

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Purest Gospel

*Expanded Edition · A Teaching Companion for the Adult
Class · Twenty-Eight Sessions on Romans*

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Part One — How This Guide Works

This is a teaching companion to *The Purest Gospel: A Confessional Lutheran Exposition of Romans*. It is not a standalone study. It assumes the book is in the leader's hands — and ideally in the hands of the class — and it equips a teacher to lead a group *through* the commentary's argument, one section at a time. Each session distills a passage into a lecture of thirty to forty minutes followed by guided discussion. The aim is to put the real thing into the hands of an ordinary teacher: a confessional layperson of intelligence and goodwill, with no Greek and no seminary training required.

This is the expanded edition. It lays out the letter across twenty-eight sessions — a full Sunday-school year — by following the book's natural section breaks, splitting the longer movements (II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XIII, and XIV) into two or three sessions each. A briefer fourteen-session edition, one session per movement, exists for a single term; this edition trades that compression for room to breathe, letting each pericope have its own evening.

The One Discipline That Governs Everything

Everything here serves a single discipline, and a leader who grasps only this has grasped the essential thing: **every session must distinguish the word that accuses from the word that gives, and every session must end in the Gospel.**

This is not a stylistic preference; it is the only way to teach Romans without breaking it. The besetting temptation of every Bible class is to turn the text into a program of moral improvement — to ask, of every passage, “so what should I do differently this week?” Applied to Romans 1 through 11, that instinct is fatal, because those chapters are almost entirely *indicative*: they announce what God has done, not what we must do. The imperatives do not begin in earnest until chapter 12, and even there they are chained to the indicative that grounds them — *by the mercies of God, therefore present yourselves*. A teacher who imports “try harder” into the doctrinal chapters has not applied the text; he has contradicted it.

So the rule is firm: let the Law do its proper work, and let the Gospel do its proper work, and do not confuse their jobs. The Law's work is to expose sin and silence every claim of self-righteousness — to kill. The Gospel's work is to give Christ and his righteousness freely to those the Law has killed — to make alive. Real growth and real obedience do follow, and the Confessions affirm the Law's continuing use in guiding the Christian; but obedience follows *from* the Gospel as fruit, never *toward* the Gospel as price. The watchword throughout is **become what you are**, never *earn what you lack*. You will sometimes

feel the class wants a to-do list to take home. The most pastoral thing you can do is decline to give one, and send them home with a gift instead.

The Anatomy of a Session

Every session follows the same shape, so you learn the rhythm once and teach it twenty-eight times:

- **The One Thing** — a single sentence; if the class forgets all else, this is what they carry out the door.
- **Law and Gospel in This Text** — your bearing: where the accusing word is, where the gifting word is, how the passage moves from one to the other. Read only this and you have the essential orientation.
- **Teaching Outline** — three or four beats, keyed to the argument, deliverable aloud, each with its anchor verse.
- **The Greek Worth Surfacing** — the one or two terms, transliterated and glossed in plain words, that genuinely illuminate. Light, not display.
- **Opening** — a question or framing to begin, usually surfacing an assumption the text will overturn.
- **Discussion Questions** — graduated from observation to doctrine to the heart, each with a teacher's note, all gospel-shaped.
- **The Hard Question** — the objection your sharpest member will raise, with the confessional answer and a pointer to the excursus that arms you.
- **Misreadings to Head Off** — the common distortions, named in advance.
- **The Close** — a Gospel landing, nearly readable aloud, sealed with an apt hymn.

Using the Excursuses

The nine excurses in the commentary are **teacher equipment, not lay sessions**. A class will bog down if marched through the New Perspective or the grammar of predestination; but you should read the relevant excursus before the session it serves, because that is where the hard questions get their real answers. Each session's "Hard Question" points you to the excursus that arms you for it. Treat the excurses as your pre-game film, and bring to class only what the class can use.

A final word about yourself: you are a beggar telling other beggars where bread is found. Teach the text, not yourself; let the gift be the point; do not manufacture emotion or guilt, and do not send the class home leaning on their own resolve. Trust the Word to do its own

work. It does not need your enthusiasm to make it powerful, and it will not fail for lack of your eloquence. Your job is to get out of its way.

The Course at a Glance

#	Session	Passage	The One Thing
1	Movement I	1:1–17	The gospel is God's saving power, revealing a righteousness from God received by faith.
2	Movement II.1	1:18–32	God's wrath is revealed as he gives a truth-suppressing race over to the ruin it chose.
3	Movement II.2	2:1–29	The moralist who judges others stands equally condemned; God weighs the heart, not the badge.
4	Movement II.3	3:1–20	Jew and Gentile alike are under sin; every mouth is stopped; no one is justified by works.
5	Movement III.1	3:21–31	But now, apart from law, God is both just and the justifier of the ungodly in Christ.
6	Movement III.2	4:1–25	God justifies the ungodly, crediting Christ's righteousness to all who believe, as he did Abraham.
7	Movement IV.1	5:1–11	Justified, we have peace with God now, a hope proven by Christ's death for his enemies.
8	Movement IV.2	5:12–21	As all fell in Adam, so in Christ the gift abounds; grace reigns to eternal life.
9	Movement V.1	6:1–14	Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, reckon yourselves dead to sin and alive to God.
10	Movement V.2	6:15–23	You will serve some master; grace has made you a slave of God, whose gift is eternal life.
11	Movement VI.1	7:1–13	The Law is holy and good; it exposes the sin it cannot cure, and drives us to Christ.
12	Movement VI.2	7:14–25	The believer wars with indwelling sin — the wretched man who, fighting, gives thanks.
13	Movement VII.1	8:1–11	There is now no condemnation for those in Christ; the Spirit of life sets us free.
14	Movement VII.2	8:12–27	The Spirit makes us God's children who cry "Abba," heirs who groan toward glory.
15	Movement VII.3	8:28–39	The golden chain cannot be broken; nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ.

#	Session	Passage	The One Thing
16	Movement VIII.1	9:1–18	God's word has not failed; salvation rests on his mercy, not human will or effort.
17	Movement VIII.2	9:19–29	The potter has every right to show mercy; he preserves a remnant from Jew and Gentile.
18	Movement IX.1	9:30– 10:13	Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness; the word is near — believe and confess.
19	Movement IX.2	10:14–21	Faith comes by hearing the preached word; so the gospel must be sent and proclaimed.
20	Movement X.1	11:1–24	A remnant stands by grace; Gentiles, grafted into Israel's tree, must not boast.
21	Movement X.2	11:25–36	God's mercy will triumph for the nations and for Israel — and Paul falls into worship.
22	Movement XI.1	12:1–8	By the mercies of God, present yourselves a living sacrifice; be transformed, and serve.
23	Movement XI.2	12:9–21	The life that flows from mercy is genuine love — blessing enemies, overcoming evil with good.
24	Movement XII	13:1–14	Honor the civil authorities within their bounds; love fulfills the law; wake, the day is near.
25	Movement XIII.1	14:1–23	Welcome the weak; in open matters, never let your liberty wound a conscience Christ died for.
26	Movement XIII.2	15:1–13	Bear with the weak as Christ bore with you; welcome one another as Christ welcomed you.
27	Movement XIV.1	15:14–33	The gospel is centrifugal, pressing to the nations where Christ is not yet named.
28	Movement XIV.2	16:1–27	The purest gospel makes a named, embodied people — to the glory of the only wise God.

Part Two — The Twenty-Eight Sessions

Each session is built for a lecture of thirty to forty minutes, followed by discussion. Prepare by reading the corresponding section of the commentary, plus any excursus named under “The Hard Question.”

Session 1 — Movement I: The Gospel of God

Romans 1:1–17

Preparing to teach: read Movement I, and skim the Volume One front matter for Luther's tower. This is the overture: every theme of the letter is sounded here in miniature. Teach the thesis (1:16–17) and let the rest point to it.

The One Thing

The gospel is not advice about how to climb to God; it is the announcement that God has come down — his saving power for everyone who believes, revealing a righteousness that is his gift, received by faith from first to last.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is almost pure Gospel-announcement, and your task is to let the class hear *gospel* as **good news**, not good advice. The word means the herald's announcement of a victory already won. The Law stands just offstage — verse 18 will open with wrath, and the thesis of 1:16–17 blazes against that dark backdrop — but here the note is triumphant: a righteousness *from* God, revealed and given, received by faith. Let the overture sound bright; the shadows come soon enough.

Teaching Outline

1. The gospel and its pedigree (1:1–7). Paul is set apart for a gospel that is not new — *promised beforehand through the prophets* — and is *concerning his Son*, descended from David and *declared* Son of God in power by the resurrection. Note: *declared*, openly shown to be what he always was — not *made* the Son. The gospel is the announcement of a person.

2. Paul's eagerness and confidence (1:8–15). He longs to come to Rome, obligated to Greek and barbarian alike, *eager* to preach. The gospel is for everyone, and the apostle is not embarrassed by it.

3. The thesis, part one (1:16). *I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes* — Jew first, then Greek. Not a wise teaching: the power of God, which actually saves.

4. The thesis, part two (1:17). *In it the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* The verse that broke open the Reformation: righteousness *revealed* and *received by faith*, God's gift.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **euangelion** — “gospel,” literally *good news*. In the ancient world, the word for a royal herald’s announcement: a battle won, a king enthroned. News of something *done*, not instructions for something to do. Teach this and the class stops hearing “gospel” as a synonym for “religion.”
- **dikaiosynē theou** — “the righteousness of God.” Here, a righteousness that comes *from* God and is given to faith — not the standard by which he condemns, but the gift by which he saves. (Full case in Excursus B.)

Opening

“When you hear the word *gospel*, what comes to mind? A set of rules? A way of life? A feeling you’re supposed to have? Tonight Paul tells us it’s none of those. It’s news — and the difference between news and advice is the difference between Christianity and every other religion on earth.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul says he is *not ashamed* of the gospel. Why might someone be tempted to be ashamed of it — then and now?” *Steer toward: a crucified Savior, salvation as a free gift to the undeserving, the offense of grace. Paul’s confidence is in the gospel’s power, not himself.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Paul calls the gospel the *power* of God for salvation — not a *teaching* about salvation. What difference does that make?” *Steer toward: the gospel does something when preached; it is the instrument God uses to save, not merely information about a salvation accomplished elsewhere. This sets up the means of grace.*
3. **The heart.** “‘The righteousness of God is revealed... from faith for faith.’ If the righteousness you need is *revealed and given* rather than *achieved* — how does that land on a week you’ve failed God badly?” *Steer toward: assurance. The righteousness that saves you was never your production, so your failures cannot revoke it. Resist any drift toward “try to be more righteous.” The point is the gift.*

The Hard Question

“‘The righteous shall live by faith’ (1:17). What does it even mean — *the righteous* person who *lives by faith*, or the one who is *righteous-by-faith* who *shall live*? Why hang a whole letter on one line from Habakkuk?”

The answer. Both readings are true, and Paul uses the verse as the table of contents for everything that follows. Read it *the one who is righteous-by-faith*, and it announces justification — chapters 1 through 4. Read it *shall live by faith*, and it announces the new life faith receives — chapters 5 through 8. Habakkuk's single line holds the whole letter in seed. Paul is not being vague; he is being comprehensive. (See *Excursus B* and the *Volume One front matter*.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Gospel as advice or rules.** It is *news* — something done, to be believed, not a program to attempt.
- **“Not ashamed” as personal pluck.** Paul's boldness rests in the gospel's power, not his nerve.
- **“To the Jew first” as ethnic favoritism.** It marks the historical order of the gospel's going, not a higher tier of salvation; the same gospel saves Jew and Greek by the same faith.

The Close

You did not come here to be handed a better set of instructions. You came to hear news — that God has not waited at the top of a ladder for you to climb, but has come all the way down in his Son, and now sends a word with power to save everyone who simply believes it. The righteousness you need is not a project assigned to you; it is a gift revealed to you, from faith to faith, yours by trusting. That is the gospel Paul was not ashamed of, and it is the gospel still.

Suggested closing hymn: “Salvation unto Us Has Come” (Speratus) — the great Reformation hymn of justification by grace through faith, the thesis of Romans set to music.

Session 2 — Movement II.1: The Wrath Revealed

Romans 1:18–32

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement II. This session begins the letter's long indictment, and its job is to wound, not to comfort. Resist the urge to soften it — but anchor the class in the truth that this diagnosis is the bad news that makes the good news good.

The One Thing

God's wrath is revealed against a race that knew him and would not honor him; we exchanged his glory for idols of our own making, and in judgment God "gave us over" to the ruin we insisted on.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is the Law in its accusing office, and there is almost no Gospel here — by design. Your task is to let the diagnosis land honestly. Two things to keep clear: first, the wrath here is not only future fire but a present *handing over* — God's judgment is, in part, God letting us have exactly what we demand. Second, the passage is a mirror for *everyone*, not a weapon against one group; its catalog of sin runs from idolatry all the way down to gossip, envy, and disobedience to parents, so that no reader escapes. End the session honestly: this is the floor of the human condition, and there is a rescue coming — but not tonight. Tonight, the truth.

Teaching Outline

1. The suppression of the truth (1:18–23). God's wrath is revealed against those who *suppress the truth*. What can be known of God is plain — his eternal power and divine nature, seen in what he made — so they are *without excuse*. They knew God but did not honor him; they *exchanged* his glory for images.

2. The handing over (1:24–27). Three times the dread refrain: God *gave them over* — to impurity, to dishonorable passions. Note: this is not God causing sin but God removing restraint, letting the exchange of the Creator for the creature work itself out in the body.

3. The debased mind and the long list (1:28–32). Because they did not see fit to acknowledge God, he gave them up to a debased mind — and then the catalog: not only the dra-

matic sins but envy, gossip, slander, boasting, disobedience to parents. The list is built so that no one closes the book feeling innocent.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **paredōken** — “he gave them over” (1:24, 26, 28), the grim refrain of the passage. It is a courtroom handing-over, an act of judgment: God’s wrath expressed not (yet) as fire but as *abandonment* — letting sinners have the sin they insist on, until the sin becomes its own punishment.
- **ēllaxan / metēllaxan** — “they exchanged” (1:23, 25, 26). The verb of the whole tragedy: we *traded* the glory of God for images, the truth for a lie. Sin, at root, is a bad exchange.

Opening

“We picture God’s wrath as a thunderbolt from the sky. Paul describes something quieter and far more terrifying: God’s wrath is, in part, God *letting us have exactly what we insist on*. Three times in this passage he says God ‘gave them over.’ Tonight we look at what it means when God stops saying no.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul says the truth about God is ‘plain’ and people are ‘without excuse’ (1:19–20). What can be known of God apart from the Bible, according to Paul — and what can’t?” *Steer toward: creation reveals God’s power and divinity, enough to leave us accountable, but not enough to save — it shows there is a God to be honored, which we suppress. Natural revelation condemns; it does not rescue.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Three times: ‘God gave them over.’ Is God *causing* their sin? What kind of judgment is this?” *Steer toward: judicial abandonment, not divine authorship of sin. God removes the restraints and lets sin run to its own ruin — which is itself a form of wrath. The most frightening thing God can do to a rebel is leave him to his rebellion.*
3. **The heart.** “The list in verses 29–31 ends with envy, gossip, pride, disobedience to parents — sins that fill respectable churches. Why does Paul end his catalog of pagan depravity *there*?” *Steer toward: so no reader escapes. The passage is a mirror, not a weapon for pointing across town. The respectable sinner is included by design — which is exactly where chapter 2 will press.*

The Hard Question

“Doesn’t this passage just confirm that God causes some people to sin — and then punishes them for it? How is that just?”

The answer. Look carefully at *gave them over*. God does not inject the sin; he withdraws the restraint. The people in view *already* suppressed the truth, *already* exchanged God’s glory for idols — and God’s judgment is to stop holding them back from the consequences of what they have chosen. This is everywhere in Scripture: the most terrible sentence God passes on a hardened rebel is to let him have his rebellion. It is fully just, because the sin is theirs; and it is genuinely wrath, because to be handed over to yourself is ruin. The mercy of God is that he does *not* always give us over — and that, in the gospel, he reverses the exchange entirely. (See *Movement II*.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **“God gave them over” as God authoring sin.** It is abandonment to chosen sin, not the cause of it.
- **The vice list as a weapon against one group.** Paul builds it to indict *every* reader; it climaxes in respectable sins precisely to close that escape hatch. Read it as a mirror, not a missile.
- **Natural revelation as a road to salvation.** Creation reveals enough of God to leave us without excuse, never enough to save; it convicts, it does not convert.

The Close

This is a hard place to end an evening, and Scripture means it to be. Paul is not describing someone else — the lurid pagan across the centuries — but the human heart as such, which knows God and will not honor him, and trades his glory for whatever idol is nearest. Left to ourselves, this is the floor we sink to, and the most fearful judgment is simply God letting us go. Do not flinch from that tonight; let it be true. For the whole point of telling the truth this plainly is that the rescue, when it comes, will be unmistakable — and it is coming. The God who gives rebels over to their ruin is the same God who, in his Son, will reverse the exchange and give us his glory instead.

Suggested closing hymn: “Lord, to Thee I Make Confession” (Franck) — the honest confession of a heart that has traded God’s glory away, casting itself on mercy.

Session 3 — Movement II.2: No One Is Exempt

Romans 2:1–29

Preparing to teach: read the second part of Movement II. The danger this week is that the class will hear chapter 1 as being about “those people.” Chapter 2 springs the trap on the respectable, religious reader — which is the class itself. Teach it to humble, gently and without exception.

The One Thing

The moral, religious person who condemns others stands condemned by the same standard; God shows no partiality and weighs the heart, not the badge — so that the truest “circumcision” is inward, the work of the Spirit, not an outward mark we can boast of.

Law and Gospel in This Text

Still the Law, still its accusing office — but now turned on the best people in the room. Chapter 1 indicted the obvious sinner; chapter 2 indicts the *judge* of the obvious sinner. The Gospel is not yet here, but the Law is doing essential Gospel-preparation: it is stripping the respectable of the one defense they still cling to — *at least I’m not like them*. Your job is to let that last refuge fall. The good news hidden in the structure is that God’s impartiality means there is no inside track to lose and no class of person beyond mercy’s reach; but that comfort waits. Tonight, the mirror turns toward the pew.

Teaching Outline

1. The judge in the dock (2:1–11). *You have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges — for you do the same things. God’s judgment is according to truth, according to works, and without partiality.* The very act of condemning others convicts the condemner.

2. The law and the conscience (2:12–16). All who sin will be judged — those under the law by the law, those without it by the law written on the heart, their conscience accusing or excusing. No one is judged by a standard they never had; everyone falls short of the standard they did.

3. The Jew and the law (2:17–24). You who rely on the law and boast in God — do you keep what you teach? The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles *because of you*. Possessing the law is not keeping it.

4. True circumcision (2:25–29). Circumcision profits only with obedience; the real Jew is one inwardly, *circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit* — whose praise is from God, not man. The outward badge saves no one.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **krinō / katakrinō** — “to judge” and “to condemn.” Paul’s bitter irony: in the act of judging the sinner, the moralist *condemns himself* (2:1), because he does the same things. The pointing finger has three fingers pointing back.
- **peritomē kardias** — “circumcision of the heart” (2:29). The real mark of belonging to God is not an outward sign one can display but an inward reality the Spirit works. Religion you can show off is not yet religion of the heart.

Opening

“The most dangerous person in the book of Romans is not the pagan idolater of chapter 1. It is the churchgoing moralist of chapter 2 — the one who read last week’s passage and felt *good* about himself. Tonight Paul turns the spotlight off the sinner across town and onto the sinner in the pew. Onto us.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Verse 1 says the one who judges ‘condemns himself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.’ How does judging others actually expose the judge?” *Steer toward: the standard you apply to others is the standard you’ve just acknowledged — and then failed. To condemn another’s sin is to confess you know the law you also break. Self-righteousness is self-incriminating.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Paul says real circumcision is ‘of the heart, by the Spirit’ (2:29), not an outward mark. What are the outward ‘badges’ we trust in today instead of the heart?” *Steer toward: church membership, baptism treated as a talisman, doctrinal correctness worn as a trophy, family heritage, moral reputation. Good things, all — but none of them is the inward work of the Spirit, and none can be boasted of before God.*
3. **The heart.** “Where do you catch yourself feeling safe before God because you’re ‘not like’ someone else? What happens to that safety when chapter 2 takes the comparison away?” *Steer toward: surfacing the comparative righteousness we all run on, and letting it fall. When the only standard is God’s and the only comparison is gone, every mouth — including the respectable one — is stopped. That is exactly where the gospel can finally reach us.*

The Hard Question

“Romans 2:13 says ‘the doers of the law will be justified.’ And 2:6 — God ‘will render to each according to his works.’ Doesn’t Romans teach a final judgment by works, right here?”

The answer. Paul states the Law’s standard truly: God’s judgment is impartial and according to works, and a perfect doer of the law *would* be justified. He says this not to open a road but to close one — to show that, measured by *doing*, every mouth is stopped (which 3:19–20 will make explicit). The standard is real; our keeping of it is not. The works the final judgment looks for are the works no fallen person produces — which is precisely why a righteousness *apart from* the law had to be revealed (3:21). The standard convicts; it does not save. (See *Excursus A and Movement II*.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **2:13 as a second road to salvation.** It states the Law’s standard to convict; 3:20 fore-closes works as a way of justification.
- **The Gentiles “who do the law” (2:14–15) as natural-law salvation.** Their conscience proves they *have* a standard and accuses them by it; it does not save them. The point is universal accountability, not a pagan back door.
- **“Circumcision of the heart” as something we achieve.** It is the Spirit’s work (2:29), not a sincerity we generate. Even the inward mark is gift.

The Close

If you walked in tonight quietly confident that you are one of the good ones, Paul has spent this hour taking that confidence apart — not to crush you for sport, but to do you the deepest kindness a teacher can. As long as you are comparing yourself to the sinner across town, you will never need a Savior; you will only need to keep winning the comparison. So God takes the comparison away. He weighs the heart, not the badge, and he shows no partiality — which means your church membership and your clean reputation and your correct opinions, good as they are, cannot stand in that scale. That is hard news. But it is the only news that empties our hands enough to receive what is coming. The respectable and the dissolute kneel at the same rail, and the same blood is poured out for both.

Suggested closing hymn: “Today Your Mercy Calls Us” (Allen) — mercy held out precisely to the one who thought he stood, calling the self-secure home.

Session 4 — Movement II.3: Every Mouth Stopped

Romans 3:1–20

Preparing to teach: read the third part of Movement II, and skim Excursus A on the works of the law. This is the bottom of the pit — the verdict that makes the gospel necessary. Let the Law finish its work here; next week is the dawn.

The One Thing

Jew and Gentile alike are under sin; the whole world is accountable to God; and by works of the law no one will be justified — because the law was never given to save, but to give the knowledge of sin.

Law and Gospel in This Text

The Law reaches its verdict here, and the verdict is total: *none is righteous, no, not one*. This is the deepest point of the indictment, gathered from Israel's own Scriptures so that no one can call it Paul's private pessimism. Let the silence of 3:19 — *every mouth stopped* — actually fall on the class. Do not rush to relieve it. The one relief you may offer is to point, at the very end, to the door this verdict opens: the law brings the knowledge of sin (3:20) precisely so that we will look outside the law, outside ourselves, for a righteousness we cannot produce. The bottom of the pit is where the rescue rope is finally grasped.

Teaching Outline

1. The objections answered (3:1–8). What advantage has the Jew? Much — the oracles of God. But Israel's unfaithfulness does not nullify God's faithfulness; God remains true though every man a liar. And no, we may not “do evil that good may come.”

2. The universal verdict (3:9–18). Are we any better? No — *all are under sin*. Then the catena from the Psalms and Isaiah: *none is righteous... no one seeks for God... their throat is an open grave... there is no fear of God before their eyes*. From throat to feet to eyes, the whole person is indicted.

3. The purpose of the law (3:19–20). Whatever the law says, it says *to those under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world held accountable*. And the conclusion: *by works of the law no human being will be justified, for through the law comes knowledge of sin*.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **hyph' hamartian** — “under sin” (3:9). Not merely *sinner*s who commit sins, but *under* sin — beneath its power, in its grip, as under a tyrant. The problem is not just a tally of wrong acts but a captivity.
- **epignōsis hamartias** — “knowledge of sin” (3:20). The law’s purpose stated outright: it is a diagnostic instrument. It cannot heal; it can only show you, with terrible clarity, that you are sick. That is its gift and its limit.

Opening

“We have reached the bottom of the pit. For two chapters Paul has been gathering the human race into a single courtroom — pagan and Jew, dissolute and respectable — and tonight he reads the verdict. He reads it not in his own words but in theirs, from their own Scriptures, so no one can say the judge was biased.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “The catena in verses 10–18 moves through the body — throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet, eyes. Why might Paul pile up so many quotations, and why map them onto the whole body?” *Steer toward: to show the totality of the problem — not one faculty corrupted but the whole person. This isn’t a few bad habits to fix; it’s a condition that reaches everywhere. Hence “works” can’t cure it.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Verse 20: ‘through the law comes knowledge of sin.’ If the law can’t make us righteous, what is it actually for?” *Steer toward: to expose, to diagnose, to stop the mouth — to bring us to the end of self-confidence so we’ll look elsewhere for righteousness. The law is the mirror, not the cure. Knowing that keeps us from misusing it.*
3. **The heart.** “What does it feel like to have your mouth ‘stopped’ before God — to have no defense left? Why might that silence be the most hopeful moment in the letter so far?” *Steer toward: the silenced sinner is exactly the one the gospel is for. As long as we’re still arguing our case, we don’t need a Savior. The end of our defense is the beginning of grace. Point ahead to “But now.”*

The Hard Question

“If ‘no one seeks for God’ (3:11), what about all the people who clearly *are* searching — the spiritually hungry in every religion, the sincere seekers? Isn’t Paul overstating it?”

The answer. There is a real human religiosity — people search constantly. But Paul's point is *what* they seek and *on whose terms*. Left to ourselves, we seek a god of our own devising, a god who will ratify us, a manageable god — which is to say, we flee the true and living God even as we reach for the divine. The very impulse to climb to God on our own terms is the problem, not the solution. True seeking after the true God — repentant, self-despairing, taking him as he is — is itself the Spirit's gift, the first sign that grace is already at work. So Paul is not denying religion; he is denying that our native search ever finds the God who must find us. (*See Movement II and Excursus A.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **“No one seeks God” as denying all human religiosity.** It denies *saving* search on God's terms; idolatry is search in the wrong direction.
- **The catena as rhetorical exaggeration.** Paul presents it as Scripture's settled verdict, not hyperbole; the totality is the point.
- **The law as something to be kept here.** In this passage its stated job is *knowledge of sin* — to stop the mouth, not to offer a ladder.

The Close

Hear the verdict, and do not look away from it: *none is righteous, no, not one*. Not the pagan, not the moralist, not the lifelong churchgoer — not one. Every mouth is stopped, every defense spent, the whole world standing silent and accountable before God. This is as low as the letter goes, and it is supposed to be, because a person who still has something to say for himself has not yet understood that he needs a Savior at all. But notice what the silence is *for*: the law stops your mouth so that, with nothing left to plead, you will finally turn from yourself to look for a righteousness you could never produce. You are standing tonight at the very threshold of the gospel — and the next word in Romans, spoken to people exactly this empty-handed, is *But now*.

Suggested closing hymn: “From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee” (Luther, on Psalm 130) — the cry from the bottom of the pit that ends, against all odds, in hope of redemption.

Session 5 — Movement III.1: Just and Justifier

Romans 3:21–31

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement III, and skim Excursus B (the righteousness of God). This is the doctrinal summit of the whole letter. Teach it slowly; do not rush past the Gospel to find something “practical.” The application of justification is faith, assurance, and worship.

The One Thing

At the cross God found the way to be both *just* and *the justifier* of the ungodly: he punished sin fully in Christ, and now declares righteous, as a free gift, everyone who believes — apart from the law, apart from works, apart from boasting.

Law and Gospel in This Text

After the long night of the indictment comes the two-word dawn: **“But now”** (3:21). This is the most relentlessly Gospel passage in the letter, and your first task is to let the relief land — the exhale after the held breath of chapter 3. Where the Law appears here, it appears only to be excluded: works that cannot justify, boasting that is shut out. The movement is from a Law that closed every door to a Gospel that opens the only one — Christ, received by faith. Resist all session long the pull to make this “practical” in the moralist’s sense. There is almost no imperative here, and that is the point.

Teaching Outline

1. “But now” — the pivot (3:21–22). *Now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law — through faith in Jesus Christ, for all who believe, without distinction. Not a righteousness we climb to, but one revealed and given.*

2. The free gift and its costly ground (3:23–25). *All have sinned — so the gift must be free, justified by his grace as a gift. But free to us is not cheap: the ground is the redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood. Hold these together — free to us, costly to him.*

3. Just and justifier — the summit (3:26). *God did it that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. A judge who acquits the guilty without satisfaction is not just. At the cross God punishes sin in full — in Christ — so that he can justly justify the ungodly.*

4. Boasting excluded (3:27–31). Where is boasting? *Excluded* — by the law of faith. One is justified by faith *apart from works of the law*. God is God of Jew and Gentile alike, justifying both by faith. And this does not overthrow the law but upholds it.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **dikaioō** — “to justify”: to *declare* righteous, like a judge’s verdict — *not* to *make* righteous, as if God were slowly improving us. A courtroom word, not a hospital word. God declares the believing sinner righteous, for Christ’s sake, while he is still in fact a sinner. Teach this and half the doctrine is secured.
- **hilastērion** — “propitiation,” and behind it the *mercy seat*, the blood-sprinkled lid of the ark where God met his people. Christ is now that place — where wrath is turned away and mercy met, by his own blood. This is why the free gift required a cross.

Opening

“Be honest. If you died tonight and stood before God, and he asked, ‘Why should I let you in?’ — what is the first answer that rises up in you?”

Let a few answer. Most reach for something *in themselves*: I tried to be good; I believed; I went to church. Name that instinct gently — the inborn conviction that we are justified by what we have done — and say: “Paul spends this passage taking that answer away from us, and giving us a far better one.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Verse 21 opens with ‘But now.’ *But now* — after what? What had just happened to everyone by the end of chapter 3, verse 20?” *Steer toward: the Law had stopped every mouth; the whole world stood guilty and silent. The “but now” is the rescue arriving. Let them feel the pivot.*
2. **Doctrine.** “‘That he might be just *and* the justifier’ (3:26). Why couldn’t God simply forgive sin and skip the cross? What problem does Calvary solve?” *Steer toward: God’s own justice. A judge who lets the guilty walk free with no satisfaction is corrupt. God satisfies justice himself, in Christ, then justly justifies us. The cross is where justice and mercy meet without either bending.*
3. **The heart.** “If your standing with God rests entirely on Christ’s righteousness credited to you — not at all on your performance — how does that change how you’ll meet your worst day this week? And your *best*?” *Steer toward: on the worst day, no less accepted, be-*

cause acceptance never rested on performance. On the best day, nothing to boast of, because the verdict was never earned. Resist “so try harder.” The fruit is rest and worship.

The Hard Question

“If we’re justified by faith ‘apart from works of the law’ (3:28), Paul says this ‘upholds’ the law (3:31). How does abolishing works as a way of salvation *uphold* the law rather than overthrow it?”

The answer. Two ways. First, the law’s *demand* is finally satisfied — not lowered or waived, but met in full by Christ, whose perfect obedience and sin-bearing death give the law everything it required. Justification by faith does not say the law didn’t matter; it says the law mattered so much that only the Son could satisfy it. Second, the law’s *purpose* is honored: it was given to expose sin and drive us to Christ, and faith is exactly where it was always pointing. The person who tries to keep the law for righteousness actually dishonors it, by pretending it asks less than perfection. The person who flees to Christ honors it, by admitting it asks everything — and rejoicing that everything has been paid. (See *Movement III and Excursus B*.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **“Justified” means “made better.”** It is a verdict, not a renovation — God *declares* the believing sinner righteous while he is still in fact a sinner.
- **Faith as the work I do to earn it.** Faith is the empty hand that receives, justifying by its object, Christ, not as an achievement.
- **Grace as God overlooking sin.** The cross proves he did *not* overlook it; he bore it. The *hilastērion* guards us from a sentimental grace that costs nothing.

The Close

Your acceptance with God does not rise and fall with how your week went. It does not depend on whether you prayed enough, resisted enough, felt enough. It rests on a verdict already spoken over you for Christ’s sake — *righteous* — grounded in a righteousness that is not your own and therefore cannot be lost, because it was never yours to lose. You came in tonight wondering, somewhere deep down, whether you measure up. Hear the gospel: you do not, and you are accepted anyway, fully and forever, because Another measured up in your place and his record is credited to your account. And God did this without ceasing to be just — for the debt was not waved away but paid, in blood, by his own Son. Just, and the justifier of the ungodly. Go in that peace.

Suggested closing hymn: “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness” (Zinzendorf, tr. Wesley) — the imputed righteousness of Christ as the believer’s only standing, sung exactly where the doctrine is taught.

Session 6 — Movement III.2: The God Who Justifies the Ungodly

Romans 4:1–25

Preparing to teach: read the second part of Movement III, and skim Excursus C (faith in Christ). This session proves the doctrine of justification from the Old Testament itself — Abraham and David — and lands on the word “ungodly.” Teach it to comfort the worst sinner in the room.

The One Thing

Abraham was justified by faith — counted righteous before he had done anything to deserve it; God justifies *the ungodly*, crediting Christ’s righteousness to all who, like Abraham, simply believe the God who raises the dead.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is Gospel proving itself from Scripture. Paul anticipates the objection — *isn’t justification by faith a Pauline novelty?* — and answers from Genesis: Abraham believed God, and it was *counted* to him as righteousness, before circumcision, before the law, before any work. The Law lingers only as the foil: the wages owed to a worker, set against the gift given to one who does not work. Your task is to let the great word *ungodly* (4:5) ring out. God does not justify the godly, the improved, the deserving; he justifies the ungodly who believe. That is the scandal that offends all religion and the only hope any sinner has.

Teaching Outline

1. Abraham believed, and it was counted (4:1–8). What did Abraham find? Not justification by works — *he believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness*. To the worker, wages are owed as a debt; to the one who does not work but believes *in him who justifies the ungodly*, faith is counted as righteousness. David says the same: blessed are those whose sins are *not counted* against them.

2. Before circumcision, before the law (4:9–17). Abraham was counted righteous *while still uncircumcised* — so he is father of all who believe, circumcised or not. The promise came not through law but through the righteousness of faith, that it might rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring.

3. The faith of Abraham, and ours (4:18–25). Against hope he believed in hope, fully convinced God could do what he promised — even to a body as good as dead. That faith was

counted to him. And the words *it was counted to him* were written for us too, who believe in him *who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **logizomai** — “to count, credit, reckon” — the accounting word that tolls eleven times through this chapter. It is the language of a ledger: righteousness *entered to our account* as a gift, sins *not entered* against us. This is imputation, and it is real — not a polite fiction, because the righteousness credited is Christ’s own.
- **dōrean / kata charin** vs. **opheilēma** — “as a gift, according to grace” versus “as a debt.” To the worker, payment is *owed* (4:4); to the believer, righteousness is *given*. Grace and wages are mutually exclusive currencies; you cannot be paid and gifted for the same thing.

Opening

“Imagine you opened your bank statement and found a deposit you never earned — transferred from someone else’s account, in exactly the amount of a debt you could never have paid. You did nothing but receive it. Paul says that is precisely what God does with the righteousness of Christ: he credits it to your account, as a gift, and cancels what you owed.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul could have chosen any Old Testament figure. Why Abraham — and why does it matter that Abraham was counted righteous *before* he was circumcised (4:10)?” *Steer toward: Abraham is the father of the Jewish people and the test case for any “salvation by works/marks” claim. By dating his justification before circumcision, Paul shows faith — not the badge, not the work — was always the ground. Abraham is everyone’s father by faith.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Verse 5: God ‘justifies the ungodly.’ Sit with that. Who would we naturally expect God to justify — and why is *ungodly* so startling?” *Steer toward: we expect God to accept the deserving, the ones who cleaned up first. The scandal and the only hope is that he justifies the ungodly, by faith. If God justified only the godly, none of us would qualify.*
3. **The heart.** “Abraham’s faith was ‘fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised’ (4:21). Faith here isn’t a leap in the dark — it’s confidence in God’s *character*. Where do you most struggle to be ‘fully convinced’ God will keep his word to you?”

Steer toward: naming the places assurance falters, and re-grounding faith in God's character and promise rather than our feelings. Faith's strength is in its object — the God who raises the dead — not in the vividness of our believing.

The Hard Question

“But James says ‘a person is justified by works and not by faith alone’ (James 2:24) — and James uses Abraham too. Don't Paul and James flatly contradict each other?”

The answer. They use the same words differently, and both are right. Paul speaks of how a sinner is justified *before God* — at the root, by faith alone, apart from works, because only Christ's righteousness can stand in that court (and he cites Abraham's faith in Genesis 15, *before Isaac*). James speaks of how faith is justified — *shown to be real* before men — at the fruit, by the works living faith produces (and he cites Abraham's obedience in Genesis 22, *years later*). A faith that produces nothing is not the justifying kind; it is a corpse (James 2:17). So the Reformation said it precisely: **faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone.** Same Abraham, two moments: justified by faith at the root, shown righteous by works as the fruit. (*See Excursus C and the Apology's fourth article.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Faith as the work that earns.** Abraham's faith justified by *receiving* the promise, not by achieving anything. The hand that takes a gift has earned nothing.
- **Imputation as a legal fiction.** It is not fiction, because the righteousness credited is Christ's real, perfect righteousness — God is not pretending; he is giving.
- **Softening “ungodly.”** God justifies *the ungodly* (4:5). The word is the offense and the comfort; do not let the class file off its edge.

The Close

Hear the word the whole chapter has been driving toward, and hear that it is for you: God justifies *the ungodly*. Not the godly. Not the improved. Not the ones who finally got their act together. The ungodly — the one who does not work but believes — receives, as a free gift, a righteousness credited to his account that was earned by Another and can never be revoked, because it was never his to begin with. Abraham brought nothing but empty hands and a God who keeps his word, and it was counted to him as righteousness. So it is counted to everyone who believes in the God who raised Jesus from the dead — Jesus, delivered up for our trespasses, raised for our justification. Bring your empty hands tonight. They are exactly what this gospel is looking for.

Suggested closing hymn: “My Faith Looks Up to Thee” — the empty-handed look of faith to Christ alone, who bore the debt and is now our righteousness.

Session 7 — Movement IV.1: Peace with God

Romans 5:1–11

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement IV. The doctrine of justification is settled; now Paul shows its fruits and its security. This is a session about assurance — teach it to comfort.

The One Thing

Justified by faith, we *have* peace with God right now, standing in grace and rejoicing in hope — and the proof that this peace will hold is that Christ died for us while we were still his enemies.

Law and Gospel in This Text

Overwhelmingly Gospel. The Law lingers only in the shadows — we were once *weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies* — and even those words serve to magnify the grace. Your task is assurance. Paul reasons from the greater to the lesser: if God did the hard thing (justified his enemies at the cost of his Son's blood), he will surely do the easier thing (keep his reconciled children to the end). Let the class do that math, because their confidence depends on it. There is no command here to obey, only a settled peace to rest in.

Teaching Outline

1. The fruits of justification (5:1–2). *Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ — note *have*, present tense, a possession, not a goal. Through him we have *access* into this grace in which we *stand*, and we *rejoice in hope* of the glory of God.

2. Hope that does not disappoint (5:3–5). More than that, we rejoice in *sufferings*, knowing suffering produces endurance, endurance character, character hope — and *hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts* through the Spirit.

3. The proof of the love (5:6–11). While we were still *weak*, at the right time Christ died for the *ungodly*. One will scarcely die for a righteous man — but God shows his love in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. The “much more”: if his death reconciled us as enemies, *much more* shall his life save us as friends.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **echomen** — “we have.” In 5:1, *we have peace with God*. (An old variant reads “let us have,” a subjunctive — but the indicative is right: Paul states a fact, not urges an effort.) Peace with God is not a feeling you struggle into; it is a settled state already yours by the verdict.
- **pollō mallon** — “much more.” Paul’s engine of assurance: from the harder thing already done (justifying enemies by blood) to the easier thing certain to follow (saving children by his life). When you feel insecure, do the *much more* math.

Opening

“If God justified you when you were his *enemy* — at the cost of his own Son’s blood — how much more will he keep you now that you are his *child*? Paul wants you to do that math tonight, because your assurance on your darkest day depends on getting it right.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul says we *have* peace with God — present tense, already true. Not ‘we are working toward peace.’ What changes when you hear your peace with God as a settled fact rather than a fluctuating feeling?” *Steer toward: assurance rests on the verdict, not the mood. Peace with God was established at the cross and declared in justification; it doesn’t rise and fall with how spiritual we feel this week. The fact stands under the feeling.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Verses 6–8 stack up four words for us: *weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies*. Why does Paul pile on the bad news right here, in a passage about God’s love?” *Steer toward: to measure the love. The worse our condition when Christ died for us, the greater the love proven. God didn’t wait for us to improve; he died for enemies. The depth of our need displays the height of his love.*
3. **The heart.** “Where in your life are you still living as though your peace with God depends on your performance — as though a bad week could revoke it?” *Steer toward: naming the functional works-righteousness that steals assurance, and resting in the indicative. The peace is a fact established by the verdict, guaranteed by the “much more.” Let them rest there.*

The Hard Question

“Paul says we *rejoice* in our sufferings (5:3). Does Christianity glorify suffering? And is God sending me hardship on purpose to build my character?”

The answer. Paul does not call suffering good, and he does not tell us to enjoy it; he says that for those already at peace with God, God *uses* suffering, weaving it into a chain that ends in hope. The rejoicing is not in the pain but in what the God of love is doing through it. As for whether God “sends” each affliction to improve you — Scripture is more careful than that. We live in a fallen world that produces suffering on its own; what Paul promises is not that God authors every hardship but that God wastes none of it, working all of it toward the good of those who love him (a promise he’ll make explicit in 8:28). The ground under the whole chain is not the suffering but the love *already poured into our hearts* (5:5). Suffering is not the engine of hope; God’s love is, and suffering is one of the unlikely places he proves it. (See Movement IV.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **“Let us have peace” (the subjunctive).** The indicative is right: *we have* peace — a fact, not an exhortation. Don’t turn the gift into a task.
- **Suffering as earning hope.** Suffering *produces* hope as fruit in those already loved and at peace; it does not purchase God’s favor.
- **Reconciliation as our achievement.** We were reconciled *while enemies*, by his death (5:10) — God’s act, received, not negotiated.

The Close

Hear what you already possess: *peace with God*. Not a truce you must keep renewing, not a mood you must work to sustain — peace, settled, present-tense, established by a verdict already spoken over you for Christ’s sake. And hear the *much more*: the God who loved you enough to die for you while you were his enemy will not lose you now that you are his child. Whatever this week holds — and some weeks hold suffering — your standing does not waver, because it never rested on you, and even your hardest days he will not waste. His love has already been poured into your heart. Stand in the grace where you stand, and rejoice.

Suggested closing hymn: “It Is Well with My Soul” — peace with God that holds through sorrow, resting on what Christ has done rather than on circumstance.

Session 8 — Movement IV.2: The Two Adams

Romans 5:12–21

Preparing to teach: read the second part of Movement IV. This is the great “two humanities” passage — Adam and Christ, condemnation and gift. Teach it to magnify the “much more” of grace over the ruin of Adam.

The One Thing

As in Adam the whole race fell under sin and death, so in Christ — the second Adam — the gift of righteousness abounds to many; and what the first Adam lost, the second more than restores, so that grace reigns to eternal life.

Law and Gospel in This Text

Law and Gospel run as two parallel lines here — Adam’s trespass bringing condemnation and death, Christ’s obedience bringing righteousness and life — and the whole passage is built to show that the second line is *greater* than the first. Your task is to keep the asymmetry in view: this is not a tidy balance of fall and recovery, but a *much more* of grace over sin. Where the Law shows us bound to Adam’s ruin, the Gospel shows us bound to Christ’s abundance — and the abundance wins. End where Paul ends: *grace reigns*.

Teaching Outline

1. One man, sin, and death (5:12–14). Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all *because all sinned*. Death reigned even from Adam to Moses — proof that all were implicated in Adam, our head.

2. The gift is not like the trespass (5:15–17). *But the free gift is not like the trespass.* The trespass brought condemnation from one sin; the gift brings justification from many trespasses. *Much more* will those who receive the abundance of grace *reign in life* through the one man Jesus Christ.

3. Two verdicts, two outcomes (5:18–19). As one trespass led to condemnation for all, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all who are in him. As by one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, by one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

4. Grace reigns (5:20–21). The law came in to *increase* the trespass — but *where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*, so that as sin reigned in death, *grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life*.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **pollō mallon** — “much more,” again (5:15, 17). The hinge of the passage. Adam and Christ are not a balanced ledger; the gift *exceeds* the ruin. Grace does not merely undo the fall; it carries us higher than Adam ever stood.
- **hōs... houtōs** — “as... so” (5:18–19), the structure of the whole comparison. Two heads, two humanities: *as* in Adam, *so* in Christ. The question that decides everything is simply: in which man are you?

Opening

“You inherited a fallen nature from a man you never met, for a sin you didn’t personally commit. That strikes us as deeply unfair — until we realize that the entire gospel runs on the very same principle, in reverse. One man acting for the many is bad news in Adam and the best news imaginable in Christ.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Five times in these verses Paul says some version of ‘much more’ or ‘how much more.’ What is he so determined for us *not* to miss?” *Steer toward: the superiority of grace. Christ doesn’t merely break even with Adam; the gift abounds beyond the trespass. We aren’t just restored to a clean slate — we’re given more than we lost. Grace wins decisively.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Paul says by Adam’s disobedience ‘the many were made sinners,’ and by Christ’s obedience ‘the many will be made righteous’ (5:19). How does this ‘one man for the many’ principle work — and where else have we seen it?” *Steer toward: federal or covenant representation — one acting on behalf of all. We saw it in chapter 4 (Christ’s righteousness credited). It’s the same logic both ways: we fell in our first head, Adam, and we rise in our new head, Christ. You can’t keep the second while rejecting the first.*
3. **The heart.** “Everything comes down to which man you’re ‘in’ — Adam or Christ. What does it mean for your daily life that you are no longer defined by Adam’s ruin but by Christ’s abundance?” *Steer toward: identity grounded in Christ, not in the fall, not in our failures. We live from Christ’s abundance, not toward it. The reign of grace, not the reign of death, now defines us.*

The Hard Question

“How is it fair that Adam’s sin gets counted against me? I wasn’t there. I didn’t eat the fruit.”

The answer. It is the same principle that saves you, run in reverse. We are not saved as isolated individuals each negotiating private terms with God; we are saved *in Christ*, the second Adam, whose obedience is counted to all who are in him. That is representation — one acting for the many. But representation cuts both ways: we fell in Adam, our first head, and we rise in Christ, our new head. You cannot accept the imputed righteousness of the second Adam while rejecting the imputed guilt of the first; they are the same structure, and to reject one is to lose the other. And Paul’s whole point is that the structure is *good news*, because the second Adam gives *much more* than the first took away. The deepest answer to “it isn’t fair that I’m condemned in Adam” is “then rejoice that you are justified in Christ — by the very same kind of fairness.” (See *Movement IV*.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **“All” in 5:18 as universalism.** The “all in Adam / all in Christ” parallel describes two humanities under two heads, not the automatic salvation of every person; the gift is received (5:17).
- **Original sin as merely Adam’s bad example.** Paul says death spread *because all sinned* in Adam — a real solidarity in guilt, not just imitation.
- **Grace abounding (5:20) as license.** Paul knows exactly where this will be twisted, and answers it in the very next verse — 6:1, next session. Abounding grace produces new life, not permission to sin.

The Close

The whole human story, Paul says, hangs on two men. In the first, you were born — into his fall, his guilt, his death, with no say in the matter and no way out by your own effort. But in the second, you have been re-born — into his obedience, his righteousness, his life — and this too came to you from outside, as a gift, with no merit of your own. If the first seems unfair, let the second overwhelm the complaint: for the gift is not like the trespass. Where Adam brought one sin and total ruin, Christ brings many trespasses forgiven and abounding life. Where sin reigned in death, grace now reigns through righteousness to eternal life. You are no longer defined by the man in the garden, but by the man on the cross and out of the tomb. Live as one in whom grace reigns.

Suggested closing hymn: “All Mankind Fell in Adam’s Fall” (Lasius) — the two Adams in a single hymn: our ruin in the first, our rescue and abounding life in the second.

Session 9 — Movement V.1: Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ

Romans 6:1–14

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement V, and read Excursus D on Holy Baptism in full — this is where it pays off. Here the letter turns from “what God has done for us” toward “what God has made us,” and the first imperatives appear. Watch the order: the imperative always flows from the indicative.

The One Thing

In baptism God joined you to Christ's death and resurrection, so sin's *reign* over you is broken; now reckon yourself what you already are — dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is the first great “become what you are” session, and it all turns on keeping the order straight. The Gospel comes first and grounds everything: you *died* with Christ, you were *raised* with him, sin's dominion is *broken* — all accomplished, all gift, all indicative. Only then come the imperatives: *reckon* yourselves dead to sin; *present* yourselves to God. The commands do not earn the new life; they flow from it. If you teach this as “now buckle down and stop sinning,” you have reversed Paul and turned the gospel back into law. Teach it as “you are a new creature — now live as the one you already are.”

Teaching Outline

1. The question, and its answer (6:1–4). *Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? — the objection raised by free grace (and by 5:20). By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? We were baptized into his death, buried with him, raised to walk in newness of life.*

2. United to his death and resurrection (6:5–10). *If united with him in a death like his, we shall be united with him in a resurrection like his. Our old self was crucified; the body of sin brought to nothing; the one who has died is set free from sin's reign. Christ died to sin once for all; the life he now lives, he lives to God.*

3. The imperative grounded in the indicative (6:11–14). *So you also must consider — reckon — yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Do not let sin reign; present*

yourselves to God as those alive from the dead. *Sin will have no dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **baptizō** — “to baptize, to immerse, to join.” In 6:3, we were *baptized into his death*. Note the word *into*: baptism does not merely picture our union with Christ; it effects it. We were buried with him *through* baptism. (Full case in Excursus D.)
- **logizesthe** — “reckon, consider, count as true.” In 6:11, *reckon yourselves dead to sin*. Not pretending or self-hypnosis, but counting as true what God has *made* true. The verdict is real; the command is to live in light of the reality.

Opening

“Here’s an objection people actually make: ‘If God forgives sin freely, and more sin means more grace, why not just keep sinning?’ Paul raises that exact question about his own gospel — and notice his answer is *not* ‘because you’ll get caught’ or ‘because you’ll lose your salvation.’ His answer is stranger and far better: ‘you can’t — you’re dead.’”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul answers ‘why not keep sinning?’ with ‘you *died* to sin’ — not ‘you shouldn’t,’ but ‘you can’t; you’re dead to it.’ What does it mean that the Christian has *died* to sin?” *Steer toward: sin’s reign, its mastery, its ownership of us, is broken — we’re no longer its slaves in the decisive sense. Not that we never sin (that’s next chapter), but that sin no longer owns us. A new Master has us.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Verse 11 is the first command in this part of the letter: *reckon yourselves dead to sin*. But it comes after ten verses of what God has *done*. Why does that order matter so much?” *Steer toward: the command rests on the accomplished fact. We don’t make ourselves dead to sin by reckoning; we reckon because God has made it so. Reverse the order and you get works-righteousness; keep it and you get gospel-driven obedience.*
3. **The heart.** “If your baptism really joined you to Christ’s death and resurrection — an objective fact, not a feeling — how might remembering ‘I am baptized’ change the way you face temptation this week?” *Steer toward: assurance and identity, not white-knuckle effort. The baptized person fights sin from victory, not for it — as one who already belongs to Christ. Luther’s “baptizatus sum.”*

The Hard Question

“Does baptism actually *do* something, or is it just a symbol — my public testimony of a decision I already made?”

The answer. Read 6:3–4 closely: *we were baptized into his death... buried with him by baptism into death*. Paul does not say baptism *pictures* a union accomplished elsewhere; he says we were joined to Christ’s death and resurrection *through* it. Baptism is God’s act before it is ever our testimony — the means by which he applies Christ’s death and resurrection to us, working forgiveness and new life. It is not a sign of something we did; it is a gift God gave. This is why Luther, in every assault of doubt, returned not to the sincerity of his decision but to the objective fact: *I am baptized*. (The full case — including infant baptism and the answer to the memorialist view — is in *Excursus D*, which you should read before this session.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Baptism as merely my symbol or testimony.** Paul makes it God’s act that joins us to Christ — the means, not a sign of a prior decision.
- **“Reckon yourselves dead to sin” as pretending sin is gone.** It is not gone — next session’s wretched man proves it. To reckon is to count as true that sin’s *reign* is broken, while its *presence* remains.
- **The imperatives as the engine of acceptance.** They flow from the new life God gave; they do not purchase it. Become what you are.

The Close

Christian, you are not a forgiven sinner who must now somehow muster the strength to do better. You are a dead man raised — joined in the water to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, sin’s dominion broken over you, a new creature with a new Master. When sin comes knocking this week with its old claim of ownership, you have an answer that does not depend on your willpower: *I died to you. I am baptized. I belong to Another now*. The grave you should fear is already behind you, in the font; the life ahead of you is Christ’s own risen life, given to you as a gift. Live as the one you already are.

Suggested closing hymn: “God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It” (Spitta) — the great Lutheran hymn of baptismal confidence: “I am baptized into Christ!”

Session 10 — Movement V.2: Slaves of Righteousness

Romans 6:15–23

Preparing to teach: read the second part of Movement V. The image shifts from death-and-resurrection to slavery and freedom. Teach the paradox honestly: there is no such thing as no master, and the freest service is bondage to God.

The One Thing

No one is free of all masters; you are a slave either of sin, whose wage is death, or of God, whose gift is eternal life — and grace has transferred you from the one to the other, so present your members now to your new and rightful Lord.

Law and Gospel in This Text

The Law and Gospel here are framed as two slaveries with two paychecks. The Law's word is the wage: *the wages of sin is death* — what the old master pays, in full, on time. The Gospel's word is the gift: *the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* — not earned, not owed, given. Your task is to expose the modern lie that freedom means having no master at all, and to set against it the gospel paradox: we were made to belong to God, and his service is the only bondage that is also liberty. The session's imperative (present your members to righteousness) flows, as always, from the gift of the new Master who has already claimed us.

Teaching Outline

1. Two slaveries (6:15–19). Shall we sin because we are under grace? *By no means!* You are slaves of the one you obey — *sin, which leads to death*, or *obedience, which leads to righteousness*. But thanks be to God: you who were slaves of sin have become *obedient from the heart*, and *set free from sin*, have become *slaves of righteousness*.

2. The fruit of each (6:20–22). When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness — and what fruit did you get? Things you are now ashamed of, *for the end of those things is death*. But now, set free from sin and *enslaved to God*, the fruit you get leads to sanctification, *and its end, eternal life*.

3. Wages and gift (6:23). The hinge verse, and a study in contrasts: *the wages of sin is death* — earned, owed, paid in full — *but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* — unearned, undeserved, given.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **doulos / douloō** — “slave,” “to enslave.” A jarring word, and Paul means it to jar (he even apologizes for the image in 6:19). We resist it because we prize autonomy — but Paul’s point is that autonomy is a myth; the only question is *whose* slave you are. Grace doesn’t make you masterless; it gives you the right Master.
- **opsōnia** vs. **charisma** — “wages” versus “free gift” (6:23). *Opsōnia* was a soldier’s pay, what you’ve earned and are owed. *Charisma* is sheer grace, what you could never earn. Sin pays you what you’ve coming; God gives you what you never could. Two currencies; never confuse them.

Opening

“Our culture’s highest value is to be free of all masters — to belong to no one, to answer to nothing, to be entirely your own. Paul says that freedom is an illusion. You *will* serve something — a habit, an appetite, an idol, a fear. The only real question is which master you serve, and what that master pays.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul frames the whole Christian life as a transfer of ownership — from slavery to sin, to slavery to God. Why might the word *slave* be exactly the right word, even though it makes us flinch?” *Steer toward: it names the totality of the claim. We’re not God’s part-time employees or volunteers; we belong to him entirely, bought with a price. The word strips away the polite fiction that we’re our own and just rent God a room.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Verse 23 sets *wages* against *gift*. Why is it crucial that eternal life is called a *gift* and not *wages* — even after all this talk of obedience and fruit?” *Steer toward: the obedience and fruit are real, but they’re never the payment for life. Sin earns its wage; God gives his gift. If eternal life were wages, it would be owed — and grace would be abolished. The fruit flows from the gift; it doesn’t buy it.*
3. **The heart.** “What old ‘master’ still has a grip on you — a habit, fear, or appetite you serve even though you know its wage is death? What would it mean to present that part of yourself, today, to your new Master instead?” *Steer toward: concrete, honest naming — and then the gospel move: you are no longer that master’s slave; you’ve been transferred.*

Presenting your members to righteousness is claiming the freedom that's already yours, not earning a freedom you lack.

The Hard Question

“Isn’t ‘slavery to God’ a grim way to describe the Christian life? Where’s the freedom and joy in being anyone’s slave?”

The answer. Here is the gospel paradox: true freedom is not the absence of a master but the presence of the *right* one. We were made by God and for God, so to belong to him is not bondage against our nature but the homecoming of it — like a fish “freed” into water rather than onto dry land. The old master, sin, promised freedom and paid death; it was the cruelest slavery precisely because it felt like liberty. The new Master frees us *from* that, and his “yoke is easy.” So Paul can call us slaves of God and slaves of righteousness without grimness, because this slavery is the only service in which a person becomes fully himself. As the hymn has it, we are made captive only to be set free. The grim slavery is the one we left. (*See Movement V.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Freedom as autonomy.** Paul denies the option of no master; the choice is only *which* master. “Being my own” is just the old slavery wearing a flattering name.
- **“Wages of sin is death” as only future hell.** Sin pays death now too — in shame, bondage, the slow ruin named in 6:21. The wage is already being drawn.
- **Eternal life as earned by the new obedience.** It is the *free gift* (6:23), set deliberately against wages. The fruit of holiness flows from the gift; it does not purchase it.

The Close

You will serve something this week — that much is certain. The only question is which master, and what he pays. Your old master, sin, is a liar who promised you freedom and was always quietly drawing up your wages: death, paid in full, on time. But you have been transferred. Bought at the price of Christ’s blood, set free from the one master only to belong, gladly and entirely, to the other — the God who made you for himself, whose service is the only bondage that is also liberty, and who pays not wages but a gift you could never earn: eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. So present yourself today to the Master who actually loves you. You are not reaching for a freedom you lack; you are living into a freedom already bought and already yours.

Suggested closing hymn: “Make Me a Captive, Lord” (Matheson) — “make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free”; the paradox of the session in a single line.

Session 11 — Movement VI.1: The Law Is Holy

Romans 7:1–13

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement VI. Paul pauses to defend the Law he has spoken of so severely. Teach this to rescue the Law from the charge of being the villain — and to clarify what it is actually for.

The One Thing

We have died to the Law through the body of Christ to belong to another; and the Law itself is holy and good — it exposes the sin it cannot cure, doing its God-given work of driving us out of ourselves and to Christ.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This session is a meditation on the Law's true character, and it requires care. Paul has said hard things about the Law — it brings wrath, increases trespass, works death — and now he defends it: it is *holy, righteous, and good*. The Law is not the villain; sin is. Your task is to let the class see the Law rightly: it is a good gift that cannot do what only the Gospel does. The Gospel breaks in at the start — *you have died to the law through the body of Christ... to bear fruit for God* — and in the recognition that the Law's exposing work, painful as it is, is mercy, because it drives the despairing sinner to the only One who can save.

Teaching Outline

1. Released to belong to another (7:1–6). As death dissolves a marriage, so we have *died to the law through the body of Christ*, to belong to another — to him who was raised — that we may *bear fruit for God*. We serve now in the new way of the Spirit, not the old way of the written code.

2. Is the law sin? (7:7–12). *By no means!* Yet through the law came the knowledge of sin: *I would not have known coveting if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."* Sin, seizing the commandment, sprang to life and deceived and killed. The commandment is *holy, righteous, and good*; sin is the culprit that abused it.

3. Did the good bring death? (7:13). *By no means!* It was sin, working death through what is good, *that sin might be shown to be sin* — that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. The Law exposes sin for the monster it is.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **hagios / dikaios / agathos** — “holy, righteous, and good” (7:12), Paul’s three-fold defense of the commandment. Whatever the Law cannot do, it is not because the Law is bad. The fault is never in the standard; it is in us, and in the sin that uses the good standard to kill.
- **epithymia** — “coveting, desire” (7:7). Paul’s chosen example, the tenth commandment, is the one that reaches past outward acts to the heart’s inward craving — which is why it exposes us all. The Law that forbids coveting forbids what we cannot stop doing, and so reveals the depth of the disease.

Opening

“Is the Law the villain of the Christian story? Paul has said it brings wrath, increases trespass, works death — you could be forgiven for thinking the Law is the enemy. So he stops, this week, to defend it. And the defense tells us exactly what the Law is for — and what it can never do.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul uses marriage to explain our relationship to the Law (7:1-4): death ends the old bond and frees us for a new one. Who did we belong to, who do we belong to now, and what’s the purpose of the new union?” *Steer toward: we belonged to the Law (and to sin); we now belong to the risen Christ; and the purpose is to “bear fruit for God.” Note the goal isn’t lawlessness but fruit — fruit that grows from belonging to Christ, not from striving under the Law.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Paul insists the Law is ‘holy, righteous, and good’ (7:12) even while saying it works death in us. How can both be true? Where does the problem actually lie?” *Steer toward: the problem is in us — in sin — not in the Law. The Law is a perfect mirror; the ugliness it shows is ours. Blaming the Law for our condemnation is like blaming the mirror for the face, or the X-ray for the tumor.*
3. **The heart.** “Paul’s example is *coveting* — the commandment that reaches the heart, not just the hands. What does it do to your self-confidence when you realize the Law forbids not just bad actions but the cravings underneath them?” *Steer toward: the Law reaches further than we can control, and that’s the point — it drives us past “I’ve kept the outward rules” to “I cannot cleanse my own heart,” and so to Christ. The deeper the Law cuts, the more clearly it preaches our need.*

The Hard Question

“If the Law just exposes and kills sin and can’t save anyone, why did God give it at all? Wouldn’t we be better off without it?”

The answer. The Law is good and necessary — it simply was never meant to save. The Confessions speak of its three uses: it *restrains* gross evil in society (a curb); it *exposes* sin and drives us to Christ (a mirror — its sharpest, most important use); and it *guides* the believer in the way of love (a rule). The Law fails to save only in the sense that a thermometer fails to cure a fever — that was never its job. To wish the Law away would be to wish away the very thing that shows us our need and shapes our life; we would not be freer, only blind to our sickness and lawless in our love. Blaming the Law for not saving is like blaming the X-ray for not healing the tumor it faithfully reveals. (See Movement VI; the three uses are treated in the Confessions’ article on the Law.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **The Law as evil or simply abolished.** Paul calls it holy, righteous, and good; we die to it *as a way of justification and condemnation*, not to its goodness or its guiding use.
- **“Died to the law” as license for lawlessness.** We died to the Law to *bear fruit for God* (7:4) — released from its condemnation into Christ’s service, not into anarchy.
- **The commandment as the cause of sin.** Sin is the culprit; it merely *used* the good commandment as its occasion. The Law revealed the disease; it did not create it.

The Close

Do not leave tonight thinking the Law is your enemy. The Law is holy, righteous, and good — a true and faithful gift of God, which does exactly what God made it to do: it shows you your sin with a clarity nothing else can. It will never save you, but it was never meant to; that is no failure in the Law, any more than it is a failure in the mirror that it cannot wash your face. And here is the mercy hidden in its severity: the Law cuts deep, all the way to the cravings of the heart, precisely so that you will stop trusting yourself and flee to the only One who can cleanse you. You have already died to the Law through the body of Christ — released from its accusation to belong to the risen Lord, and to bear, at last, real fruit for God. The Law drove you home. Now rest in the One it drove you to.

Suggested closing hymn: “The Law of God Is Good and Wise” (Loy) — a Lutheran hymn on the goodness of the Law and its right use, sung exactly where Paul defends it.

Session 12 — Movement VI.2: The Wretched Man

Romans 7:14–25

Preparing to teach: read the second part of Movement VI, and read Excursus E on the “I” of Romans 7 in full. This session frees a lot of struggling Christians — handle it as the pastoral gift it is. Teach the “I” as the regenerate believer.

The One Thing

The believer, freed from the Law’s condemnation, still wages a lifelong war with indwelling sin — delighting in God’s law inwardly yet doing what he hates; the wretched man who, in the very same breath, gives thanks to God through Jesus Christ.

Law and Gospel in This Text

A subtle session. The divided self Paul describes — *I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate* — must be taught as the experience of the *Christian*, the regenerate believer who *delights in the law of God in his inner being* and yet finds sin warring in his members. The Gospel breaks through in the cry’s answer: *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* And the deepest pastoral point: the war itself is *evidence* of the new life, not its absence. The dead do not fight. Comfort the strugglers tonight; many of them have secretly feared their struggle disproves their faith.

Teaching Outline

1. Sold under sin (7:14–17). The law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. *I do not understand my own actions — I do the very thing I hate.* If I do what I do not want, I agree the law is good; it is sin dwelling in me that does it.

2. The divided self (7:18–20). I have the desire to do right but not the ability to carry it out. *I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep doing.* The will is renewed; the flesh resists.

3. The two laws at war (7:21–23). *I delight in the law of God in my inner being,* but I see another law waging war against the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin. Note that delight — only the regenerate can speak it.

4. The cry and the thanks (7:24–25). *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* And at once: *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* — followed by an honest restatement of the ongoing struggle. Deliverance is sure; it is not yet complete.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **ho esō anthrōpos** — “the inner being,” the inner self (7:22). Decisive: Paul says of this “I” what he says nowhere of the unbeliever, who (8:7) *cannot* submit to God’s law. A self that *delights* in God’s law from within is a renewed self. This is the Christian speaking.
- **sarx** — “flesh,” the fallen nature that remains even in the believer. The war is between the renewed inner self and the sin still clinging to the flesh — not two people, but one Christian, *simul* righteous and sinner.

Opening

“Have you ever, as a Christian, done the very thing you hate — and then wondered whether a *real* Christian would still struggle like this? Whether your ongoing battle with sin means you were never truly converted? Paul knew that fear. And what he says about it tonight may be the most freeing thing in this whole letter.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Verse 22: ‘I delight in the law of God in my inner being.’ Could an unbeliever honestly say that? What does this tell us about who the ‘I’ of this passage is?” *Steer toward: 8:7 says the mind of the flesh is hostile to God and cannot submit to his law. Only a regenerate person delights in God’s law from within. So this struggling “I” is the Christian — which means the struggle is normal Christian experience, not proof of false faith.*
2. **Doctrine.** “How can Paul be a ‘wretched man’ losing battles with sin and a justified saint at the same time? What’s the word the Reformation gave for this double condition?” *Steer toward: simul iustus et peccator — at once righteous and sinner. Fully justified before God in Christ, still battling indwelling sin in daily life. Both true at once, all the way to the grave. This is the ordinary shape of the Christian life.*
3. **The heart.** “If the war you feel against sin is actually *evidence* of the new life — if only a converted person fights like this — how does that reframe your discouragement over your own ongoing struggle?” *Steer toward: the struggle is the friction of the new life against the old flesh; the unbeliever feels no such war, being at peace with his sin. Your war is a mark of life. Don’t reinforce despair — turn it to the thanksgiving of 7:25.*

The Hard Question

“Is the ‘wretched man’ Paul *before* he was a Christian, or Paul *as* a Christian? People argue it both ways — and it changes everything.”

The answer. It is the Christian. Three things settle it: the present tense (Paul says *I do*, not *I did*); the delight in God’s law *in the inner being* (7:22), which Scripture says the unregenerate cannot have (8:7); and the structure of the climax — the cry *who will deliver me* is answered by *thanks be to God*, and *then* the struggle is restated as ongoing. Deliverance is certain in Christ and not yet complete in experience: the *already* and the *not-yet* of every Christian life. The war is not the absence of grace; it is what grace makes when it sets a new man against the old in one heart. (*Read Excursus E before teaching this — it also answers the “carnal Christian” misreading.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **The “I” as unregenerate, or as a defeated stage to escape.** It is the normal, regenerate Christian — and there is no graduating out of the struggle into a “victorious life” this side of glory.
- **The struggle as proof of lost salvation.** The opposite: only the converted fight this war. The unbeliever feels no such division.
- **The Law as the villain.** Paul has just insisted it is holy, righteous, and good. The culprit is indwelling sin; the battlefield is the flesh.

The Close

If you came in tonight quietly afraid that your struggle with sin disqualifies you — that a real Christian would have moved past this by now — hear the apostle, who never did move past it: *Wretched man that I am... thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* Both halves are true at once, and you are meant to say both. The war you feel is not the evidence against your faith; it is the evidence *for* it, because the dead do not fight. Your deliverance is certain — signed and sealed in Christ — even though it is not yet finished. So fight on, and lose some battles, and grieve your sin honestly, and in the same breath give thanks: the Deliverer has come, the verdict over you is already settled, and the body of death will one day be left behind for good. And as if to prove it, the very next word in Romans is *no condemnation*.

Suggested closing hymn: “Chief of Sinners Though I Be” — the believer’s honest confession of ongoing sin met by the full sufficiency of Christ.

Session 13 — Movement VII.1: No Condemnation

Romans 8:1–11

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement VII. This begins the summit of the letter. Verse 1 is the verdict everything has been building toward — let it land with full weight, and ground it where Paul grounds it: in Christ, not in our walk.

The One Thing

There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus; what the Law, weakened by our flesh, could never do, God did by sending his own Son — and the Spirit of life now dwells in us and gives life.

Law and Gospel in This Text

Pure Gospel from the first word, and your task is to get out of its way. *No condemnation* (8:1) is the verdict of the whole letter, made personal and permanent — and it rests on what *God* did in his Son, not on the quality of our walking. Where the Law appears, it appears as the thing that *could not* save us (weakened by the flesh) — until God did in Christ what the Law never could. Then the contrast of flesh and Spirit: two ways of existing, death and life. Keep the ground clear all session: the “no condemnation” rests on Christ’s finished work; walking by the Spirit is its fruit, never its basis.

Teaching Outline

1. The verdict (8:1–4). *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* What the law could not do, weakened by the flesh, *God did*: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *condemning sin in the flesh* — so that the law’s righteous requirement is fulfilled in us who walk by the Spirit.

2. Two minds, two ends (8:5–8). Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the flesh; those who live according to the Spirit, on the Spirit. *To set the mind on the flesh is death; to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* The mind of the flesh is hostile to God and cannot submit to him.

3. The Spirit who gives life (8:9–11). You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if the Spirit dwells in you. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is *life*

because of righteousness — and the Spirit who raised Jesus will give life to your mortal bodies also.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **katakrima** — “condemnation” (8:1). A legal verdict of guilt and its sentence. Paul says it is *gone* — *no* condemnation — not lessened, not suspended pending review, but removed, because the sentence already fell on Christ (8:3). The court has ruled, and the ruling is final.
- **sarx / pneuma** — “flesh” and “Spirit.” Not body versus soul, but two whole ways of existing: life turned in on itself and toward death, versus life animated by God’s Spirit toward life and peace. The contrast is total, and the Christian has been moved from the one realm to the other.

Opening

“Read Romans 8:1 aloud, slowly: *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Now ask yourself honestly — do you believe that applies to you on your worst day? Tonight we’ll see why it does, and why the verdict can never be reopened.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Verse 1 begins with *therefore*. ‘No condemnation’ — *therefore*, because of what? What has Paul established in the chapters behind us that makes this true?” *Steer toward: justification by faith, union with Christ, the verdict already rendered, sin condemned in Christ’s flesh (8:3). “No condemnation” is the conclusion of everything before it — it rests on Christ’s finished work, not our improvement.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Verse 3 says God did what the Law ‘could not do.’ Why couldn’t the Law take away condemnation, and what did God do instead?” *Steer toward: the Law couldn’t save because it was “weakened by the flesh” — the problem was never the Law but us. So God sent his Son and condemned sin in his flesh, in our place. The Law diagnosed; the Son cured.*
3. **The heart.** “If there is truly ‘no condemnation,’ why do we still so often *feel* condemned? Where do you go when your conscience accuses you?” *Steer toward: the verdict is objective — rendered in Christ — and does not rise and fall with our feelings or our accuser’s voice. Faith clings to the verdict, not the feeling. And God delivers that verdict to us concretely in the word and absolution, so we have somewhere outside ourselves to stand.*

The Hard Question

“If there’s ‘no condemnation,’ why does my conscience still accuse me so fiercely? Doesn’t the guilt I feel mean something is still wrong between God and me?”

The answer. Your conscience is a real gift, and the guilt it raises over actual sin is not nothing — but it is not the final word, and it is not the Judge. The verdict of *no condemnation* was rendered by the only Judge who matters, on the basis of what Christ did, not on the basis of how you feel. The accusing conscience (and the devil, who loves to amplify it) speaks *after* the gavel has already fallen — and faith’s task is to answer the accusation not by trying to feel innocent but by pointing to Christ: *the sentence already fell on him*. This is exactly why God gives us the spoken word and absolution — so the verdict reaches us from outside, in a voice we can trust more than our own churning hearts. When your conscience accuses, you do not argue your innocence; you plead Another’s. (See Movement VII.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **“No condemnation” as conditional on performance.** It rests on being *in Christ Jesus*, not on walking well; the walk is fruit, not the basis.
- **Walking “according to the Spirit” as the ground of the verdict.** The verdict grounds the walk, not the reverse. We walk by the Spirit *because* there is no condemnation, not in order to earn it.
- **Flesh vs. Spirit as body vs. soul.** It is two whole modes of existence — God-opposed and death-bound, versus Spirit-animated and alive — not a war between our physical and immaterial parts.

The Close

Hear the verdict over your life, Christian, and hear that it is final: *no condemnation*. Not “less condemnation,” not “no condemnation as long as you keep it up” — *no condemnation*, now, for those who are in Christ Jesus, because the sentence already fell, in full, on him. Your conscience may still accuse you; the accuser certainly will. But neither of them is the Judge, and the Judge has already ruled. When the guilt rises this week, do not try to argue yourself innocent — you are not. Do something better: point past yourself to the One in whose flesh your sin was condemned, and let the verdict stand. There is therefore now no condemnation. Live as a person against whom the case is closed.

Suggested closing hymn: “Before the Throne of God Above” (Bancroft) — the conscience’s accusation answered by the upward look to Christ the advocate: no condemnation, because he stands in our place.

Session 14 — Movement VII.2: Children of God, Heirs in Hope

Romans 8:12–27

Preparing to teach: read the middle of Movement VII. This is the warm heart of the letter — adoption, the cry of “Abba,” the Spirit’s help in our weakness. Let the assurance be felt, but anchor it where Paul does: in the Spirit’s witness through the gospel, not in the strength of our feelings.

The One Thing

We have received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry “Abba! Father!” — God’s own children and heirs with Christ, who groan now toward a glory the Spirit himself helps us wait for.

Law and Gospel in This Text

Overwhelmingly Gospel — sonship, the Spirit’s witness, the sure inheritance. The only imperative (*put to death the deeds of the body*, 8:13) is grounded entirely in the sonship that precedes it: we mortify sin *by the Spirit*, as children who already belong, not as slaves trying to earn a place. Where the Law’s old voice appears, it is named and dismissed: *you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear*. The note of the session is the confidence of a child who knows whose he is — and the comfort that even our groaning and our fumbling prayers are upheld by the Spirit. Let the warmth be real; tie it to the Word and the Spirit’s witness, not to the temperature of our emotions.

Teaching Outline

1. Sons, not slaves (8:12–14). We are debtors — but not to the flesh, to live by it. By the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body, and live. *All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

2. The cry of Abba (8:15–17). You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry *Abba! Father!* The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children — and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if we suffer with him to be glorified with him.

3. Groaning toward glory (8:18–25). The sufferings of now are not worth comparing with the glory to come. Creation groans, and we groan inwardly, awaiting the redemption of our bodies. In this hope we were saved — and we wait for it with patience.

4. The Spirit helps our weakness (8:26–27). Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; we do not know what to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes with groanings too deep for words, and God who searches hearts knows the Spirit's mind.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **Abba** — the Aramaic word for “Father,” intimate and trusting, the very word Jesus used in Gethsemane. By the Spirit, the adopted child cries the same word. Assurance here is not a distant deity to be appeased but a Father to whom we belong and dare to cry.
- **huiothesia** — “adoption,” literally *placement as a son*. A legal term: God does not merely forgive us; he *places* us in his family with the full standing of sons and heirs. Our belonging is not probationary, and the inheritance is already ours by right.

Opening

“Here’s a question that goes deeper than it sounds: do you relate to God as a *slave* — anxiously hoping to stay in his good graces, always one mistake from being thrown out — or as a *child* who simply knows he belongs? Paul says the Spirit himself was given to settle that question, and to put a word in your mouth: *Abba*.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul contrasts two spirits — a ‘spirit of slavery’ leading to fear, and ‘the Spirit of adoption’ (8:15). What’s the difference between serving God as a slave and serving him as a child? How would each one feel?” *Steer toward: the slave works from fear, to avoid punishment, never sure of his standing; the child works from belonging, secure in the father’s love. Same outward obedience, opposite inner worlds. The gospel makes us children, not better slaves.*
2. **Doctrine.** “The Spirit ‘bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God’ (8:16). How does the Spirit do that — and what keeps this witness from being just our own wishful feelings?” *Steer toward: the Spirit witnesses through the gospel and the promises of God, not as a free-floating emotion. The witness rests on Christ’s finished work, delivered in the Word; our assurance leans on that, not on the intensity of an experience we have to keep manufacturing.*
3. **The heart.** “Paul says we ‘groan’ even as God’s children, and that we often don’t even know how to pray (8:26). Does it comfort you or trouble you that the Christian life includes groaning — and that the Spirit prays when you can’t?” *Steer toward: the groaning is not a sign that something is wrong with our adoption; it’s the ache of children who have*

tasted the firstfruits and long for home. And our weakness in prayer is met, not by trying harder, but by the Spirit's own intercession. We are upheld even where we fail.

The Hard Question

“If we’re really God’s children and heirs, why do we still suffer and groan? Doesn’t being adopted by God mean our troubles should be behind us?”

The answer. This is the great *already / not-yet* of the Christian life, and getting it right saves people from a lot of false guilt and false promises. We *are* God’s children *now* — that is settled, present-tense, sealed by the Spirit (8:15–16). But we do not yet have the *whole* inheritance: we still await *the redemption of our bodies* (8:23), the end of suffering, the glory to come. So the groaning is not evidence *against* our adoption; it is the very mark of those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit and ache for the full harvest. And note where Paul locates suffering: it is the road we walk *with* Christ toward glory (8:17), not a detour off the family path. Anyone who promises you that being God’s child means the end of trouble now has skipped from verse 16 to the resurrection and left out the groaning Paul puts right between them. (See *Movement VII*.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Adoption as only a future hope.** It is present and settled — we cry *Abba* now, are heirs now. The inheritance is future; the sonship is not.
- **Groaning and weak prayer as marks of weak faith.** Even the Spirit groans (8:26); the whole creation groans. Weakness in prayer is met by the Spirit’s intercession, not rebuked.
- **“Put to death the deeds of the body” as earning sonship.** We mortify sin *by the Spirit*, as those already sons — it flows from belonging, never toward it.

The Close

Listen for the word the Spirit puts in your mouth, because it changes everything: *Abba. Father.* You are not a slave in God’s house, anxiously hoping to keep your place; you are a child, adopted, with the full standing of an heir, and the Spirit himself testifies to it deeper than your moods can reach. Yes, you still groan — the whole creation groans, and so do you, and so, in a mystery, does the Spirit who prays in you when you have no words. But the groaning is the ache of children almost home, not the fear of slaves about to be cast out. Whatever this week presses on you, it cannot touch your adoption.

You belong. The inheritance is signed. And the same Spirit who taught you to cry *Abba* will carry you, groaning and all, the whole way home.

Suggested closing hymn: “Children of the Heavenly Father” (Sandell-Berg) — the unshakable security of God’s adopted children, sheltered in the Father’s care.

Session 15 — Movement VII.3: Nothing Can Separate Us

Romans 8:28–39

Preparing to teach: read the close of Movement VII, and read Excursus F on election before fielding the “golden chain” question. This is the summit of the whole letter. Let the class soar — and let the chapter, not your commentary, do the soaring. End the term’s high point here.

The One Thing

God works all things for the good of those he has called, links them in an unbreakable chain from his foreknowledge to their glory, and binds them in a love that nothing in all creation can ever sever.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is pure Gospel at its highest pitch, and your task is simply to get out of its way. The golden chain (8:29–30) is given as *comfort* — every link holds; not one called child is lost. The courtroom imagery (8:31–34) answers every accusation: who can charge or condemn those God has justified and Christ intercedes for? And the soaring close (8:35–39) names every terror — death, life, powers, the future — and crosses each one off the list of things that could separate us from God’s love. There is no imperative here at all, and that is the point: this is bedrock to stand on, not a task to perform. Where election is raised, raise it the way Paul does — as the ground of unshakable assurance, never as cold speculation.

Teaching Outline

1. All things, and the golden chain (8:28–30). *All things work together for good* for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. Then the chain: those he *foreknew* he *predestined*, and those he *predestined* he *called*, *justified*, and *glorified* — every link unbroken, the last already spoken as good as done.

2. The unanswerable questions (8:31–34). *If God is for us, who can be against us?* He who did not spare his own Son will give us all things. Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? Who is to condemn? Christ died, was raised, and intercedes for us.

3. More than conquerors (8:35–37). Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, peril, sword? In all these we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us.

4. The sweeping certainty (8:38–39). *I am sure* that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor to come, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **hypernikōmen** — “we are more than conquerors” (8:37). Paul coins an intensified word: not merely *we win*, but *we super-conquer* — we come through the very things meant to destroy us with the victory enlarged, through him who loved us. The sufferings do not even dent the outcome.
- The “golden chain” itself (8:29–30) is worth naming: *foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified*. Note the past tense on *glorified* — the last link, still future in our experience, is spoken as already accomplished. In God’s purpose it is that certain.

Opening

“Take a moment and make a list in your mind — silently — of the things you are most afraid could finally come between you and God. Your sin. Your doubt. Your death. The thing you did that you’ve never told anyone. Paul made that list too, at the end of this chapter. And then, one by one, he crossed off every single item.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Romans 8:28 is one of the most quoted — and most misused — verses in the Bible. What exactly does Paul promise? And just as important, what does he *not* promise?” *Steer toward: he promises that God works ALL things together for GOOD — not that all things ARE good, not that outcomes will be pleasant. The “good” is defined in the next verse: being conformed to the image of Christ, and finally glorified. It’s a promise about God’s purpose, not about comfortable circumstances.*
2. **Doctrine.** “The ‘golden chain’ ends with ‘glorified’ — in the past tense, as though it’s already done (8:30). Why would Paul speak of our future glory as already accomplished? What’s he trying to do for us?” *Steer toward: assurance. The chain is unbreakable — everyone foreknown is finally glorified, no link lost. Speaking the last link as past tense makes the point: in God’s purpose your glory is as good as done. This is meant to steady the trembling believer, not to fuel speculation about who’s in and who’s out.*
3. **The heart.** “Paul is ‘sure’ that nothing can separate us from God’s love (8:38). Most of us are not that sure on a bad day. Where does Paul’s certainty come from — and how is it different from just being confident in ourselves?” *Steer toward: his certainty rests on God’s*

love demonstrated in Christ (8:32) and on Christ's ongoing intercession (8:34) — not on his own steadiness. The love that holds us is HIS, and does not depend on the strength of our grip. We are held; we do not hold on by our own power.

The Hard Question

“The ‘golden chain’ — foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified. Doesn't this mean God simply chose some people and not others before they were ever born? And what about everyone *not* on the chain?”

The answer. Election unto salvation is entirely of grace, and Paul gives it here for one purpose: *comfort*. The chain is unbreakable — everyone God foreknew is finally glorified; not one called child slips through. That truth is meant to steady the anxious believer, not to send anyone speculating about the lost. And here is the guardrail the confessional tradition insists on: Scripture nowhere teaches a *symmetrical* decree. God does not predestine anyone to hell the way he predestines his own to glory. Those who are lost are lost by their own persistent resistance to the gospel — not by a sentence pronounced over them before they drew breath. Election is good news for the trembling, not a cold ledger of the doomed. When the doctrine starts to frighten you, you are using it backwards: Paul deploys it to make you *sure*, not scared. (*The full case, including this asymmetry, is in Ex-cursus F — read it before this session.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **“All things work together for good” as a promise of pleasant outcomes.** It promises that God *works* all things — even suffering — toward conformity to Christ and final glory, not toward our comfort.
- **Predestination as cold determinism or a cause for fear.** Paul wields it as comfort and worship; turned into terror, it has been read backwards.
- **The love depending on our grip.** It is *his* love that holds us (8:39); our security rests on his hold, not ours. We are kept, not self-keeping.

The Close

Hear the end of the matter, Christian, and let it be the high ground you stand on for the rest of your life: *nothing* — not death, not life, not the worst this world can do, not the accuser's loudest charge, not your own darkest failure — *nothing in all creation* can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord. The chain that holds you runs from God's eternal foreknowledge to your final glory, and you are not the weak link, be-

cause you are not a link you forged — he did. If God is for you, and at the cross he proved he is, then the case against you is closed, the love that holds you is his own, and the verdict is already written in the past tense: *glorified*. Go and live as one who cannot be lost. You came to the summit; rest here. It holds.

Suggested closing hymn: “If God Himself Be for Me” (Paul Gerhardt) — a direct versification of Romans 8:31–39, the believer’s defiant confidence in the unbreakable love of God.

Session 16 — Movement VIII.1: Sovereign Mercy

Romans 9:1–18

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement VIII, and read Excursus F before fielding the Jacob-and-Esau question. This opens the letter's second half. Teach it as Paul wrote it — in tears, not cold logic — and let the keynote be mercy.

The One Thing

God's saving word has not failed — because it never rested on human descent or human effort, but on his sovereign mercy, who has every right to have mercy on whom he will.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is demanding material, and the temptation is to teach it as an abstract puzzle about predestination. Don't. Teach it as Paul wrote it — drenched in tears for his own people (9:1–3) — and let the keynote be *mercy*. The Gospel here is profound comfort: if your salvation finally rested on your own will and effort, you would have every reason to tremble; but it rests on God's mercy, which cannot fail. The hard edges (God's freedom, Pharaoh's hardening) are real, but they serve the mercy, not the reverse. Keep the comfort in view all session: a salvation that depends on God's mercy is a salvation that cannot be lost by the weakness of our willing.

Teaching Outline

1. The weeping apostle (9:1–5). Paul has great sorrow and unceasing anguish; he could wish himself accursed for his kinsmen's sake. To Israel belong the adoption, the covenants, the law, the promises — and from them, the Christ, *who is God over all, blessed forever* (one of the clearest confessions of Christ's deity in the New Testament).

2. The children of promise (9:6–13). God's word has not failed: not all who descend from Israel are Israel. The children of *promise* are counted, not the children of the flesh — Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau, chosen *before* either had done anything, so that God's purpose of election might stand.

3. Mercy, not human will (9:14–18). Is there injustice with God? By no means. *I will have mercy on whom I have mercy*. So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who

shows mercy. He raised up Pharaoh to show his power; he has mercy on whom he wills, and hardens whom he wills.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **eleos / eleēō** — “mercy,” and “to show mercy.” It is the keyword of the whole section: *I will have mercy on whom I have mercy* (9:15); *salvation depends on God who has mercy* (9:16). Whatever else is hard here, the theme is mercy — God’s freedom *to be merciful* to the undeserving.
- **sklērynō** — “to harden” (9:18), used of Pharaoh. Worth a careful word: in Exodus, Pharaoh hardens his own heart again and again before the text ever says God hardened it. God’s hardening is his judicial confirmation of a rebellion already chosen — handing a man over to the hardness he insisted on — not the manufacture of evil in an innocent.

Opening

“Let me ask the question this chapter is really about. If your salvation finally depended on *you* — your choosing well, your willing rightly, your trying hard enough — how sure could you be of standing at the very end? Paul’s answer here is meant to be the deepest comfort you’ve heard all year: it doesn’t depend on you. It depends on God’s mercy. And God’s mercy does not fail.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Before Paul says one word about election, he tells us he is in anguish — he could wish himself *cursed* for his fellow Jews (9:3). Why does it matter that this hard chapter opens in tears rather than cold logic?” *Steer toward: Paul is not a detached philosopher solving a puzzle; he is a heartbroken pastor grieving the unbelief of his own people. Election is never to be discussed coldly or smugly. The doctrine lives inside love and anguish, never apart from them.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Paul says salvation depends ‘not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy’ (9:16). Most of us instinctively feel that’s unfair. Why might it actually be the best news in the chapter?” *Steer toward: if it depended on us, it could fail — our will is weak, our exertion falters. Because it rests on God’s mercy, it cannot fail. The very thing that offends our pride is the thing that secures our salvation. We’d lose a salvation that hung on our willing; we cannot lose one that hangs on his mercy.*
3. **The heart.** “Where do you catch yourself believing, deep down, that your standing with God really does depend on your willing and running well enough? What would it

mean to rest in his mercy instead of your effort?” *Steer toward: surfacing the functional works-righteousness that quietly steals peace, and resting in mercy. Not passivity — but the deep rest of knowing the outcome was never finally in our own shaking hands.*

The Hard Question

“‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’ (9:13) — and before either of them had done anything. Does God just love some people and hate others, arbitrarily, before they’re even born?”

The answer. Several things keep this from meaning what it first sounds like. First, in its original setting the statement concerns the *line of promise* — Jacob, not Esau, carries the covenant forward — not a declaration that God eternally damned the infant Esau. Second, “hated” is a Hebrew idiom of comparative preference: the same construction lets Jesus say a disciple must “hate” his father and mother (Luke 14:26), meaning *love less by comparison*, not despise. Third, even read as a matter of salvation, election stays *asymmetrical*: God chooses his own purely by grace, but he damns no one apart from their own sin. The point of the passage is not arbitrary cruelty; it is that God’s saving purpose runs on *mercy and his free choice*, not on human pedigree or merit — which is exactly why it cannot fail. (See *Excursus F* for the full treatment.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **God as an arbitrary tyrant.** The chapter’s whole emphasis is God’s right to be *merciful* — to save the undeserving — not a capricious cruelty.
- **“Jacob loved, Esau hated” as cold double predestination of individuals from birth.** It concerns the promise-line first, uses a Hebrew idiom of preference, and remains asymmetrical even read soteriologically.
- **“Depends not on human will” as making us robots.** It secures salvation in God’s mercy; it does not erase human responsibility, as the next session’s “potter” passage and Pharaoh’s self-hardening make plain.

The Close

This is a hard chapter, and it ends in the softest possible place: *mercy*. Hear the comfort buried in all the difficulty. Your salvation does not finally rest on the strength of your faith, the steadiness of your will, or the success of your striving — all of which waver and fail. It rests on the mercy of God, whose word *has not failed and cannot fail*. The thing that wounds your pride — that you contributed nothing, that it was mercy from first to last — is the very thing that lets you sleep tonight. The God who wept over his

people and gave his Son for them is the God who has had mercy on you. Rest in that mercy. It will hold when everything in you gives way.

Suggested closing hymn: “By Grace I’m Saved” (Scheffler) — “by grace! None dare lay claim to merit”; the security of a salvation grounded wholly in God’s free mercy.

Session 17 — Movement VIII.2: The Potter and the Clay

Romans 9:19–29

Preparing to teach: read the second part of Movement VIII, and have Excursus F firmly in hand — the asymmetry of the verbs in 9:22–23 is the hinge of the whole session. This is the passage critics throw at the Christian God; teach it closely enough to show what Paul actually says, and what he pointedly does not.

The One Thing

The potter has every right over the clay — and the right he exercises is the right to show *mercy*, patiently enduring vessels of wrath while making known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, called from Jews and Gentiles alike.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is the hardest passage in the letter to teach without distortion, and everything depends on reading it as carefully as Paul wrote it. The Law's severe note is real — God's freedom, his right over the clay, the vessels of wrath. But the *emphasis*, and the Gospel, is mercy: God endured the vessels of wrath *with much patience* precisely in order to make known *the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy* (9:22–23). And the grammar guards an all-important asymmetry — the vessels of mercy God *prepared beforehand*; the vessels of wrath are merely *fitted* for destruction, with no divine actor named. Teach the asymmetry and you have teach the passage; miss it, and you have made God a monster he is not.

Teaching Outline

1. The clay's complaint (9:19–21). *Why does he still find fault?* Paul does not answer with a system; he answers with the Creator's right: who are you to answer back to God? Has the potter no right over the clay, to make from the same lump vessels for honor and for dishonor?

2. The asymmetry of the vessels (9:22–24). God, desiring to show his wrath and power, *endured with much patience* vessels of wrath *fitted for destruction* — in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he *prepared beforehand* for glory, *even us* whom he called, from Jews and from Gentiles. Linger on the verbs.

3. Foretold by the prophets (9:25–29). Hosea: I will call “not my people” my people. Isaiah: though Israel be as the sand, only a *remnant* will be saved; unless the Lord had left us offspring, we would have become like Sodom. Mercy preserves a people.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **skeuos** — “vessel,” a clay pot. The image is humbling: we are the workmanship, not the workman. But the point of the metaphor is not God’s arbitrariness; it is his *right* — and the right he chooses to exercise is mercy.
- The verb asymmetry in 9:22–23 is the whole hinge. The vessels of mercy God *proetoi-masen* — “prepared beforehand” (active; his own gracious work). The vessels of wrath are *katērtismena* — “fitted, ripe” for destruction (a passive participle with *no stated agent*). Paul carefully does *not* say God prepared them; they ripened for ruin by their own resistance. The grammar itself refuses a symmetrical decree.

Opening

“Does God create some people for the express purpose of destroying them? This is the passage people point to when they accuse the Christian God of monstrosity. So tonight we are going to do something simple and demanding: read it slowly — closely enough to hear what Paul actually says, and, just as important, what he pointedly does not.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “When the objector asks ‘why does God still find fault?’ (9:19), Paul doesn’t give a tidy explanation — he points to the potter’s right over the clay. Why might Paul refuse to ‘solve’ the problem and instead put us in our place as creatures?” *Steer toward: some questions are asked from the wrong posture — the creature demanding the Creator justify himself. Paul reasserts the right relation: God is God, we are clay. But notice this isn’t the end — he immediately moves to mercy. The clay is humbled precisely so it can receive mercy rather than demand explanations.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Look closely at 9:22–23. What does Paul say God *did* to the vessels of mercy? And what does he carefully *not* say about the vessels of wrath?” *Steer toward: God ‘prepared beforehand’ the vessels of mercy (active — his gracious work). But the vessels of wrath are ‘fitted for destruction’ with no actor named — Paul does NOT say God prepared them. The asymmetry is deliberate: God prepares his own for glory; the lost ripen for ruin by their own rebellion. He even ‘endured them with much patience.’*

3. **The heart.** “Paul calls believers ‘vessels of mercy, prepared beforehand for glory’ (9:23). If that’s what you are — clay the Potter chose to show mercy to — how does that land against the pride that wants to take some credit, and the despair that fears you’re not good enough?” *Steer toward: it dismantles both. Pride has nothing to claim — you’re clay, shown mercy. Despair has nothing to fear — your standing rests on the Potter’s mercy, not your quality of clay. You are a vessel of mercy by his preparing, not your deserving.*

The Hard Question

“‘Vessels of wrath prepared for destruction’ (9:22) — did God make some people for the very purpose of damning them?”

The answer. No — and the text itself is built to prevent that reading. Look at the verbs, because Paul chose them with care. Of the vessels of mercy, he says God *prepared them beforehand* for glory: an active work of grace, God’s own doing. Of the vessels of wrath, he says they are *fitted* for destruction — a passive form with *no divine actor named* — meaning they ripened for ruin by their own persistent resistance. Paul could have written “God prepared them for destruction”; he deliberately did not. Add that God *endured them with much patience* — hardly the language of someone eager to manufacture the damned. This is the asymmetry the whole Lutheran tradition insists on: God elects his own to salvation purely by grace, but he predestines *no one* to hell. The saved are saved by his mercy; the lost are lost by their own sin. The grammar will not give the objector the monster he came looking for. (*This is the heart of Excursus F — read it before this session.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **The potter passage as crushing human responsibility.** The clay’s question is answered by God’s right to show *mercy*; and Pharaoh, just before, hardened his own heart first. Responsibility stands.
- **Symmetrical predestination.** The verbs of 9:22–23 refuse it: vessels of mercy *prepared by God*; vessels of wrath merely *fitted*, no agent named.
- **“Vessels of wrath” as God’s eager manufacture of the damned.** He *endured them with much patience* — long-suffering, not relish for destruction.

The Close

Here is the passage people use to call God a monster, and here is what it actually says: the Potter has every right over the clay — and the right he exercises is *mercy*. He endured, with much patience, what deserved only wrath, and he did it to pour out the

riches of his glory on vessels of mercy — *even us*, he says, called from Jew and Gentile, prepared beforehand not for destruction but for glory. You are not clay God shaped to break. If you are in Christ tonight, you are a vessel of mercy, made to hold the riches of his grace, by a Potter who chose to show you mercy when he owed you nothing. Stop demanding that God explain himself to you, and start receiving the mercy he is pressing into your hands. That is what the clay was made for.

Suggested closing hymn: “Jesus Sinners Doth Receive” (Neumann) — the mercy that welcomes the undeserving: “this can all my fears relieve... Jesus sinners doth receive.”

Session 18 — Movement IX.1: The Word Is Near

Romans 9:30–10:13

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement IX, and skim Excursus G on the means of grace. This passage is a direct rebuke to the religion of the inner quest — strikingly timely for our own age. Teach it as rest for the exhausted.

The One Thing

Israel stumbled chasing a righteousness by works; Christ is the end of the Law as a way to be right with God; and the saving word is *near* — not at the top of some inner ladder, but as close as the gospel you can hear right now.

Law and Gospel in This Text

The Law/Gospel contrast is the very spine here. Israel pursued righteousness by *works* and stumbled over Christ; the Gentiles received it by *faith*. The Gospel relief is profound: you do not have to ascend to heaven or descend to the depths to find God — the word is *near*, in the mouth and the heart. Set this against every modern spirituality of the inner climb — the endless search within for a deeper experience — and let the class feel the rest of it. You do not climb up to God; the word comes down to you, and Christ is its content. Keep the session resting on the *nearness* of the word, against all striving.

Teaching Outline

1. The stumbling stone (9:30–33). The Gentiles, not pursuing righteousness, attained it — the righteousness that is by faith. Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not reach it, because they pursued it *as if* it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone — and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

2. Christ, the end of the Law (10:1–4). Paul's heart's desire is their salvation. They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge; ignorant of God's righteousness, they sought to establish their own. *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

3. The near word (10:5–13). Do not say *who will ascend into heaven* or *who will descend into the abyss* — the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, the word of faith we proclaim. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that

God raised him, you will be saved. *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved — Jew and Greek alike.*

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **telos** — “end,” in 10:4: *Christ is the telos of the law for righteousness.* The word can mean *goal* or *termination*, and both are true — but the weight here falls on *termination*: Christ brings the Law to an end *as a way of being justified*. That road closes; the road of faith opens. (Christ is also the Law’s goal, the one it always pointed to — but he is not merely its goal while leaving law-righteousness as a live option.)
- **rhēma** — “word,” in 10:8: *the word is near you.* Not a truth to be climbed to but a word to be heard and believed — as near as the gospel spoken in your hearing.

Opening

“Where do people look for God today? Almost always *inside* — in feelings, in a private spiritual journey, in some deeper experience they’re forever straining to reach. Paul says something that should stop us cold: *stop climbing*. You do not have to ascend to heaven or descend to the depths to find Christ. The word is near — as near as the gospel you can hear in this room tonight.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Israel had a real *zeal for God* (10:2) — they were sincere, devout, serious about religion. Yet Paul says they missed it. What went wrong? Can sincerity itself be part of the problem?” *Steer toward: their zeal was aimed at establishing their OWN righteousness — sincere, but pointed the wrong way. Sincerity in self-justification doesn’t save; it’s the very engine of the problem. Devotion aimed at the self is still aimed away from Christ.*
2. **Doctrine.** “‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness’ (10:4). Does ‘end’ mean the Law is now abolished and irrelevant for the Christian — or something more precise?” *Steer toward: ‘end’ means Christ terminates the Law as a WAY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS — that road is closed. It does NOT mean the Law is abolished; it still exposes sin, restrains evil in society, and guides the Christian. What ends is law-keeping as a means of being justified. Christ is also the Law’s goal — it always pointed to him.*
3. **The heart.** “Be honest: do you ever treat your relationship with God as a ladder you have to keep climbing — more discipline, deeper experiences, better feelings — never quite arriving? What would change if you really heard that the word is already *near you*?” *Steer toward: the exhaustion of the inner climb versus the rest of the near word. You*

don't have to manufacture an encounter; God has come near in the gospel. Assurance rests on the word spoken to you, not the spiritual height you attain.

The Hard Question

“‘Christ is the end of the law’ (10:4) — so is the Law just abolished now? Does it have any place at all in the Christian life?”

The answer. The Law is not abolished; what ends is one specific thing — the Law *as a road to righteousness before God*. That road Christ closes completely: you will never be justified by keeping it, and to keep trying is to stumble over the very stone of salvation, as Israel did. But the Law keeps doing its other work. It still *accuses*, exposing our sin and driving us to Christ (its sharpest use). It still *restrains* evil in society through the civil order. And it still *guides* the Christian, showing the shape of the life that faith now freely lives. So the believer is finished with the Law as a way to *earn* God's acceptance, and free to receive the Law as a *gift* that teaches him how to love. The end of law-righteousness is not lawlessness; it is the freedom to obey without fear. (See Movement IX.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **telos as only “goal.”** The weight is on *termination*: Christ ends the Law as a way to righteousness. Miss this and you leave law-keeping open as a road, and stumble where Israel stumbled.
- **telos as total abolition of the Law.** No — only as a means of justification; its accusing, restraining, and guiding uses remain.
- **Seeking God within.** The whole passage points *outward* to the near, external word — against the religion of the inner quest.

The Close

If you are tired tonight — tired of climbing, tired of straining after a deeper experience, tired of taking your own spiritual temperature and never trusting the reading — hear the gospel and set the ladder down. *The word is near you*. You do not have to ascend into heaven to drag Christ down; he has already come. You do not have to descend into the depths to raise him up; he is already risen. The God you have been straining to reach has reached *you*, and put his saving word as near as the voice that speaks it and the ear that hears it. Christ is the end of all your exhausting law-keeping — not so you may live lawlessly, but so you may finally rest. Stop climbing. The word is near — near enough to hear, near enough to hold, near enough to save.

Suggested closing hymn: “Lord, ’Tis Not That I Did Choose Thee” (Conder) — the confession that grace and the saving word came to us first, before any move of ours toward God.

Session 19 — Movement IX.2: Faith Comes by Hearing

Romans 10:14–21

Preparing to teach: read the second part of Movement IX, and read Excursus G on the means of grace. This short passage holds the whole doctrine of how faith is created — and a sobering question about those who never hear. Teach it toward mission, not speculation.

The One Thing

Faith is not summoned up from within; it is created by the heard word — so the gospel must be sent and preached, while God holds out his hands all day long to a people who will not come.

Law and Gospel in This Text

The Gospel here is the doctrine of the means of grace in miniature: *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ* (10:17). You did not generate your faith; it was given through a word someone was sent to speak. The Law's note falls at the end — Israel *heard* and would not believe, and God's open hands meet a disobedient and contrary people (10:21). Hold two things together: the immense comfort that faith is God's gift through the external word, and the urgency that drives the whole passage — if faith comes by hearing, then the word must be *sent*. This is a session that should end not in a puzzle but on the road, with the gospel moving outward.

Teaching Outline

1. The chain of sending (10:14–15). How are they to call on one they have not believed? How believe in one they have not heard? How hear without someone preaching? How preach unless sent? *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.* Calling depends on believing, believing on hearing, hearing on preaching, preaching on sending.

2. Faith from hearing (10:16–17). But not all obeyed the gospel — Isaiah said, *who has believed what he heard from us?* So then, *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* The word is the instrument; faith is its fruit.

3. God's open hands (10:18–21). Did they not hear? Indeed they did — the word went out. Did Israel not understand? They did. And yet, says God through Isaiah, *All day long I have*

held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people. The tragedy is not that the word failed to come, but that it was refused.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **akoē** — “hearing,” in 10:17: *faith comes from akoē, and akoē through the word of Christ.* The doctrine of the means of grace in a single line. Faith is not conjured from inside us; it is created by the word that comes from outside us, into the ear. This is why the gospel must be *spoken*, not merely felt.
- The image of *beautiful feet* (10:15, from Isaiah) is worth a word: the messenger’s dusty, travel-worn feet are called *beautiful* — because of the news they carry. The gospel dignifies the ordinary act of going and telling.

Opening

“Here’s a question that should unsettle every comfortable Christian: how did faith get *into* you? Not how did you decide — how did it get there in the first place? Paul’s answer reorders everything. Faith came by *hearing*. Which means someone, somewhere, had to be sent, and had to speak, before you could ever believe. You are the end of a chain that started with God sending.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul builds a chain backwards: calling, believing, hearing, preaching, *sending* (10:14–15). What’s at the very beginning of the chain — the first link everything else depends on?” *Steer toward: sending. None of it happens unless someone is sent. Faith doesn’t begin with the believer’s decision; it begins with God sending a messenger with a word. The whole chain runs on God’s initiative, delivered through human mouths.*
2. **Doctrine.** “‘Faith comes from hearing’ (10:17). If that’s true, what does it say about the popular idea that faith is something you generate inside yourself by deciding hard enough?” *Steer toward: faith is not self-generated; it’s created by the external word, which is the Spirit’s instrument. We receive faith through hearing the gospel — we don’t manufacture it by an act of will. This guards against making conversion a human work and grounds assurance outside ourselves, in the word.*
3. **The heart.** “The chapter ends with God holding out his hands ‘all day long’ to people who won’t come (10:21). What does that picture tell you about God’s heart toward those who resist him — and toward you in your own seasons of resistance?” *Steer toward: God is not the reluctant one; the picture is of patient, outstretched, almost pleading love meeting*

refusal. The tragedy of the lost is not God's unwillingness but their resistance. And it's a tender word for us: when we've been cold or resistant, the hands are still held out.

The Hard Question

"If faith only comes by hearing the gospel, what about all the people who never hear it — those who die having never had a preacher sent to them? Are they simply lost through no fault of their own?"

The answer. This question deserves sobriety, not a glib answer. Scripture is clear about the *ordinary* means: faith comes by hearing, which is precisely why mission is urgent and not optional. What Scripture does *not* give us is a detailed map of God's dealings with every individual who never heard. It tells us that all people have some witness and are *without excuse* (Romans 1), that God is perfectly just and merciful, and that *the Judge of all the earth will do right* (Genesis 18:25). We are not given to peer into God's secret dealings with those beyond the reach of the word — but we *are* given a commission to carry the word to them. So the right response to this question is not speculation in either direction — not a comfortable universalism, not a cold presumption — but *sending*. The passage was written to put us on the road, not in an armchair. Rest in God's justice; get the gospel moving. (See *Excursus G and Movement IX*.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Faith as a self-generated decision.** It comes by *hearing* — the Spirit's work through the external word — not by an act of will we produce.
- **The unevangelized question as license.** It is neither a warrant for universalism nor an excuse to stop sending; the whole passage drives *toward* mission. Speculation about the lost is the wrong response; proclamation is the right one.
- **"Faith from hearing" as mere information transfer.** Hearing the word is the means through which the Spirit *creates* faith — not a bare exchange of facts. The power is in the word, not the eloquence of the preacher.

The Close

You are sitting here tonight with faith in your heart, and Paul wants you to know how it got there: someone was sent, and spoke, and you heard, and God through that word created in you the faith by which you now call on his name. You are the living end of a chain that began with God's sending love. And that should turn you around to face outward — because the same God who sent a word to you is still holding out his hands, all

day long, to people who have not yet heard, or have heard and resisted. Their faith, too, will come by hearing — which means it waits on someone being sent. We are not given to solve the mystery of every soul beyond the word's reach; we are given the beautiful, dusty-footed task of carrying it there. The hands are still open. Go and be the feet.

Suggested closing hymn: “Preach You the Word” (Martin Franzmann) — the sower’s word scattered in faith that God will give the growth: the gospel sent, doing its own work.

Session 20 — Movement X.1: The Olive Tree

Romans 11:1–24

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement X. This chapter handles the relationship of the church to Israel — a place where arrogance and confusion both run high. The governing word to a Gentile class is the one Paul gives: do not boast.

The One Thing

God has not rejected his people — a remnant stands by grace, and we Gentiles are wild branches grafted into Israel's own tree, supported by a root we did not grow, with no ground whatsoever to boast.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is a chapter of mercy and of *humility*. The Gospel: God has not cast off his people; a remnant remains, chosen by grace, not works; and the door has swung wide to the nations. The Law's sharp word here falls squarely on *Gentile pride* — the grafted-in branch warned, bluntly, not to boast over the natural branches: *you stand by faith; do not become proud, but fear*. Teach the breadth of God's mercy and the humility it demands of those of us brought in from outside. The whole olive-tree image is built to humble the Gentile believer, not to inflate him.

Teaching Outline

1. A remnant chosen by grace (11:1–10). Has God rejected his people? *By no means* — Paul himself is an Israelite. As in Elijah's day, when God kept seven thousand, so now there is a remnant *chosen by grace* — and if by grace, then no longer on the basis of works, or grace would not be grace.

2. Grafted in — do not boast (11:11–18). Israel's stumbling brought riches to the Gentiles. But Paul warns the wild branches grafted in among the natural ones: *do not boast over the branches*. Remember, *you do not support the root, but the root supports you*.

3. Stand by faith, in fear (11:19–24). Branches were broken off for unbelief, and you stand only by faith. *Do not become proud, but fear*. Note then the kindness and the severity of God — and know that God is able to graft the natural branches back in, for it is *their own tree*.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **enkentrizō** — “to graft in” (11:17, 19, 23, 24). Paul’s image runs *backwards* from ordinary horticulture: you graft cultivated branches into hardy wild stock, not wild branches into a cultivated tree. He says so himself — we were grafted in *contrary to nature* (11:24). The whole metaphor is engineered to humble the Gentile: you are here against the natural order, by sheer mercy.
- **chrēstotēs kai apotomia** — “kindness and severity” (11:22). Two sides of God we are told to *behold* together: severity toward the branches that fell in unbelief, kindness toward those who stand by faith — and the warning that we remain in his kindness only by faith, never by entitlement.

Opening

“If you are a Gentile Christian — and almost all of us are — Paul has a word in this chapter that cuts against everything in us: you are a *wild* branch, grafted into a tree that was never naturally yours, against the very order of nature, by mercy alone. So whatever else tonight does, it should make us humble. This is a chapter about the breadth of God’s mercy and the lowliness it demands.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul keeps warning the Gentile believers: *do not boast, do not become proud, but fear* (11:18, 20). Why would Gentile Christians be tempted to look down on Israel? And why does Paul treat that pride as so dangerous?” *Steer toward: the pride of the included over the excluded, the new branch over the old. It’s dangerous because it forgets we stand only by grace, on a root that supports us — and the same unbelief that broke off the natural branches could break us off too. Humility, not triumph, is the only fitting posture.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Paul says ‘you do not support the root, but the root supports you’ (11:18). What is the ‘root,’ and what does it mean that Gentile believers are supported by it rather than the reverse?” *Steer toward: we are grafted into Israel’s tree — the covenant promises, the patriarchs, the line that produced the Christ. We didn’t start a new tree; we were brought into the old one. Our faith depends on the promises God made to Israel, fulfilled in Jesus. We are guests made family, not founders.*
3. **The heart.** “Where does spiritual pride creep into your own heart — looking down on those still outside, or those who believe differently, as if your standing were your own achievement rather than sheer mercy?” *Steer toward: the chapter’s humbling work, applied. We stand by grace alone; there’s no room to look down on anyone. Mercy received should*

make us merciful and lowly, not superior. The branch grafted in by mercy has nothing to boast of.

The Hard Question

“Has the church simply *replaced* Israel? Are the Jewish people now cut off for good, their promises handed over to us?”

The answer. No — and that idea is precisely the arrogance Paul writes this chapter to forbid. He says it plainly: God has *not* rejected his people (11:1); the natural branches were broken off *for unbelief*, and they can be grafted back in (11:23), for it is *their own* tree. The picture is not a new tree that displaces the old; it is *one* tree, with *one* root, into which both Jew and Gentile are grafted *by faith*. “Supersessionism” — the notion that the church wholly supplants Israel and inherits its promises by transfer — misreads the olive tree at exactly the point Paul is guarding. But neither does this mean a separate, parallel track for Israel apart from Christ: the broken branches are grafted back into the *same* tree, by the *same* faith, in the *same* Messiah. Hold the unity — one tree, one root, one faith — without either Gentile triumphalism or a two-track scheme. (*See Movement X.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Supersessionism / Gentile arrogance.** The very pride Paul forbids — boasting over the natural branches as if God were finished with Israel.
- **Presuming the natural branches can never return.** Paul says the opposite: they can be grafted back in, for it is their own tree.
- **Standing “by faith” as standing by our own achievement.** We stand by faith, supported by the root — humility, not boast. The branch contributes nothing to the tree.

The Close

Whatever else you take from this chapter, do not miss its heart, and do not miss its warning. The heart: *God has not rejected his people*, and his mercy is wide enough to graft wild branches like us into a tree that was never naturally ours. The warning: do not boast. You are here by mercy, against the order of nature, supported by a root you did not grow and could never have grown. The same faith that grafted you in is the only thing that keeps you here — so stand, but stand in awe, not arrogance; in gratitude, not entitlement; in fear of the God whose kindness you remain under only by his grace. The branch that remembers it was once wild, and was grafted in by mercy, has no one left to look down on. It can only be thankful.

Suggested closing hymn: “The Church’s One Foundation” (Stone) — one foundation, one Lord, one faith: the one people of God gathered into the one tree.

Session 21 — Movement X.2: All Israel, and the Depth of God

Romans 11:25–36

Preparing to teach: read the close of Movement X. This session handles a genuinely disputed text (“all Israel”), and it is a chance to model what every class needs to learn: how to hold a conviction firmly and a brother charitably at the same time. End, as Paul does, in worship.

The One Thing

God’s mercy will finally triumph — for the fullness of the Gentiles and for Israel alike — and when Paul has traced that mercy as far as a mind can go, he lays down his pen and worships.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is the Gospel of mercy’s triumph, rising into doxology. The Gospel: a hardening in part, *until* the fullness of the Gentiles; and so, in God’s deep mercy, *all Israel will be saved*; God has consigned all to disobedience that he might have *mercy on all*. There is no Law-imperative here at all — only the unveiling of a mercy so vast it ends in song. The one pastoral discipline the session requires is *charity*: “all Israel” is a genuinely disputed phrase, and the way you handle it teaches the class how to disagree well. Present the readings honestly, give the book’s lean, and refuse to make a contested text a wall between brothers.

Teaching Outline

1. The mystery (11:25–27). Lest you be wise in your own conceits: a partial hardening has come upon Israel *until the fullness of the Gentiles* has come in. *And in this way all Israel will be saved*, as it is written — the Deliverer will come from Zion and banish ungodliness from Jacob.

2. Mercy on all (11:28–32). As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake; but as regards election, beloved for the sake of the fathers — *for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*. God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have *mercy on all*.

3. The doxology of the depths (11:33–36). *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and inscrutable his ways!* Who has known the

Lord's mind? Who has been his counselor? *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **pas Israēl** — “all Israel” (11:26). The crux of the chapter, and a genuinely debated phrase (see The Hard Question). Whatever its precise reference, note what frames it: *mercy* — a hardening only *until*, a salvation *in this way*, a God consigning all to disobedience precisely *to have mercy on all*.
- **anexeraunēta** — “unsearchable” (11:33), paired with *inscrutable*. Paul reaches the edge of what thought can trace and names it: God's ways run deeper than our charts. The right response is not a finished system but a bowed head.

Opening

“We come now to one of the most debated sentences in the whole New Testament — *all Israel will be saved*. Christians who love the same Bible and read it just as carefully come to three different conclusions about what it means. So tonight is also a lesson in something every class — every church — needs: how to hold a conviction firmly and hold a brother charitably, both at once.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Three times in a few verses Paul circles back to one word: *mercy* — ‘mercy to you,’ ‘mercy on all’ (11:30–32). Whatever the details of ‘all Israel,’ what is the unmistakable theme Paul wants us to carry away?” *Steer toward: mercy — vast, surprising, undeserved mercy, reaching Gentiles and Israel alike. The hardening is ‘until’; the consigning to disobedience is ‘so that’ mercy might come. Whatever we conclude about the timing and reference, the point is the breadth and triumph of God’s mercy.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Paul ends not with a tidy system but with worship — *O the depth!* (11:33). What does it tell us that the most doctrinally intense chapters in the Bible end in a doxology rather than a diagram?” *Steer toward: there’s a point where the right response to God’s ways is not mastery but adoration. Paul doesn’t resolve every question; he bows. Good theology runs toward worship, not toward a closed system we control. Some depths are meant to be praised, not charted.*
3. **The heart.** “This passage forces a humbling admission: God’s ways are ‘unsearchable.’ Where in your own life are you demanding that God’s ways be searchable — insisting on an explanation before you’ll trust him?” *Steer toward: the move from demanding ex-*

planations to trusting the God whose mercy has already been proven at the cross. We don't get a full map; we get a trustworthy God. Worship is what faith does at the edge of its understanding.

The Hard Question

“‘All Israel will be saved’ (11:26) — what does that actually mean? A future conversion of the Jewish people? Every Jew who ever lived? Or just the church, Jew and Gentile together?”

The answer. This is a genuinely disputed text, and a good teacher says so plainly rather than pretending it's obvious. There are three respectable readings, each held by faithful interpreters: (1) “all Israel” is the elect remnant of Jews gathered throughout history; (2) it is the whole people of God, Jew and Gentile, the church, now called “Israel”; (3) it is a future ingathering of ethnic Israel, brought to faith in Christ near the end and grafted back into the *one* olive tree. This commentary leans to the third — but with a guardrail that must not be dropped: this is *not* dispensationalism. There is no separate track for Israel apart from the church; the natural branches are grafted back into the *same* tree, by the *same* faith, in the *same* Christ. Whichever reading you land on, hold it with conviction and your brother's reading with charity. This is not a hill to divide a class over — and learning to say so is part of the lesson. (*Movement X lays out the options and the book's lean, and flags this as the author's own ruling.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Dispensationalism.** A separate, parallel program for ethnic Israel apart from the church and the one tree. The branches are grafted back into the *same* tree, by faith — not given a different road.
- **Making “all Israel” a test of fellowship.** It is a genuine open question among faithful confessors; conviction held with charity is the model, not division.
- **The doxology as resignation.** *O the depth!* is worship, not a shrug. Paul bows in adoration, not in defeat.

The Close

Whatever you finally make of the harder questions in this chapter — and faithful Christians will land in different places — do not let the debate rob you of its glory. *God's mercy will triumph.* A hardening only *until*; a salvation *in this way*; a God who shut all up under disobedience for the express purpose of having *mercy on all*. Paul traced that mercy as

far as a human mind can travel, and at the edge he did not build a system; he fell down and worshiped: *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!* That is where this chapter means to leave you — not with every question answered, but with a God you can trust past the end of your understanding, and a mercy wide enough to take in the nations and Israel and you. From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Suggested closing hymn: “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty” (Neander) — the doxology of Romans 11 in congregational voice: adoration before the unsearchable God.

Session 22 — Movement XI.1: The Living Sacrifice

Romans 12:1–8

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement XI, and skim Excursus H on vocation. This is the great hinge of the letter — where doctrine turns to life — and the place where the whole discipline of this guide is tested. Guard the “therefore” with everything you have.

The One Thing

By the mercies of God — everything Paul has unfolded for eleven chapters — present yourselves as a living sacrifice; the Christian life is the grateful overflow of grace received, never the price of grace sought.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is the hinge of the entire letter, and the moment your teaching discipline matters most. Here the sustained imperatives begin — present, be transformed, think with sober judgment, serve. But look at the chain that binds them: *I appeal to you therefore, by the mercies of God* (12:1). Eleven chapters of mercy come *first*; the commands flow *out* of them. If you teach chapter 12 as “now, finally, the practical part — here’s the to-do list,” you sever the imperatives from their root and turn the gospel back into law. Teach it instead as gratitude’s overflow: *because* of all that mercy, *therefore* this life — not in order to earn mercy, but because mercy has already been poured out. Even the transformation is God’s work: *be transformed*, passive, by the renewing of the mind.

Teaching Outline

1. The hinge (12:1–2). *I appeal to you therefore, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God* — your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that you may discern the will of God. Note the passive: God renews; you are transformed.

2. Sober judgment (12:3). By the grace given him, Paul tells everyone not to think of himself more highly than he ought, but with *sober judgment*, each according to the measure of faith God has assigned. The mercy that humbles is the same mercy that frees.

3. One body, many gifts (12:4–8). As a body has many members with different functions, so we, though many, are one body in Christ. The gifts differ *according to the grace given us* —

prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, mercy — so use them. (Here vocation begins; see Excursus H.)

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **oun** — “therefore,” the first word of 12:1, and the most important word in the verse. It carries the entire weight of eleven chapters: *therefore*, in light of all this mercy. Every command that follows hangs on it. Never teach the ethics of Romans without the *therefore*.
- **metamorphousthe** — “be transformed” (12:2). It is *passive*: not “transform yourselves” but “be transformed” — by the renewing of the mind, which is God’s own work through his Word and Spirit. Even our growth is gift, not achievement. (The English “metamorphosis” is hiding inside it.)

Opening

“Romans 12 begins with a *therefore*. And the old preacher’s rule is: whenever you see a ‘therefore,’ ask what it’s *there for*. This one carries the weight of eleven chapters. Everything Paul is about to ask of you rests entirely on everything he has already given you. Get that order wrong, and you lose the gospel in the very moment you start talking about the Christian life.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul could simply have commanded, ‘present your bodies as a living sacrifice.’ Instead he writes, ‘by the mercies of God, *therefore*, present...’ Why does he ground the command in mercy first? What changes if you drop the ‘therefore?’” *Steer toward: without the “therefore,” the command becomes a law to earn God’s favor; with it, the command becomes gratitude’s response to favor already given. The same words mean opposite things depending on the order. The mercy is the engine; remove it and the engine is gone.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Verse 2 says *be transformed* — passive — not ‘transform yourself.’ Why does that grammar matter for how we think about Christian growth?” *Steer toward: sanctification, like justification, is God’s work in us, not our self-improvement project. We are transformed by the renewing of the mind, which God does through Word and Spirit. We cooperate, but we don’t engineer it. This guards against works-righteousness even in the “practical” chapters.*
3. **The heart.** “Be honest about your own instinct: when you read ‘present your bodies as a living sacrifice,’ does it land as a burden to shoulder or as a gift to pour out? What

would it take to feel it as overflow rather than obligation?” *Steer toward: locating the moralism in our own hearing, and re-rooting the command in mercy. The living sacrifice is gratitude, not payment. When mercy is felt, obedience stops feeling like a bill and starts feeling like a thank-you.*

The Hard Question

“Isn’t *this* where Romans finally gets practical — where we stop all the doctrine and start talking about what to *do*? Hasn’t the real Christian life been waiting for chapter 12 this whole time?”

The answer. Gently correct the framing, because it hides a serious error — and this is perhaps the single most important correction in the whole guide. The doctrine of chapters 1 through 11 was not a *delay* before the practical part; it was the *foundation* the practical part stands on. And the ethics of chapter 12 are not a switch from gift to demand — they are the *overflow* of the gift: *by the mercies of God, therefore*. If you teach chapter 12 as “now the to-do list,” you sever it from its root and quietly turn the whole gospel back into law — exactly what Paul spent eleven chapters dismantling. The living sacrifice is not the *price* of mercy; it is the *response* to mercy already poured out. There is nothing more practical than the doctrine that frees you to love without trying to earn. (*Movement XI develops this; it is the hinge of the entire letter.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **The imperatives as a new law.** They are the fruit of eleven chapters of mercy, not the engine of acceptance. Guard the *therefore*.
- **“Be transformed” as self-improvement.** It is passive — God’s renewing work in us, not our project of self-betterment.
- **“Living sacrifice” as earning.** It is the grateful response to mercy received, not a payment toward mercy desired. Gratitude, not invoice.

The Close

Hear the order, and never lose it: not “do this, and God will be merciful,” but “God has been merciful — *therefore*, do this.” Everything Paul now asks of you flows out of everything he has already given you: a righteousness not your own, peace with God, the Spirit, adoption, an unbreakable love, a mercy wide enough to graft in wild branches and take in the nations. *Because* of all that — not in order to earn any of it — present yourselves. And even this you do not pull off by gritted teeth; *be transformed*,

Paul says, by the renewing of your mind, which God himself works in you. So go and live the life, not as a bill you are anxiously paying down, but as a thank-you offered to the God whose mercies have already made you his. Become what you are.

Suggested closing hymn: “Take My Life and Let It Be” (Havergal) — the living sacrifice of Romans 12, every faculty offered back in gratitude to the God who gave first.

Session 23 — Movement XI.2: Genuine Love

Romans 12:9–21

Preparing to teach: read the second part of Movement XI. This is the portrait of a community that runs on grace — and its hardest line is the one about blessing your enemies. Keep tracing every command back to the mercy of 12:1; none of it stands on its own.

The One Thing

The life that flows from God's mercy is love without a mask — clinging to good, blessing persecutors, refusing revenge, and overcoming evil with good.

Law and Gospel in This Text

These are imperatives, and many of them are hard — but they are still hanging on the *therefore* of 12:1, and your job is to keep that thread visible. This is not a fresh ladder of demands; it is the shape grace takes when it overflows into a community. The Gospel undergirds the whole portrait: a people who have received mercy can extend it; a people who know God will judge justly can lay down their own revenge (12:19); a people loved while they were enemies can bless their enemies. Teach the commands as the *fruit* of mercy, never as the *root* of acceptance. And note: this renunciation of private vengeance sets up next week's hard word about the magistrate's sword.

Teaching Outline

1. Love without a mask (12:9–13). *Let love be genuine.* Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Outdo one another in showing honor; be fervent in spirit, patient in tribulation, constant in prayer, generous to the saints, given to hospitality. A whole community sketched in a breath.

2. Bless, weep, rejoice (12:14–16). *Bless those who persecute you* — bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be wise in your own sight.

3. Overcome evil with good (12:17–21). Repay no one evil for evil. So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. *Never avenge yourselves*, but leave it to the wrath of God. If your enemy is hungry, feed him — for in so doing you will heap *burning coals* on his head. *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **anhypokritos** — “genuine,” literally *un-hypocritical* (12:9). The word for love that wears no mask — not the performed warmth of the actor (the *hypokritēs* was a stage-player), but the real thing. Christian love is sincere all the way down, or it is not yet Christian love.
- The image of **burning coals** (12:20, from Proverbs 25) is worth handling, since it sounds vengeful. Read with the next verse (*overcome evil with good*), it cannot mean disguised malice — it most likely pictures the burning *shame* that undeserved kindness kindles in an enemy, the heat that can melt hostility into repentance.

Opening

“What does a community actually look like when it runs on grace instead of on keeping score? Paul paints the portrait here, stroke by stroke — and the hardest brushstroke of all is this one: it *blesses the people who hurt it*. So the real question tonight isn’t ‘can I try harder to be nice?’ It’s: where does a love like that even come from?”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul says, ‘never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God’ (12:19). He doesn’t say vengeance is wrong because justice doesn’t matter — he says leave it to *God*. How does trusting God’s justice actually make it possible to lay down our own?” *Steer toward: we renounce revenge not by pretending the wrong didn’t matter, but by entrusting it to a Judge who will set it right. We don’t have to even the score because God will. That frees us to bless instead of retaliate — not because we’re doormats, but because we trust the Judge.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Every command in this passage — bless, don’t avenge, overcome evil with good — hangs on the ‘therefore’ of 12:1. How is blessing your enemy the *overflow* of mercy rather than a new law you have to grit your teeth to keep?” *Steer toward: we were enemies, and God blessed us (5:10); having received that, we extend it. The command isn’t a fresh burden to earn favor; it’s what mercy looks like when it flows through us to others. You can only give what you’ve received — and we’ve received enemy-love.*
3. **The heart.** “Who is the ‘enemy’ in your life right now — the person it would feel satisfying to repay? What would it look like this week to overcome that evil with good rather than be overcome by it?” *Steer toward: concrete application rooted in grace, not willpower. Not denying the hurt, but refusing to let it turn us into what hurt us. The mercy we’ve received*

is the only fuel that makes this possible — and even here, we lean on the Spirit, not our own resolve.

The Hard Question

“‘Heap burning coals on his head’ (12:20) — isn’t that just a sneaky form of revenge? Be nice to your enemy so God will punish him worse?”

The answer. It can’t mean that, and the surrounding verses prove it. Paul has just said *never avenge yourselves* (12:19), and he immediately follows the coals with *do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (12:21). A disguised wish for your enemy’s torment would flatly contradict both. The “burning coals” image (drawn from Proverbs 25) most likely pictures the burning *shame* that undeserved kindness stirs in a hostile heart — the heat of a conscience confronted by grace, which can soften and even melt an enemy toward repentance. (Some see behind it an ancient gesture of carrying live coals as a gift of reconciliation.) Either way, Paul states the *aim* in plain words in the very next line: to *overcome* the enemy — to win him — not to outflank him. The Christian renounces vengeance entirely and leaves all judgment to God. (See *Movement XI*.)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **“Burning coals” as disguised revenge.** The next verse forbids it — overcome evil *with good*. The aim is to win the enemy, not to torment him.
- **“Never avenge yourselves” as forbidding all justice.** It forbids *private* vengeance; God’s wrath, and the magistrate’s sword (next session), are another matter entirely.
- **Genuine love as mere niceness.** It *abhors* evil and clings to good (12:9) — love with a spine, not sentiment without conviction.

The Close

Here is what grace looks like when it finally overflows into a life: love with no mask, honor freely given, patience in trouble, doors open to strangers, and — hardest of all — blessing for the very people who wound us. Where does such a love come from? Only one place. You were God’s enemy, and while you were still his enemy, he blessed you at the cost of his Son. You cannot manufacture enemy-love by trying harder; you can only pass on what you have received. So when the urge to repay rises this week, do not reach for the score-sheet — leave that with the Judge, who will set every wrong right. Reach instead for the mercy that was poured into you, and pour it out: feed your enemy, bless

your persecutor, refuse to let evil make you its own. Do not be overcome by evil. Overcome it with good — the good that was first done to you.

Suggested closing hymn: “Where Charity and Love Prevail” (Ubi Caritas, tr. Benoit) — the community of genuine love, bound together by the love of Christ poured out among them.

Session 24 — Movement XII: The Christian and the Civil Order

Romans 13:1–14

Preparing to teach: read Movement XII, and read Excursus I on the two kingdoms in full. This session touches politics, where classes get heated; the two-kingdoms doctrine is your ballast, keeping the conversation from collapsing into partisanship in either direction.

The One Thing

God governs the world through the civil authorities — his “left-hand” rule of law and sword — as well as through the gospel; the Christian honors the governing authorities within their God-given bounds, owes a love that fulfills the law, and lives awake as a child of the coming day.

Law and Gospel in This Text

Most of this session lives in God’s *left-hand* rule — the civil order, law, the sword — which belongs to the Law’s second use in society, not to the gospel. Teach it through the two kingdoms: God rules the world with two hands, the right by the gospel (the church, the conscience, salvation) and the left by the sword (the state, the body, temporal order). Both are God’s; neither is to be confused with the other. The Gospel breaks through at the end, in the call to wake and *put on the Lord Jesus Christ* (13:14) — the very verse that converted Augustine in a Milan garden. Let the session close there, in the light of the coming day.

Teaching Outline

1. The governing authorities (13:1–7). Be subject; there is no authority except from God. The magistrate is *God’s servant* for your good, who *does not bear the sword in vain* — an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Pay taxes, revenue, respect, honor. (Note how this reconciles with 12:19: private vengeance is forbidden; the magistrate’s sword is God’s own.)

2. Love fulfills the law (13:8–10). Owe no one anything except to love one another, for the one who loves has fulfilled the law. The commandments are summed up in one: *love your neighbor as yourself*. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

3. The coming day (13:11–14). Know the hour: salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. Cast off the works of darkness, put on the armor of light; *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, and make no provision for the flesh.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **diakonos theou** — “God’s servant” (13:4), used of the civil magistrate. A striking phrase: the secular ruler — even a pagan one, even an official of Nero’s Rome — is doing *God’s* work when he restrains evil and protects the good. The state is not the devil’s realm; it is God’s left hand. (Paul uses a second word, *leitourgos*, “minister,” in 13:6.)
- The governing *concept* deserves naming even without more Greek: the **two kingdoms** (or two governments). God rules the world in two ways — by gospel and by sword — and the wisdom of the Christian life is to keep them distinct without separating them. (See Excursus I.)

Opening

“How should a Christian relate to a government he didn’t vote for, doesn’t trust, or even believes is unjust? Keep in mind that Paul wrote this about *Rome* — about the empire of Nero, which would soon execute him. His answer surprises us in both directions: it asks more submission than we’d like, and it draws clearer limits than we expect.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul calls the governing authority *God’s servant* (13:4) — and he’s writing about pagan Rome. What changes when you realize that even a secular, unbelieving government is doing God’s work when it restrains evil and protects the innocent?” *Steer toward: the state is God’s left-hand rule, not a necessary evil or the devil’s domain. Restraining crime, protecting the innocent, keeping order — these are God’s own work, done through human authorities, even unbelieving ones. This dignifies civil life and tempers both anarchism and idolatry of the state.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Last week Paul said *never avenge yourselves* (12:19). This week he says the magistrate is *an avenger* who carries out God’s wrath (13:4). How do these fit together?” *Steer toward: the two kingdoms. As a private person, the Christian renounces personal vengeance and bears wrong. But the civil office — magistrate, judge, soldier — wields the sword not for private revenge but as God’s appointed servant, to protect the neighbor. Same Christian, different roles; the sword belongs to the office, not to private grievance.*

3. **The heart.** “Where are you tempted to give the government either too much or too little — to treat the state as a savior, or to treat it as the enemy and withhold the honor Paul commands? What would honest, bounded submission actually look like?” *Steer toward: avoiding both political idolatry (the state as messiah) and political contempt (withholding all honor). The Christian honors the office as God’s servant, within its bounds, while reserving ultimate allegiance for God alone.*

The Hard Question

“Does 13:1–7 mean Christians must obey the government *no matter what* — even a tyrant, even when it commands us to sin?”

The answer. No. Submission is the rule, but it is bounded. The authority is God’s servant *for good* (13:4) — that is its mandate and the limit of its commission. When it commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, it has stepped outside that commission, and there the Christian’s obedience stops: *we must obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29). The two kingdoms marks the boundary precisely: the civil authority rules the body and the outward order (the left-hand kingdom), but it has *no jurisdiction over the conscience and faith* (the right-hand kingdom). When the state reaches into the conscience, demands idolatry, or commands sin, it must be resisted — by refusal and the patient bearing of the cost — while still honoring the office itself. Honor the authority; obey God absolutely. The two are not in conflict until the state forces the choice. (*Excursus I works this out, including the harder question of resistance to tyranny.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Unconditional submission.** Submission is bounded by the authority’s mandate (God’s servant *for good*) and by God’s prior claim — *obey God rather than men*.
- **13:4 contradicting 12:19.** They are reconciled by the two kingdoms: private vengeance is forbidden; the magistrate’s sword is God’s own, wielded in his office for the neighbor.
- **“Put on Christ” as moral effort.** It is the daily return to the baptismal reality — clothing ourselves again in the Christ who is already ours — not a fresh act of self-improvement.

The Close

Live, then, as a citizen of two kingdoms at once — honoring the earthly authority God has set over you, paying what you owe, seeking the peace of your city, even when its rulers are far from godly; and at the same time bowing your conscience to God alone, who shares his throne with no Caesar. Do not make the state your savior; it cannot save.

Do not make it your enemy; it is God's servant. And above all, hear the word that woke Augustine in a garden and can wake you tonight: the night is far gone, the day is at hand — so *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*. You who were clothed in him at the font, be clothed in him again this morning, and walk as a child of the coming day, in a world whose long night is nearly over.

Suggested closing hymn: "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying" (Nicolai) — the watchman's cry of Romans 13:11–12, the church roused for the dawn of Christ's coming.

Session 25 — Movement XIII.1: Welcome the Weak

Romans 14:1–23

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement XIII. This is intensely practical for any congregation — every church has its disputes over secondary things. Teach it to make peace, and to draw a bright line between what is open and what is not.

The One Thing

Welcome the one who is weak in faith; in matters where God has left us free, never let your liberty wound a conscience for which Christ died.

Law and Gospel in This Text

The Gospel grounds the whole ethic: each brother stands or falls before his own Master, who is able to make him stand (14:4), and not one of them is a person Christ did not die for (14:15). The practical wisdom concerns *adiaphora* — things neither commanded nor forbidden by God (here, food and special days), where Christians may genuinely differ. The discipline to teach is twofold and must be kept sharp: in matters truly indifferent, love defers and refuses to wound the weak conscience; but in matters of the gospel and clear command, the truth is never up for compromise. Keep that line bright all session — the freedom of the gospel is real, and so is the limit love places on it.

Teaching Outline

1. Welcome, do not judge (14:1–12). Welcome the one weak in faith, but not to quarrel over opinions. One eats anything; another only vegetables. One esteems a day; another regards all alike. Let each be convinced in his own mind. *Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?* Each will give an account of himself to God.

2. Do not be a stumbling block (14:13–21). Decide never to put a stumbling block before a brother. The kingdom of God is not food and drink but *righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*. Do not, for the sake of food, *destroy the one for whom Christ died*. It is good not to do anything that makes your brother stumble.

3. Whatever is not from faith (14:22–23). The faith you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to condemn himself for what he approves. But

whoever doubts is condemned if he eats, because it is not from faith — *for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **adiaphora** — not a word in this text, but the category the whole passage is about: *things indifferent*, neither commanded nor forbidden by God. Food, days, customs — matters where God has left his people free, and where, therefore, no one may bind another's conscience as if his own preference were God's law. (The Formula of Concord treats this directly.)
- **proskomma** — “stumbling block” (14:13). The thing love refuses to place before a weaker brother. My liberty is real, but I will not exercise it in a way that trips someone *for whom Christ died*. Love limits liberty.

Opening

“Christians have always fought about secondary things — what you may eat or drink, which days to keep, what music in worship, what customs and styles. Paul hands us a framework that is still quietly revolutionary: in the matters where God has left us free, the first question is not *what is my right?* but *what does love require?*”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul addresses both the *strong* (who know they're free) and the *weak* (whose conscience is bound). What does he tell each one *not* to do? What's the besetting sin of each side?” *Steer toward: the strong are not to despise* the weak* (look down on their scruples); the weak are not to *judge* the strong (condemn their liberty). Each side has its own temptation — contempt and condemnation — and the gospel rebukes both. The strong bear; no one binds.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Paul raises the stakes shockingly high: ‘do not destroy the one for whom Christ died’ — over a matter of *food* (14:15). Why would he attach so much weight to something so small?” *Steer toward: because a wounded conscience is no small thing, and a person Christ died for is of infinite worth. My freedom is real, but it is never worth wounding a soul Christ bought. Love ranks the brother above the right. The smallness of the issue makes the principle clearer, not weaker.*
3. **The heart.** “Think of a secondary issue where you hold strong views. Are you holding it in a way that builds your brother up — or in a way that despises him (if you're the ‘strong’) or judges him (if you're the ‘weak’)? What would deferring in love cost you,

and is it a cost worth paying?” *Steer toward: applying the framework concretely and humbly, on both sides. The goal is a community where Christ’s welcome, not our preferences, sets the terms. Real love is willing to forgo a real right for a brother’s sake.*

The Hard Question

“Where’s the line between a matter of freedom, where I should defer to the weaker brother, and a matter of *truth*, where I must *not* compromise? Doesn’t ‘don’t offend the weak’ just let the most scrupulous person in the room rule the whole church?”

The answer. Everything turns on distinguishing *adiaphora* from doctrine. In matters God has neither commanded nor forbidden — food, days, customs, styles — love defers, and the strong bear with the weak; no one’s preference may bind another’s conscience. But in matters of the *gospel and clear command*, the truth is never negotiable; there, deference would not be love but betrayal. (When the truth of the gospel was at stake, Paul himself did not yield an inch — see Galatians.) And the Formula of Concord adds a sharp point: in a *time of confession*, when the truth is under attack, even an indifferent thing ceases to be indifferent, because yielding it would betray the gospel. So no, the scrupulous do not simply win: love governs *freedom*, but truth is never up for compromise. The whole skill of the Christian life in community is telling the two apart. (*Movement XIII and the Confessions’ article on adiaphora develop this.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Liberty as license.** Freedom is real, but it is governed by love; the strong who despise the weak have abused it.
- **Scruple as law.** The weak may not bind the strong’s conscience as if their own preference were God’s command.
- **Treating doctrine as adiaphora (false peace), or adiaphora as doctrine (legalism).** Both errors wreck the church — one by compromising truth, the other by binding consciences God has freed. Keep the line bright.

The Close

The church is full of people who eat differently, keep different days, and hold different convictions about a hundred secondary things — and over all of it Paul sets a single governing word: do not wound, for the sake of your freedom, a soul for whom Christ died. Your liberty is real; Paul never takes it away. But he ranks something higher than your right to use it: your brother, bought with blood. So in the open matters, hold your

freedom loosely and your brother tenderly; defer where love asks you to defer; refuse to let a question of food or days or style trip someone Christ went to the cross to save. And keep the line bright — for where the *gospel* is at stake, love does not yield, because there yielding would be the cruelest thing of all. Welcome the weak. Guard the truth. Let love govern your freedom, and let nothing govern the gospel.

Suggested closing hymn: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (Fawcett) — the bond of Christian fellowship that holds across every secondary difference.

Session 26 — Movement XIII.2: Welcome as Christ Welcomed You

Romans 15:1–13

Preparing to teach: read the second part of Movement XIII. Last week's "welcome the weak" now gets its measure and its ground: welcome one another as Christ welcomed you. Let the staggering size of that standard set the tone.**

The One Thing

Bear with the weak as Christ bore with you, and welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you — at the cost of his own blood, for the glory of God, that Jew and Gentile might praise him with one voice.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is the Gospel ground beneath last week's ethic. The strong are to bear with the weak — but the reason and the measure is Christ: *Christ did not please himself* (15:3), and we are to *welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you* (15:7). The imperative is real, but it is wholly grounded in the indicative of Christ's own reception of us. Teach the welcome as a mirror: however Christ welcomed you — undeserving, weak, at infinite cost, for God's glory — that is the welcome you now owe your brother. The session crests on the God of hope filling us with joy and peace, and on the great vision of the nations praising God together.

Teaching Outline

- 1. Christ did not please himself (15:1–3).** We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. *For Christ did not please himself* — the reproaches fell on him.
- 2. One voice (15:4–6).** Whatever was written was written for our instruction, that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May God grant you to live in such harmony that *together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.
- 3. Welcome as Christ welcomed you (15:7–13).** *Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.* Christ became a servant to confirm the promises to the patriarchs,

and that the *Gentiles* might glorify God for his mercy. May the *God of hope* fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **proslambanō** — “to welcome, to receive, to take to oneself” (15:7). It is the *same* word used of welcoming the weak brother in 14:1 — and now of the way *Christ welcomed you*. Paul deliberately sets the two side by side: receive your brother with the very welcome you yourself received from Christ. The measure of our welcome is his.
- **ho theos tēs elpidos** — “the God of hope” (15:13). The title under which Paul gathers the whole section: the God who welcomes, reconciles, and gathers the nations is the God who fills his people with joy, peace, and an overflowing hope by the Spirit.

Opening

“Last week Paul told us to welcome the weak. This week he gives us the *measure* of that welcome, and it is staggering: *welcome one another as Christ welcomed you*. So the real question tonight is a personal one — how did Christ welcome *you*? Because whatever the answer is, that is now the bar for how you receive everyone else.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul grounds the whole command in three words: *Christ did not please himself* (15:3). What did it cost Christ *not* to please himself? And how does that reframe the ‘inconvenience’ of bearing with a difficult brother?” *Steer toward: it cost Christ the cross — the reproaches fell on him. Set against that, the cost of bearing with a brother’s scruples shrinks to its true size. We’re asked to do, in small measure, what Christ did in full: set aside our own preference for another’s good.*
2. **Doctrine.** “‘Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you’ (15:7). Take that seriously — *how* did Christ welcome you? List the ways. What does each one demand of how you now welcome others?” *Steer toward: Christ welcomed us undeserving, weak, still sinners, at the cost of his blood, freely, for God’s glory — and did not leave us as he found us. So our welcome of others is to be costly, free, undeserved, and aimed at God’s glory, not a grudging tolerance that keeps score.*
3. **The heart.** “Paul calls God ‘the God of hope’ and prays we’d ‘abound in hope’ (15:13). Where do you most need that overflowing hope right now — and how does being *welcomed* by Christ feed it?” *Steer toward: hope flows from being received and secured by Christ,*

not from circumstances improving. Because we are welcomed and held, we can abound in hope even now. The God who welcomed us is the God of hope who fills and carries us.

The Hard Question

“Isn’t ‘welcome one another’ just a recipe for a church with no standards — accept everyone, overlook everything, never say a hard word?”

The answer. No — and the model Paul gives is exactly what prevents that. The welcome is patterned on *Christ’s* welcome, and Christ’s welcome was neither cheap nor static. It was *costly* — it took his blood. It was *aimed at God’s glory*, not at our comfort. And it was *transforming* — he welcomed us as we were and refused to leave us as we were. So this is not a limp tolerance that winks at sin; it is a strong, self-giving, transforming embrace. And remember the context: chapter 14 already drew the line between *adiaphora*, where we bear with one another, and matters of truth, where we do not yield. Welcoming the weak in open matters is not the same as abandoning the gospel or excusing sin. Christ welcomed you at the door *and* walked you toward holiness — and that double movement is the welcome we now extend. (*See Movement XIII.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Welcome as standard-less tolerance.** It is patterned on Christ’s costly, transforming welcome, for God’s glory — not a tolerance that overlooks sin or truth.
- **“Bear with the weak” as mere condescending endurance.** It is self-giving love after Christ’s example — pleasing the neighbor for his good and upbuilding, not pleasing ourselves.
- **The “one voice” of 15:6 as uniformity.** It is Jew and Gentile, different, glorifying God *together* — unity in diversity, not the erasure of difference.

The Close

How did Christ welcome you? Not after you had your convictions sorted and your scruples calibrated and your life cleaned up — but while you were weak, and wrong, and his enemy. He welcomed you at the cost of his own blood, freely, for the glory of God, and he did not leave you where he found you. *That* is the welcome you now owe the brother across the aisle who eats differently, keeps different days, sees a hundred secondary things differently than you do. Receive him the way you were received: bearing with his failings as Christ bore with yours, pleasing him for his good rather than yourself, holding the truth without yielding and holding the brother without despising.

And as you do, the God of hope will fill you with joy and peace, until your difference becomes one voice and your many become one body — to the glory of the God who welcomed you first.

Suggested closing hymn: “In Christ There Is No East or West” (Oxenham) — the one welcomed and welcoming people, gathered across every difference into one fellowship in him.

Session 27 — Movement XIV.1: The Apostle to the Nations

Romans 15:14–33

Preparing to teach: read the first part of Movement XIV. After eleven chapters of doctrine and three of its overflow, we see the doctrine become a mission — the gospel in motion toward the nations. Let the class feel the outward press of it.**

The One Thing

The gospel that justifies the ungodly cannot sit still; it presses outward to the nations, to the places where Christ has not yet been named.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is the Gospel in motion. There is little here to accuse and much to marvel at: Paul's priestly ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles, his holy ambition to go where Christ has never been named, his plans for Rome and Spain, the collection gathered across churches, the request for prayer. The theological note is the *centrifugal* character of the gospel — good news, by its very nature, presses outward to be announced. Teach the passage so the class sees that mission is not an optional add-on for the specially called, but the gospel doing what the gospel does. The doctrine of the whole letter is here becoming feet on a road.

Teaching Outline

1. A priest of the gospel (15:14–16). Paul writes boldly by the grace given him, to be a *minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles*, in the priestly service of the gospel — so that the *offering of the Gentiles* might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The nations themselves are the offering he brings to God.

2. A holy ambition (15:17–21). Paul will speak only of what Christ has done through him to bring the Gentiles to obedience. His aim: *to preach the gospel where Christ has not already been named*, not to build on another's foundation — that those who have never heard might see and understand.

3. Plans, collection, and a request (15:22–33). Hindered until now, he longs to come to Rome on his way to *Spain*. First he must carry to Jerusalem the *collection* from Macedonia

and Achaia for the poor saints. He asks for their prayers, and for the God of peace to be with them all.

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **leitourgos** — “minister,” a word with priestly, liturgical weight (15:16). Paul casts his preaching to the Gentiles as a *priestly* act: he serves at the altar of the gospel, and the offering he presents to God is *the nations themselves*, made holy by the Spirit. Evangelism is worship; the converted peoples are the offering.
- **philotimeomai** — “to make it one’s ambition,” literally *to be fond of honor*, here bent toward a holy end (15:20): Paul’s ambition is not reputation but reach — *to preach where Christ has not been named*. The gospel turns even ambition outward.

Opening

“Paul had a holy ambition — not to build a comfortable, settled ministry, but to go where Christ had *never been named*. This passage lets us see the engine running underneath the whole letter: the gospel that justifies the ungodly simply cannot sit still. It presses outward, to the edges, to the nations. The question for us is whether any of that restlessness is in us — or whether we’ve quietly decided the good news is just for keeping.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul’s ambition was to preach *where Christ had not been named* (15:20) — not to build on someone else’s work. What does that restless, outward push tell us about the gospel itself? Can a gospel that never goes anywhere be the real thing?” *Steer toward: the gospel is inherently centrifugal — it presses outward because it is good news meant to be announced. A faith content to stay private has misunderstood the news it carries. Mission isn’t an add-on; it’s the gospel in motion, doing what news does.*
2. **Doctrine.** “Paul calls his preaching a *priestly* service and the converted Gentiles an *offering* to God (15:16). How does that reframe evangelism — from a sales pitch or a duty into something closer to worship?” *Steer toward: bringing people the gospel is priestly work, and the people brought are an offering laid before God, made holy by the Spirit. Evangelism is an act of worship, not mere recruitment. It’s God-ward before it’s people-ward — the nations gathered as a gift back to God.*
3. **The heart.** “Paul asks the Roman church to *help him on his way* and gathers a collection across churches (15:24, 26). Mission here is a whole-body project, not a solo act. What’s

your part — and where might you be treating the gospel's spread as someone else's job?" *Steer toward: not everyone is an apostle to the nations, but everyone belongs to a sending people — through prayer, giving, hospitality, support, and witness where we are. The body sends together. Treating mission as "the missionary's job" forgets that Paul needed the church behind him.*

The Hard Question

"Is mission really essential to the gospel, or is it just one ministry among many — fine for those specially 'called' to it, but optional for the rest of us?"

The answer. The gospel is, by its very nature, *good news to be announced* — and a faith content to keep it private has misunderstood what it holds. Paul's outward drive is not a personality quirk; it is the gospel's own logic, the same logic as Romans 10: *how are they to hear without someone preaching?* Now, not everyone is an apostle to the nations — Paul has a particular call. But every Christian belongs to a *people* whose message is for all peoples, and every Christian has a part in the sending. Notice that Paul, the great missionary, needs the church behind him: he asks Rome to *help him on his way* (15:24), and he carries a *collection* gathered across many congregations (15:26). Mission is a body project — some go, some send, all pray and give and witness where they are. A church that has stopped going, in any of these ways, has begun to stop believing what it says it believes. (*See Movement XIV.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Mission as optional, or only for specialists.** The gospel is inherently centrifugal; the whole body has a part in the sending, even if not all are sent in the same way.
- **The Jerusalem collection as mere charity.** It is also a sign of the *one* people — Gentile churches serving Jewish believers — the doctrine of the one olive tree embodied in shared money.
- **This section as a skippable travelogue.** It shows the doctrine of the whole letter becoming a mission: the gospel in motion, feet on the road, the nations gathered as an offering.

The Close

Here, near the end of the greatest doctrinal letter ever written, the doctrine grows feet. The righteousness of God revealed, the ungodly justified, the nations grafted in — all of it now presses outward in a man who cannot rest while there are still places Christ has

not been named. That is not Paul's eccentricity; it is the gospel's own nature. Good news strains to be told. So let this passage do something to you tonight: let it turn you outward. You may never go to Spain, but you belong to a people whose message is for every people, and you have a part — to pray, to give, to send, to open your home, to speak where you are. The gospel that found you was carried to you by someone who would not keep it. Now it is in your hands. Do not be the place where the good news finally sat still.

Suggested closing hymn: "Spread, Oh, Spread, Almighty Word" (Bahnmaier) — the missionary cry of the church, the saving word carried to the ends of the earth.

Session 28 — Movement XIV.2: To the Only Wise God

Romans 16:1–27

Preparing to teach: read the close of Movement XIV. This is the capstone — of the letter and of the whole year. Gather the entire argument and end, as Paul does, in worship. Do not skip the names; that is where the doctrine finally becomes a people.

The One Thing

The gospel that justifies the ungodly gathers a named, embodied, motley people — and the whole letter closes where it began, in the obedience of faith, to the glory of the only wise God.

Law and Gospel in This Text

This is the doxological close, and it is almost entirely Gospel and praise. Paul's roll of named saints, the brief sharp warning against those who divide, and then the great closing doxology — all of it the gospel bearing fruit in real lives and ending in worship. The one structural thing to show the class is the *inclusio*: the letter opened with *the obedience of faith among all the nations* (1:5) and closes with the very same phrase (16:26). Romans is framed, from first word to last, by faith that takes God at his word. Gather the whole year here, and end where Paul ends — on your knees: *to the only wise God be glory forevermore*.

Teaching Outline

1. The named saints (16:1–16). Phoebe, commended — a *servant* of the church and a *patron* of many. Prisca and Aquila, who risked their necks. A long roll of names — men and women, slave and free, Jew and Gentile — *greet one another with a holy kiss*. Here the towering doctrine becomes a community: real, diverse, named people the gospel actually saved.

2. A warning and a blessing (16:17–24). Watch out for those who cause divisions contrary to the teaching you learned; *the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet*. Grace, and greetings from Paul's companions.

3. The closing doxology (16:25–27). *To him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ... to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations... to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

The Greek Worth Surfacing

- **hypakoē pisteōs** — “the obedience of faith,” the phrase that frames the whole letter (1:5 and 16:26). It does not mean “faith *plus* obedience” as two separate things; it means the obedience that *consists in* faith — faith itself as the glad submission of taking God at his word. Romans begins and ends on this single note.
- **diakonos** — “servant,” and likely “deacon,” used of Phoebe in 16:1, who is also named a *prostatis*, a *patron* of many. The terms mark her real and honored service to the church. (On the careful handling of Phoebe and Junia, see The Hard Question.)

Opening

“Romans ends with a list of names — more than two dozen of them. It is tempting to skip a list of names. Don’t. This is where all the towering doctrine of the last year finally lands: not in an abstraction, but in a real, named, motley community of people the gospel actually saved — risk-takers and householders, women and men, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free. The purest gospel produces a people. Tonight we gather the whole year, and we end where Paul ends — in worship.”

Discussion Questions

1. **Observation.** “Paul ends this towering theological letter with a list of *names* and personal greetings. Why might that be exactly the right way to end Romans, rather than a tidy summary of doctrine?” *Steer toward: because the doctrine was always for a people, not a lecture hall. Justification, adoption, the unbreakable love — all of it landed in real, named lives: Phoebe, Prisca, Junia, the whole motley roll. The names show the gospel’s harvest. A theology that never became a community would have missed the point.*
2. **Doctrine.** “The letter ends with the same phrase it began with: *the obedience of faith among all the nations* (1:5, 16:26). Why frame the whole letter with that exact phrase? What is ‘the obedience of faith?’” *Steer toward: not faith plus works, but the obedience that consists in believing — taking God at his word is itself the truest obedience. The letter is bracketed by faith, beginning to end; everything in between unfolds what it means to believe. The frame tells you the theme.*
3. **The heart.** “We’ve spent a whole year in Romans. If you had to name the *one thing* you’ll carry out of this letter — the gift you didn’t have before, or had forgotten — what is it?” *Steer toward: letting the class voice the gospel back to one another. Listen for “I’m accepted by grace, not performance,” “no condemnation,” “I am baptized,” “the word is near,” “nothing can separate me.” This is the year’s harvest — let them preach it to each other.*

The Hard Question

“Romans 16 calls Phoebe a *deacon* (16:1) and says Junia is *well known among the apostles* (16:7). What do these verses say about women’s roles in the church?”

The answer. Handle this soberly, honoring both the text and the confessional understanding of the office. Phoebe is called a *diakonos* — *servant*, and the term *can* carry the sense of a recognized office; she is also named a *patron* (*prostatis*) of many. Whatever her precise role, the text plainly honors her substantial labor for the church. Junia (almost certainly a woman) is described as *episēmos en tois apostolois* — which can mean “outstanding *among* the apostles” or “well known *to* the apostles”; the grammar genuinely allows both, and even “among the apostles” most likely uses *apostle* in its broad sense of *commissioned messenger or missionary*, not the office of the Twelve. The honest conclusion: Scripture here honors the real, weighty, public gospel labor of women in the church — named and celebrated — without overturning the confessional understanding of the pastoral office. Resist *both* errors: dismissing these women as insignificant, and overclaiming what the text will not bear. State the data, name the genuine interpretive questions, and let the text’s own honor for these laborers stand. (*Movement XIV handles this soberly and at greater length.*)

Misreadings to Head Off

- **Skipping the names as unimportant.** They are the doctrine made flesh — the gospel’s actual harvest, a real and diverse people.
- **Over- or under-reading Phoebe and Junia.** Both errors distort the text; honor what it says, and claim no more than it says.
- **The doxology as a mere sign-off.** It is the theological climax: the gospel, the nations, the obedience of faith, the glory of God — the whole letter gathered into praise, and bracketed with 1:5.

The Close

We end where Paul ends, and where the whole letter has been driving since its first verse: on our knees, in worship. Think back over this year — the mouth stopped by the Law, the *But now* of justification, the *no condemnation*, the *Abba* cry, the word near you, the mercy that grounds the whole Christian life, the love that nothing can sever — and see that all of it pours out, at the last, not into a program but into a doxology: *to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ*. This is what the purest gospel makes: not merely forgiven individuals, but a named and gathered people, drawn from every

nation, bound together by a righteousness none of them earned, living the obedience that simply *is* faith, and lifting one voice to the God whose mercy saved them. You are one of those names now. Go and live as the one you are — accepted, free, and his — to the glory of the only wise God. Amen.

Suggested closing hymn: “Now Thank We All Our God” (Rinkart) — the gathered people’s thanksgiving, a fitting doxology to close both the letter and the year.