'body of Christ' on earth, normally worked and worshipped. Paul says that in each local church we do not compete with each other; we serve God together as important parts of the 'body of Christ' at work on earth.

By God's Spirit, He has given different gifts. (Read Paul's famous words about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14.) In Romans 12:6–8, Paul lists some of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to believers. Paul wanted all the members of the church in Rome to know that they were gifted:

1. Each gift had a different purpose (12:4).
2. All served the whole 'body of Christ' (12:5).
3. The faith and gifts we have are given by God's grace (12:6).

Paul did not see some Christians as leaders and others as workers. All must do the work God called them to do, to serve one another and not try to do another's work. He then tells us how to use some of the gifts for the good of all (12:6–8).



Talk about this:

1. What sacrifice did people present to God under the Old Covenant (Leviticus 1:1–9)?
2. What did Paul urge the new believers to present to God (12:1)? In what ways can Christians do this?
3. How can we have our lives and minds made new (12:2; Philippians 4:8)?



Think about this: Do our religious traditions hinder new believers or believers from different backgrounds and cultures? How can people who have served in the church all their life worship and work together with new believers with different backgrounds and gifts? How can we encourage gifts that God gives to both new and old believers (12:6-8)?



Romans 12:6-8. Using the gift of the Holy Spirit

- Do you have a gift of prophecy? Then use your gift well to preach! Share the knowledge of God's truth that He reveals to you. The prophet's message must always agree with the Bible.
- Do you have a gift of serving? Then use your gift well to serve others! A servant must learn to be faithful to those he serves.
- Do you have a gift of teaching? Then use your gift well to teach others! Teachers must teach God's word clearly and with authority.
- Do you have a gift of encouragement? Then advise and encourage people to live good lives! Give comfort to weaker members with divine understanding and wisdom.
- Do you have a gift of giving to those who are in need? Then serve them well by giving to them freely! There were many sick and poor people in the churches. God calls us to be kind and gentle in our ways, to help them (1 John 3:17).
- Do you have a gift of administration or leadership? Then take your gift seriously and work hard at it! Leaders should be regular in their own study and application of God's word to lead others in the right way from the front (Matthew 15:14). Administrators should lead from behind with loving care so that everything is done in detail and in good order.
- Do you have the gift of showing kindness to others? Then show them your mercy and help them willingly and cheerfully!



Bible reading: Romans 12:9–21

LIVING TO PLEASE GOD

After encouraging us to use our spiritual gifts in serving others, Paul lists some very practical matters that require personal discipline. They are about serving God and His people in love (12:9-13):

- Love must be honest and true.
- Hate what is evil; do what is good.
- Love each other deeply.
- Honour and respect others more than yourself.
- Never stop serving the Lord: never let the faith within you die out – keep it alive.
- Be joyful in your hope.
- Be patient in suffering.
- Be faithful in prayer for others.
- Share with God's people who are in need.
- Welcome others into your home.

By God's grace we can do the things that are not easy to do. Paul learned about these things from the other Apostles. He quotes words they told him from Jesus' sermon on the mountain (Matthew 5:39–42). Both Jesus and Paul spoke to their followers who suffered for their faith. Paul continues his list of how to serve others in love, using the words of Jesus (12:14-16):

- Bless those who hurt you; bless and do not curse them.
- Rejoice with those who rejoice and be sad with those who are sad. Comfort those who mourn.
- Agree with each other regarding God's truth.
- Don't be proud: have equal respect for one another. Don't think that you are better than others.
- Be willing to be a friend of people who are not considered important.

THE MIND THAT SEEKS TO PAY BACK

It is hard to believe, but some Christians try to repay what others do to them. They try to pay back good things with good things and sometimes try to pay back bad things with bad things. These are thoughts that come from their old mind, from their former lives, before Christ saved them.

In every group of believers there are differences of opinion and problems caused by different cultures – social, racial and national. This is why Paul says, 'Be careful to do what is right' (12:17). So don't make trouble in your church! 'As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone' (12:18). Don't pay back evil with evil: do what is best for others and do not seek revenge. This is the message taught by Jesus. Leave the judgement of others to God. Instead, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. He will not be able to forget your love towards him (12:20).

Even when Christians are hurt by other believers, we must not repay them with evil or think unwise words or actions. A just and holy God knows all things. We are not called to try to make all wrong things right in our own strength, but to trust our heavenly Father to look after them. This is one of the purposes of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send to work in power among all believers (John 14:16–17). For all who truly love God, His Spirit is promised to work in them and through them and with them and around them.

Treat enemies fairly and with the love of God as your source of strength. They will not fail to notice and may one day repent of their sins and accept Jesus Christ. That is what Paul calls 'overcoming evil by doing good' (12:21). So don't let evil overcome you; overcome evil with good.

This teaching helped them to know how they should behave towards the people around them – neighbours, employers and people at their work places as well as other believers.



Talk about this:

1. When we are hurt by others, we may want to hurt them. How should Christians behave towards those who persecute them (12:19-20)?
2. How should we behave towards those closest to us?



Think about this: What hinders the work and power of the Holy Spirit in churches today?



Bible reading: Romans 13:1–14

OBEY THOSE WHO ARE OVER YOU

In Chapter 12, Paul asked the Roman believers to work together in love. In Chapter 13 Paul asks them to work together in peace by obeying and respecting those in authority. Governments that are elected by the people are meant to protect and serve the citizens who live under their rule and lead the country without corruption (Zechariah 8:16-17). It is right to obey them because God appoints our leaders to rule over us (13:1,5). We must also pay the taxes that help provide the services we need and for order in our country (13:7).

Paul gave this advice: 'If you do what is right, you won't need to be afraid of your rulers. Only if you do wrong, be afraid' (Romans 13:3–4).

God is the creator of law and order. He created order and harmony in the universe. He gives laws to govern all people, whatever their position in life. They are responsible to Him and will have to explain to Him their deeds (14:12).

WHEN MEN RULE BADLY

Paul says that God sets governments in place. He allows men to rule. Christians should obey their government. Christians may be a minority in some countries, but they have God on their side! Sometimes governments write laws that make it difficult for Christians to obey; then we must pray and follow God's way.

Daniel and his friends were ordered to worship a great idol which the king had set up. They refused and were punished (Daniel 3:28). Peter was ordered not to preach about Christ. He told the leaders, 'We must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29-32) and he went out and preached the Gospel, the Good News of God's salvation plan. He was punished but carried on preaching (Acts 5:40-42).

Sometimes we must choose between obeying God and obeying our leaders. Quietly resisting an unjust law without being violent may be a good choice in the same way as Daniel, Peter and many other faithful believers.



Talk about this:

1. Who rules over you at school, at work, in your village or town? Is it hard for you to obey them?
2. How can you help your government leaders to rule justly?
3. What order of the king did Daniel's friends disobey (Daniel 3:8–15)?
4. What did Peter say to the magistrates when they told him not to preach (Acts 5:29)?
5. Is it ever right to use violence when leaders want you to go against God's laws?



Think about this: How should we boldly pray for God's blessing on our country?

PAY YOUR DEBT TO GOD AND TO OTHERS

God's word tells His people to support the ministry of the church with their tithes and gifts, and to support the government with their taxes. As citizens of Rome, Christians had to pay taxes. They knew this was right. Taxes were to be paid first, then debts (13:7). Debts are not to be left unpaid. To obey God, we must pay our debts on time.

God's love in our hearts will help us see what to do. Do not go into debt if you know you cannot repay what you plan to borrow. If you have borrowed, you have made a promise to pay it back. 'Don't wait too long to do what you have promised to God and to others' (Ecclesiastes 5:4).

The world borrows and often does not pay back. Christians must not be like the world. Do not spend more than you earn. Be a saver, not a spender, and always set money aside for God's work. Feed and clothe your family, then use what is left to help others.

'Pay everything you owe' (13:8). This means paying promptly. Paul is not against borrowing money, but he is against borrowing money to buy things we don't need, and then failing to pay back what we have borrowed.

THE LAW OF LOVE

Paul knew that Jesus said we must love God first and then our neighbours (Matthew 22:37–39). We can never repay the debt of love we owe to our Lord. The best we can do is to show His love to others. This law of love encourages the Christian to pay his taxes, his debts and to be a good citizen.

Many of the Ten Commandments apply to our relationship to others. Paul says that they all fit under a wider command which can be summed up as 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (13:9; Leviticus 19:18; James 2:8). God's love in us enables us to go beyond the legal demands of the law which include: don't

commit adultery, don't murder, don't steal, don't envy what others have. Peter and James agree with Paul (James 4:11; 1 Peter 2:17).

Paul quotes some of the Ten Commandments given to Moses as a guide for living in love and at peace with neighbours. He warns the believers that they must now live as if Christ would soon return. Paul then adds his own guidelines to holy living: no wild parties, no drunkenness, no sexual sins, no evil behaviour, no fighting or anger, no jealousy. Above all, we must learn to live in the light of Christ, not in the darkness of sin (13:12–13). Paul's teaching remains true today, nearly 2000 years later.

Old habits are difficult to overcome. Our old natures will call us to follow our old ways. So old habits must be put off, as we follow our Lord in this new way of holiness (Ephesians 4:22–32).

Deeds of darkness must be put away: superstition and witchcraft; stealing from the government by cheating on taxes; refusing to pay debts; going after another man's wife; failing to love the brethren. All these destroy a Christian's testimony.

Paul said, 'Instead, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ' (13:14). Every morning, put on Christ as you would put on a garment. Take all that God has given you in Christ. Put on Christ and be holy. 'Don't think about how to satisfy your sinful nature.' This is 'living in Christ'.



Talk about this:

1. How can Christians be 'in the world, but not of it' (John 17:13–18)?
2. What drives the Christian to selfless love for others (2 Corinthians 5:14–17)?
3. How should we treat our enemies?



Bible reading: Romans 14:1–23

STRONG AND WEAK FAITH: LIVING TOGETHER WITHOUT JUDGING

Paul speaks strongly about faith in Jesus Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles must put their hopes in Christ and not add anything to what our Saviour said or did. Paul earlier warned the Romans not to let their traditions hinder the faith of weak believers. He now speaks about what they eat and drink (14:2-3,14-21) and which holy days should be remembered (14:5-6).

In every age, in every group of God's people there are always 'differences of opinion' (14:1). Groups of people may have a difference of opinion but this must not become a cause for judging one another (Colossians 2:16). For centuries the Jews lived under the Old Covenant rules regarding 'clean' and 'unclean' foods. No Jew ate pork, but Gentiles did. Some Jewish believers ate only vegetables (14:2).

Paul wrote, 'Accept those whose faith is weak without judging them' (14:1). God is judge. He will help the weak ones to grow strong (14:4). Therefore, stop judging one another and find ways to help believers to grow in their faith (14:13).

Every Christian must grow up in his faith. Some grow up quickly and become mature in just a few years. Others take a lifetime.

Paul told the Christians that they could eat anything set before them, if it did not trouble the person who watched. If their eating troubled the other person. If the other person was troubled by their eating, they should not eat it with them. For example, if it had been offered to the local idols which caused problems for some believers.

They must not cause the person to eat and feel they had sinned. They must therefore not judge others for what they eat or don't eat. Nor must they judge others who worship God on special days more than other days (14:5).

All our actions must show our love for others and honour the Lord (14:6). 'We don't live for ourselves alone' (14:7). The Holy Spirit gives us God's grace and power to love others. This love must overflow toward others, especially in our care of the one whose faith is weak.

What we do must show we belong to the Lord (14:8). We can show this by living with our brothers and sisters in love and service to them. Our behaviour towards them is a living witness to the non-believers who are our neighbours. So Paul urged the church people to stop judging one another to avoid believers stumbling in their faith (14:13) and to be a good witness to those outside the church.

When you don't agree with another brother, don't try to make him accept your point of view. We may feel we are right and our brother is wrong. But we must be kind and accept our brother and not cause him to stumble in his faith. A caring spirit is better than always thinking you are right. If you truly care for your brother speak to him alone and then if necessary with others in the church.

HOW TO BE STRONG IN THE LORD

'The Kingdom of God is not about [the rules of] eating and drinking. It is about knowing God's righteousness, peace and joy which the Holy Spirit gives' (14:17). This is a key verse which shows that the power of the Kingdom of God is present in true believers who have the Holy Spirit at work in their lives.

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace; let us work to build each other up (14:19) by allowing the Spirit of God, whom Christ promised for all believers, to change our thoughts, words and actions.

Paul says that God is at work in other believer's lives. So don't hinder the same work of God's Spirit by offending them and forcing your own rules on

them (14:20). Instead, encourage them to set their eyes on Christ and then these other things (rules about eating and keeping holy days) will be given new understanding.

Anyone who spreads righteousness, peace, joy and unity serves Christ and is therefore a blessing to fellow believers (14:18). Faith to do this, instead of judging, will stop any feelings afterwards of doubt and guilt (14:22-23); such faith will also stop another person from stumbling in their Christian life (14:20-21).

But if everything we do does not come from faith, it is sin (14:23). This is a hard teaching to conclude an argument over what the Romans should eat and drink!

When the Bible is silent on other details of Christian living, we trust the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and actions. Praise God for His righteousness upon us and His Spirit of truth at work within us.



Talk about this:

1. How should we care for our brothers and sisters of weaker faith?
2. Is one day more holy to God than another?
3. What traditions do we keep that hinder new believers?
4. Paul said, 'Each one needs the other.' Why is this?
5. How do we cause others to stumble in their faith?
6. What 'strong views' control your life (14:15, 16, 19, 23)?
7. How would you explain 'the Kingdom of God' (14:17)?



Think about this: What is necessary for peace and joy in a church fellowship (14:1,13,17,19)?



Bible reading: Romans 15:1–4

EVEN CHRIST DID NOT PLEASE HIMSELF

Paul continues to think about the aim of setting a good example for weaker Christians. Romans 15:1 and 2 is a summary of what Paul says in the previous chapter: we should encourage those who are weak in their faith or who have no faith; we should not just be concerned with our own needs or our own ways of serving and worshipping God.

- Criticising others is not good for we, too, have faults (Matthew 7:1-5).
- We should not please ourselves in serving God.
- Encourage others in their faith to please God.

Jesus set an example for us to follow. He did not please Himself (15:3). If you want harmony in your marriage, or in your team, or in your church, this is the answer. Paul says elsewhere that we must have the same attitude that Jesus had and think like Him (Philippians 2:1–16). Christians should therefore

put the interests of others first. This quality of the Christian life begins in our hearts, then shows in our lives. The Holy Spirit will open ways for us to do this.

THE OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS GIVE US HOPE

'Everything that was written in the Old Testament was also written to teach us...' (15:4) and to give us spiritual strength and hope. This is another verse by Paul that is famous among Bible teachers. Everything in the New Testament writings was written to encourage us with patience and strength to go on in this life; they warn us and stir us up and guide us and give us hope in God. They also describe the sinful ways of men and the punishment we all deserve for disobeying God. And they point the way to freedom from sin and punishment through the love and forgiveness that God planned by punishing His Son, Jesus, in our place.

The more we know about what God did for us in the past, the more we will have hope and confidence for the future. What was written? Not just a record of history, but a record of God revealing His divine nature, purpose and provision to mankind in love and mercy.

At the present time we are called to suffer hardship, to work hard for unity, and to follow Christ 'so that with one heart and voice you may give glory to God the Father' (15:6):

- our hearts joined in fellowship with God's heart (Philippians 2:13).
- our mouths filled with His praises (Hebrews 13:15).
- our walking in step with His Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:25).
- our living in unity with our brothers and sisters (Ephesians 4:3).
- our working to bring glory to God our Father in heaven (1 Corinthians 10:31).



Talk about this:

1. 'The Old Testament was written to teach us.' What does it teach us in addition to history?
2. How can we help weaker brothers and sisters grow stronger in their faith?
3. How can we help those who are weak in their understanding of the Bible?
4. How can we help those who have little experience in serving the Lord?



Think about this: Why are verses 1 and 2 of chapter 15 so important for believers today?



Bible reading: Romans 15:5–13

ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER

Paul follows this teaching with a further plea for Christian unity (15:5) because Christ has accepted every one of us (15:7). 'Accept one another.' This will bring unity and praise to God. Don't hold a bad feeling against a brother or sister.

Paul said, 'In Christ, we who are many are one body' (12:5) and each needs the other. Members of the same body work together and get the work done. When the work of one is not done, the whole body suffers. The greatest example of unity is when many cultures meet together in harmony because they belong to Christ.

Once again, Paul quotes several verses from the Old Testament writings in order to help believers of the Jewish culture to understand God's plan in Jesus. He longed for them to strongly believe that their Messiah would enable believers of the Gentile cultures to bring glory to God (15:9-12).

Jesus became 'a servant to the Jews on behalf of God's truth... He shows us that God will keep the promises made to the founders of our [Jewish] nation' (15:8). By sending His Son into the world, God confirmed the promise made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 12:1-3; 26:3-5; 35:10-12).

These promises were made to the nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 7:7-9), but extended to all men and women in Christ. God offered the same salvation to the other nations to give Him glory and praise for His mercy and love (John 3:16-17).

God treats all men the same and Jesus asks us to do the same (John 13:12-17). To prove his statement Paul quoted Bible verses from the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms (three parts of the Old Testament writings):

- Moses said: 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people...' (Deuteronomy 32:43).
- The psalmist said: 'Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles...' (Psalm 18:49).
- The prophet said: 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, One who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in Him (Isaiah 11:10).

Isaiah's prophesy speaks of Messiah, the Christ, the 'Root of Jesse', who would rule in the hearts of Jews and Gentiles, giving all groups of believers hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2). [Jesse was the father of king David who was an ancestor of Mary the mother of Jesus (Matthew 1:6).]

In His ministry, Jesus did what the nation of Israel should have done. He lived His life for the sake of others, so that the truth of God's love might be shown to all the world. This is why Paul chose further words from the O.T. writings to prove this:

- 'I will praise You among the Gentiles...' (Psalm 18:49)
- 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people...' (Deuteronomy 32:43)
- 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles...' (Psalm 117:1)
- 'The Gentiles will hope in Him...' (Isaiah 11:10)

A BENEDICTION

In this way, Paul is again helping the Jews to realise that Gentiles are just as important and special to God as Jews. He quickly follows this message with a benediction or prayer for joy and peace and faith and hope (15:13).

Paul strongly believed that God's blessing would come to the rest of the world as they trusted the Lord Jesus. Paul prayed for this to happen to them 'by the power of the Holy Spirit' (15:13).

The believers in Rome had this hope in Christ, but they must not keep this blessing of God's peace and grace to themselves. It must overflow to others and bless them, also. This is forever God's purpose – and is at the heart of Paul's teaching.



Talk about this:

1. When Paul says 'accept one another' does he mean 'change your opinion' or 'change your attitude'?
2. How do joy, peace, faith and hope thrive in a group of believers (15:13)?



Think about this: When we desire to encourage believers, how should we pray for them (15:13)?



Bible reading: Romans 15:14–22

PAUL PREACHED TO THE GENTILES

Paul admits that he has spoken 'very boldly' to his readers (15:15). Now he reminds the church in Rome that he has been called specially to 'serve Christ Jesus among those who are not Jews' (15:16). He had preached the Good News of God about Jesus from Jerusalem to Illyricum (called Kosovo today) and now wants to visit Rome on his way to Spain (15:19,24). Messengers of God were able to move easily around the world at that time by using the Roman roads and ships. Wherever they went, they were able to use the common language of Greek.

Paul pointed to his Jewish brothers who thought they were full of goodness, complete in knowledge and able to instruct others. But many were only interested in themselves. They were unlike the apostle Paul. His heart was set on reaching out to Jews and to the Gentiles. He said this was 'because of the grace God gave me' (15:15).

God gave Paul the grace and strength to 'be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God' (15:16). The word 'minister' is the word for priest. All Christians are 'priests unto God,' and can offer His grace to others (1 Peter 2:5).

As God's missionary to the Gentile peoples, Paul rejoiced to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. He would not boast in anything he did, but only in what Christ had done in him, and for these new believers (Romans 15:18).

The Gentile believers would be his 'offering that pleases God – the Holy Spirit will make the offering holy' (15:16).

PAUL'S MINISTRY

Paul continued to explain his ministry, as follows (15:19):

- preaching the gospel by words and deeds;
- reaching all people;
- working miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:18).

'It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation' (15:20). If someone else had preached in a place, Paul went on and began a new work elsewhere. He was a pioneer. He did not often stay in any place very long. He must go on until the last person he could reach had heard the Good News of Jesus Christ. He believed that this was the spirit and meaning of the prophet's words (15:21; Isaiah 52:15).

The places Paul names are at the eastern end and the western end of Paul's journeys. He went on until he reached the limits of his strength. He travelled as far as he could go in the Roman Empire. He did everything he could do, to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. It has been said that Paul travelled about 2000 kilometres on his first missionary journey, 4500 k on his second journey and 4000 k on his third journey. And all this was often done with great hardship (2 Corinthians 11:23–33).



Bible reading: Romans 15:23–33

PAUL'S PLAN TO VISIT ROME

Paul wrote, 'Now...there is no more place for me to work in these regions...' (15:23). He had wanted to go to Rome, but his ministry to the Gentiles had kept him busy in Asia (a province of Turkey). Now churches were planted and established in these Roman provinces.

So he wrote, 'I will go to Spain and visit you [Romans] on the way' (15:28). Perhaps he planned to take some of the believers from Rome with him to Spain. This would be a good way to fulfil his missionary vision and his strong desire to teach and to preach (1 Corinthians 16:6).

He would go to Rome to help the believers there, and to seek their prayers and support. 'Join me... by praying to God for me,' he urged (15:30).

'Now... I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.' Paul was with the men who carried an offering of money to the believers in

Jerusalem (15:26; Acts 24:17). They had suffered persecution, famine and loss of jobs. They needed help. The Gentile churches wanted to share their blessings with these Jewish believers.

Paul had been warned not to go up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1–14). The chief priests and Pharisees there hated him. To them he was a traitor. His struggle, and ours, was 'not against flesh and blood,' but against evil spirit forces (Ephesians 6:12). These evil forces would use the traditional Jerusalem Jews to stop his ministry (Acts 21:10–14,28; 26:19–23).

In all these things, Paul turned to 'the God of peace' and comfort (15:33; 2 Corinthians 1:3). He follows this with another prayer for the Roman believers (15:33).



Talk about this:

1. What was Paul's chief desire and aim in life? What part did church planting play in Paul's ministry?
2. How was he able to reach and communicate with so many people?
3. What did he say to gain prayer support and encouragement (15:30)?



Think about this: Paul used Roman roads, ships and the Greek language. What communication methods of today enable us to reach and to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ and preach to those who do not know Him personally?



Bible reading: Romans 16:1–16

PAUL SENDS FINAL GREETINGS

Paul wrote to the believers in Rome about a church leader named Phoebe. She was from the church at Cenchrea, a port near Corinth. She had been very helpful to the believers and Paul asked the Christians in Rome to give her 'any help she may need' (16:2).

Paul sends greetings to a large number of believers. No one was left in doubt of his popularity and desire to visit Rome.

- To Priscilla and Aquila, 'and the church that meets in their house' (16:3-5).
- To 'my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia' (16:5).
- To Mary, 'who worked very hard for you' (16:6).
- To Andronicus and Junia, 'my relatives who were in prison with me' (16:7).
- To Ampliatus, Urbanus, Stachys and Apelles – all common Roman names. Some were 'fellow workers' in the early Christian Church (16:9).
- To Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis, 'women who worked very hard in the Lord' (16:12–13).

- To Rufus, who received special commendation 'and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too' (16:13).

Many others are named (16:14-15). Their names are not found anywhere else in the New Testament. Paul tells them to 'greet one another with a holy kiss,' a common form of greeting at that time (16:16).

We know that some of these people met without a pastor or overseer. They studied the Old Testament writings, read the letters of Paul and the other Apostles, and shared the teachings of Christ passed down by His followers. Later, the churches had copies to read of the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, plus Luke's unfinished account of the Acts of the Apostles.



Bible reading: Romans 16:17–20

FALSE PROPHETS AND WRONG WAYS

At this point the tone of the letter changes. Now Paul shows his authority. After sending greetings from the churches where he preached, Paul warns the believers to keep away from false teachers who had risen up and divided the church (16:17).

Men who do not let the Holy Spirit work through them, work in their own strength. They put themselves and their own ideas first in front of others. These ideas were against the teaching of Paul, against the truth of God and had caused division in the church.

God gave us appetites for food, sleep and sex which are necessary to maintain life on earth in the way He planned from the beginning. These appetites are good, but they must be controlled. If not, they lead to 'sins of the flesh'. Paul often named these sins and warned believers to confess them and seek God's help and forgiveness (1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Ephesians 4:19-22; Colossians 3:5,8).

However, Paul also says how pleased he is with the Roman believers. He tells them what he wants them to do and not to do (16:18):

- He rejoices over their obedience to God – giving the church a good reputation in the region.
- He asks them to be wise about what is good – inviting the Holy Spirit to give wisdom about enjoying God's wonderful creation and our appetite for pleasure, so they do not fall away from the faith and take others with them.
- He asks them to have nothing to do with what is evil - avoiding people who only serve or please themselves.

These are sound guidelines for all believers to follow and are a good way to encourage brothers and sisters.

THE WORK OF SATAN IS UNDER GOD'S CONTROL

Paul knew it was also important to remind his readers that God has control over Satan. 'The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet' (16:20). Jesus the Messiah (Christ), defeated Satan and destroyed Satan's power to hold people in sin. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus overcame Satan. Now we share in Christ's victory (Hebrews 2:14–15).

Satan deceives those who have not been taught the truth of God. Those who hold fast to the gospel overcome:

- the attacks of the wicked one (Matthew 6:13; Ephesians 6:11);
- the false prophets and spirits sent out by Satan (1 John 4:1–4);
- the demons at work in the world (Luke 9:1–2).

When Jesus comes again, the victory will be complete. He will come soon. But for now, Satan must be 'under your feet' (16:20).



Talk about this:

1. Do you say good things about the people you know (16:1-15)?
2. How can you know who is a false teacher (16:17-18)?
3. What guidelines for the worldwide fellowship of believers are given by Paul (16:16,19)?
4. How can a Christian stand against Satan (Ephesians 6:10–18)?



Think about this: How do you teach believers that their God-given appetite or desire for food, drink, sleep and sex are necessary things which must be controlled?



Bible reading: Romans 16:20–27

A FINAL BENEDICTION

Paul commences his final blessing in verse 20: 'May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.' He then adds greetings from eight co-workers and church leaders including his scribe, Tertius, who wrote down what Paul said. At this point Tertius added his own greeting.

Paul concludes: 'God is able to strengthen your faith because of the good news I preach. It is the message about Jesus Christ. It is . . . a mystery that was hidden for a very long time. The mystery has now been made known which fulfil the writings of the prophets. The eternal God commanded that it be known. He wanted all nations to believe and to obey Him. May our only wise God receive glory forever through Jesus Christ. Amen' (16:25-27).

Paul fears that false teachers will make them stumble. Only the truth of God – the proclaiming of Jesus Christ – will make them grow strong and walk safely in faith.

This Gospel or Good News is from the 'eternal God' and must be preached so that 'disciples are made in all nations' (Matthew 28:19). The whole world must know of God's saving grace in Christ for all who believe.

What God's prophets had said, long ago, was revealed and fully understood by Paul and the Apostles (Galatians 1:12). The prophets said in the Old Testament writings that the Christ would come and die to save sinners (John 1:29). All that they had said about the coming Messiah had taken place, to the glory of God the Father, 'the only wise God,' the only intelligent Divine Being, the Creator who deserves our worship.

This was so that all nations might believe and obey Him. God's love and salvation in Jesus is for all men and women of every nation and tribe. Paul spent his life taking that message across the known world. He was guided to do this by the power of the Holy Spirit after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:13-23).



Think about this: What did Paul understand from the Old Testament writings about faith in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah (16:25-26)?

CONCLUSIONS

Within 50 years of the death and resurrection of Jesus, His disciples wrote the first four books of the New Testament to describe His teaching and healing ministry whilst on earth. The book of Acts was also written to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in creating the early Christian Church through His apostles. The letters of the apostles help us to understand more about the early church, its teachings and the errors that needed to be put right. These New Testament writings were added to the Old Testament writings in the fourth century AD to create the Bible we have today.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul longs for his fellow Jewish believers to have the mind of Christ and put aside their religious traditions and love of power. He wanted everyone to learn to do this for the sake of total unity of understanding God's truth in the church of believers who come from a variety of cultures and experiences.

It took over 300 years before the church leaders accepted the writings of Paul in the New Testament part of the Bible. In that time, many other traditions were established which Paul would have criticised. We must always be careful that our religious habits do not hinder the work of the Good News of Jesus Christ nor prevent us from knowing God, living 'in Christ' and working in the full power of His Holy Spirit. This is why it is important to read and to study the original teachings of Jesus and Paul and the other apostles and prayerfully apply them in our lives each day – guided by and in the power of the Spirit.

Paul began his letter to the Roman church with these words: 'You, too, are among those who belong to Christ' (1:7). That means ALL his readers, then

and now. May we ALL experience anew the love for mission that Paul had for preaching the Good News and serving new and weak believers at home and abroad.

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