



THE *Life*





Recovery[™]

NEW TESTAMENT
with Psalms and Proverbs

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ROMANS

THE BIG PICTURE

- A. GREETINGS AND THANKS (1:1-15)
- B. THE THEME OF THE LETTER (1:16-18)
- C. OUR NEED FOR RECOVERY (1:19-4:25)
- D. GOD'S POWER FOR OUR DELIVERANCE (5:1-8:39)
- E. QUESTIONS ABOUT ISRAEL'S RECOVERY (9:1-11:36)
- F. THE BEHAVIORS OF RECOVERY (12:1-15:13)
- G. CONCLUSION (15:14-16:27)

The church in Rome was a testimony to God's power. It had flourished despite the obstacles posed by the surrounding pagan culture. Yet these believers were not perfect; in fact, they had some serious problems. Though they were well established in their faith, their convictions and unity as a group were threatened by racial and cultural division.

The main topic in this letter is the gospel—the good news that salvation from sin is available through Jesus Christ. At the core of the gospel is the truth that God is bigger than the past. No matter who we are or what we have done, we can be saved by grace (undeserved favor from God) through faith (complete trust) in Christ. We can stand before God, justified—declared “not guilty.” That’s good news!

In Romans Paul explains four major points. First, God makes no distinction between us as individuals—we are all guilty, and we are all offered his free gift of salvation. Second, we can all be freed from sin's power through God's grace and the Holy Spirit within us. Third, we are all “in recovery” and therefore have no grounds for arrogance. And fourth, because of God's mercy we all must respect one another, despite our differences.

Many people have called this letter the greatest theological treatise ever written, but it's really a letter about how to live. It teaches us how to deal with our sinful attitudes and behaviors and tells us how to get back on the right track. Paul's letter applies directly to us, showing us how to recover from the effects of sin and dysfunction in our life.

THE BOTTOM LINE

PURPOSE: To introduce Paul to the church at Rome and summarize his message before he arrived there. **AUTHOR:** The apostle Paul. **AUDIENCE:** The church at Rome. **DATE WRITTEN:** A.D. 57, from Corinth, just before Paul's return to Jerusalem. **SETTING:** Paul wrote this letter in anticipation of a future visit to the believers in Rome. **KEY VERSES:** “And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. . . . Nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God” (8:38-39). **KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:** Paul with the believers in Rome and with Phoebe, who helped Paul in his ministry.

RECOVERY THEMES

Our Universal Need: All of us have sinned; we have all fallen short of God’s glorious standard. Regardless of whether we have fallen deeply into a controlling addiction, been abused by dysfunctional family members, or escaped severe trauma—we are all in need of recovery from sin of one kind or another. Ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God, our nature has been to disobey him; we have been addicted to ignoring God’s will. We are all powerless in our sin and need God to save us.

God’s Power to Deliver: Our need for recovery involves the need to be forgiven and to forgive, as well as to be cleansed from the effects of the past. Although we are powerless to help ourselves and don’t really deserve to be helped, God, in his great love, reaches out to us, offering to forgive us, cleanse us, and empower us to become what he wants us to be. This is truly good news! Our part is to admit our powerlessness and turn our life and will over to this powerful, loving God.

Recovery Leads to Freedom: Because God has attacked our problems at the roots—that is, he has made it possible for us to be freed from our sins—we can be free from our controlling addiction. Through God’s power, our life can become manageable. Although the process is never easy, over time we can become more and more like Christ as we walk one day at a time with him. The better we know him, the more empowered we can be. By continuing to take inventory, confessing our sins, asking for his forgiveness, and seeking to make amends to those whom we have wronged, we can experience true freedom.

The Role of Faith: Much of this letter describes the importance of faith or trust in God. “It is through faith that a righteous person has life” (1:17). There is no other way to recovery; the role of faith is central. The recovery process began with faith when we turned our will and our life over to God, and each step of the way built on that first step of faith. There is no magic formula for this—it is a daily act of trusting our all-powerful God, who promises never to forsake us and to always love us no matter how unlovable we are.

CHAPTER 1

Greetings from Paul

This letter is from Paul, Jesus Christ’s slave, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News. ²This Good News was promised long ago by God through his prophets in the holy Scriptures. ³It is the Good News about his Son, Jesus, who came as a man, born into King David’s royal family line. ⁴And Jesus Christ our Lord was shown to be the Son of God when God powerfully raised him from the dead by means of the Holy Spirit.* ⁵Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority to tell

1:4 Or the Spirit of holiness.

Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name.

⁶You are among those who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷dear friends in Rome. God loves you dearly, and he has called you to be his very own people.

May grace and peace be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God’s Good News

⁸Let me say first of all that your faith in God is becoming known throughout the world. How I thank God through Jesus Christ for

1:1 In this letter Paul introduced himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. Paul was a Roman citizen; for him to choose a life of slavery was unthinkable. But Paul purposely used this word to demonstrate his humility and dependence upon God. Paul demonstrated the type of humility we need in recovery. We make progress in recovery when we recognize how helpless we are and how much we need God. Only when we joyfully submit to God’s will for our life can we begin the recovery process.

1:16-17 All of us have failed in one way or another, and we all know what shame feels like. We are ashamed of our past failures, our bad habits, or even the abuses we have suffered. Paul tells us that the Good News of Jesus Christ is God’s power to deliver us from all the shameful things in our life. And it’s for everyone! God has the power to deliver and transform us when we turn our life over to him. The Good News of salvation is certainly nothing to be ashamed of!

1:21-32 When we refuse to admit our powerlessness and hold on to our self-sufficiency, we follow the downward path that Paul describes here. First, we exchange worship of God for worship of things—our addiction or compulsion. Second, we exchange our worship of the living God for a willful form of sin. Third, we move beyond these forms of sin to deep denial—we believe lies and reject truth. This passage describes lives that have become totally unmanageable, the natural consequence of refusing to acknowledge God. The only way to escape such destruction is to recognize our powerlessness and turn our life over to God.

each one of you. ⁹God knows how often I pray for you. Day and night I bring you and your needs in prayer to God, whom I serve with all my heart* by telling others the Good News about his Son.

¹⁰One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you. ¹¹For I long to visit you so I can share a spiritual blessing with you that will help you grow strong in the Lord. ¹²I'm eager to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours. In this way, each of us will be a blessing to the other.

¹³I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters,* that I planned many times to visit you, but I was prevented until now. I want to work among you and see good results, just as I have done among other Gentiles. ¹⁴For I have a great sense of obligation to people in our culture and to people in other cultures,* to the educated and uneducated alike. ¹⁵So I am eager to come to you in Rome, too, to preach God's Good News.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles. ¹⁷This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."*

God's Anger at Sin

¹⁸But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves.* ¹⁹For the truth about God is known to them instinctively.* God has put this knowledge in their hearts. ²⁰From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God.

²¹Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became utter fools instead. ²³And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people, or birds and animals and snakes.

1:9 Or in my spirit. **1:13** Greek brothers. **1:14** Greek to Greeks and to barbarians. **1:17** Hab 2:4. **1:18** Or who prevent the truth from being known. **1:19** Greek is manifest in them.

STEP 2

Coming to Believe

BIBLE READING: Romans 1:18-20

We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Saying that we "came to believe" suggests a process. Belief is the result of consideration, doubt, reasoning, and concluding. The ability to form beliefs is part of what it means to be made in God's image. It involves emotion and logic. It leads to action. What, then, is the process that leads us to solid belief and changes our life?

We start with our own experiences, and we see what doesn't work. Looking at the condition of our life, we realize that we don't have enough power to overcome our dependency. We try with all our might, but to no avail. When we are quiet enough to listen, we hear that still, small voice inside us saying, "There is a God, and he is extremely powerful." The apostle Paul said it this way: "For the truth about God is known to [all people] instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts" (Romans 1:19).

Recognizing our internal weaknesses is the first step toward recovery. When we look beyond ourself, we see that there are others who have struggled with an addiction and recovered. We know that they, too, were unable to heal themselves, yet they now live free of addictive behaviors. We conclude that there must be a greater Power that helped them. Since we can see the similarities between their struggles and our own, we come to believe that our powerful God can restore us to sanity. This is where many people are when they get to Step Two, and it's a good place to be on the way to recovery. *Turn to page 391, Hebrews 11.*

²⁴So God let them go ahead and do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. ²⁵Instead of believing what they knew was the truth about God, they deliberately chose to believe lies. So they worshiped the things God made but not the Creator himself, who is to be praised forever. Amen.

²⁶That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. ²⁷And the men, instead of having normal sexual relationships with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men and, as a result, suffered within themselves the penalty they so richly deserved.

²⁸When they refused to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their evil minds and let them do things that should never be done. ²⁹Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, fighting, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip. ³⁰They are backstabbers, haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They are forever inventing new ways of sinning and are disobedient to their parents. ³¹They refuse to understand, break their promises, and are heartless and unforgiving. ³²They are fully aware of God's death penalty for those who do these things, yet they go right ahead and do them anyway. And, worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.

CHAPTER 2

God's Judgment of Sin

You may be saying, "What terrible people you have been talking about!" But you are

just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you do these very same things. ²And we know that God, in his justice, will punish anyone who does such things. ³Do you think that God will judge and condemn others for doing them and not judge you when you do them, too? ⁴Don't you realize how kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see how kind he has been in giving you time to turn from your sin?

⁵But no, you won't listen. So you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself because of your stubbornness in refusing to turn from your sin. For there is going to come a day of judgment when God, the just judge of all the world, ⁶will judge all people according to what they have done. ⁷He will give eternal life to those who persist in doing what is good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. ⁸But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and practice evil deeds. ⁹There will be trouble and calamity for everyone who keeps on sinning—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. ¹⁰But there will be glory and honor and peace from God for all who do good—for the Jew first and also for the Gentile. ¹¹For God does not show favoritism.

¹²God will punish the Gentiles when they sin, even though they never had God's written law. And he will punish the Jews when they sin, for they do have the law. ¹³For it is not merely knowing the law that brings God's approval. Those who obey the law will be declared right in

2:1-4 As we see people whose lives are wicked and completely out of control, it is easy to feel superior and point a finger at them. Paul quickly corrects the tendency to do this by showing that everyone is in the same boat. We all do things that are wrong; we hide all kinds of problems, habits, and sins in the dark recesses of our life. If we often apply this passage to other people, we probably really need to apply it to ourself. Recovery begins with an honest personal inventory.

2:5-16 God is impartial. He doesn't forgive us because we are members of a special group of people. He doesn't judge us by the way we talk, walk, or dress. He judges us by whether or not we obey and believe in him. The Jews of Paul's day believed that they had special privileges from God, but here we find that God treats all people the same. If we admit our failures and seek to follow God's will for us, we are his special people. We are also on the way to recovery. Some of us have felt like an outsider all our life, having been rejected by others because of our problems or failures. God will never reject us if we confess our sins, accept his forgiveness, and humbly obey him.

2:28-29 Paul made an important point very clear in these verses: God is concerned that our heart be open and obedient to him. Our outward religious or recovery activities are important only if they reflect our love for God and others. We can always fake recovery, just as we can fake our relationship with God. If we just go through the motions and make no real commitment to God, we cannot make progress for long. But if we are filled with his Spirit and motivated by our love for God and other people, no obstacle to recovery is too great to overcome.

God's sight. ¹⁴Even when Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, instinctively follow what the law says, they show that in their hearts they know right from wrong. ¹⁵They demonstrate that God's law is written within them, for their own consciences either accuse them or tell them they are doing what is right. ¹⁶The day will surely come when God, by Jesus Christ, will judge everyone's secret life. This is my message.

The Jews and the Law

¹⁷If you are a Jew, you are relying on God's law for your special relationship with him. You boast that all is well between yourself and God. ¹⁸Yes, you know what he wants; you know right from wrong because you have been taught his law. ¹⁹You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a beacon light for people who are lost in darkness without God. ²⁰You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that in God's law you have complete knowledge and truth.

²¹Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal? ²²You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you do it? You condemn idolatry, but do you steal from pagan temples? ²³You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonor God by breaking it. ²⁴No wonder the Scriptures say, "The world blasphemes the name of God because of you."^{*}

²⁵The Jewish ceremony of circumcision is worth something only if you obey God's law. But if you don't obey God's law, you are no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile. ²⁶And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won't God give them all the rights and honors of being his own people? ²⁷In fact, uncircumcised Gentiles who keep God's law will be much better off than you Jews who are circumcised and know so much about God's law but don't obey it.

²⁸For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the Jewish ceremony of circumcision. ²⁹No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not a cutting of the body but a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. Whoever has that kind of change seeks praise from God, not from people.

2:24 Isa 52:5.

STEP 5

Freedom through Confession

BIBLE READING: Romans 2:12-15

We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

All of us struggle with our conscience, trying to make peace within our own heart. We may deny what we have done, find excuses, or try to squirm out from beneath the full weight of our conduct. We may work hard to be "good," trying to counteract our wrongs. We do everything we can to even out the score. In order to put the past to rest, however, we must stop rationalizing our sins and admit the truth.

We are all born with a built-in alarm that alerts us when we do wrong. God holds everyone accountable: "In their hearts they know right from wrong. They demonstrate that God's law is written within them, for their own consciences either accuse them or tell them they are doing what is right" (Romans 2:14-15).

In Step Five we set out to stop this internal struggle and admit that wrong is wrong. It is time to be honest with God and ourself about our cover-ups and the exact nature of our wrongs. We need to admit the sins we have committed and the pain we have caused others. We may have spent years constructing alibis, coming up with excuses, and trying to plea-bargain. It is time to come clean. It is time to admit what we know deep down inside to be true: "Yes, I'm guilty as charged."

There is no real freedom without confession. What a relief it is to finally give up the weight of our lies and excuses. When we confess our sins, we will find the internal peace we lost so long ago. We will also be one step closer to recovery. *Turn to page 305, Galatians 6.*

CHAPTER 3

God Remains Faithful

Then what's the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the Jewish ceremony of circumcision? ²Yes, being a Jew has many advantages. First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.*

³True, some of them were unfaithful; but just because they broke their promises, does that mean God will break his promises? ⁴Of course not! Though everyone else in the world is a liar, God is true. As the Scriptures say, "He will be proved right in what he says, and he will win his case in court."*

⁵"But," some say, "our sins serve a good purpose, for people will see God's goodness when he declares us sinners to be innocent. Isn't it unfair, then, for God to punish us?" (That is actually the way some people talk.) ⁶Of course not! If God is not just, how is he qualified to judge the world? ⁷"But," some might still argue, "how can God judge and condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory?" ⁸If you follow that kind of thinking, however, you might as well say that the more we sin the better it is! Those who say such things deserve to be condemned, yet some slander me by saying this is what I preach!

All People Are Sinners

⁹Well then, are we Jews better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown

3:2 Greek *the oracles of God*. **3:4** Ps 51:4. **3:9** Greek *Are we better?* **3:10-12** Pss 14:1-3; 53:1-3. **3:13** Pss 5:9; 140:3. **3:14** Ps 10:7. **3:15-17** Isa 59:7-8. **3:18** Ps 36:1.

that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin. ¹⁰As the Scriptures say,

"No one is good—
not even one.

¹¹No one has real understanding;
no one is seeking God.

¹²All have turned away from God;
all have gone wrong.
No one does good,
not even one."*

¹³"Their talk is foul, like the stench from an
open grave.

Their speech is filled with lies."

"The poison of a deadly snake drips from
their lips."*

¹⁴"Their mouths are full of cursing and
bitterness."*

¹⁵"They are quick to commit murder.

¹⁶Wherever they go, destruction and
misery follow them.

¹⁷They do not know what true peace is."*

¹⁸"They have no fear of God to restrain
them."*

¹⁹Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses and to bring the entire world into judgment before God. ²⁰For no one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what his law commands. For the more we know God's law, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying it.

3:20 The more we know about God's laws, God's heart, and God's claim on our life, the clearer it becomes that we don't measure up. God's Old Testament laws represent his will for us; following them leads to a godly life. But none of us can follow these ideals with our own power. We must recognize our need for God's gracious forgiveness and his power on a daily basis to help us follow his program for healthy living. When we fail in our walk with God, we can remind ourselves that we are powerless without him. This is the first step back into the process of recovery.

3:21-26 This portion of Scripture clearly states why Jesus died on the cross. We are all made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. None of us are so good that we don't need God; none of us are so bad that we are beyond the reach of God's loving grace. Jesus has declared us not guilty and set us free from God's anger. Salvation is freely given, but it was expensively purchased by God!

3:27 God deals with all people on the same basis, regardless of race or social class. In our day Paul might have said that God gives the same attention to the cry of the homeless alcoholic as he does to that of the richest person in the world. No one can earn God's acceptance. All must come to recovery through faith and trust in God. This leaves us nothing to boast about; none of us can be saved by anything we do or say. But there is no reason for us to hide from God either; nothing is so bad in our life that it cannot be forgiven completely by our gracious and loving God.

4:6-8 Many of us have failed desperately; we have hurt others in ways that cannot easily be repaired. What can we do about our guilt? King David was guilty of serious sins—adultery, deceit, and murder—yet when he acknowledged his guilt, confessed his sins to God, and experienced God's forgiveness, he found joy. Each of these steps was an act of faith, but the result was joy. Each of the steps we take in recovery is also an act of faith, but as we faithfully work each step, we will also experience God's forgiveness and joy.

Christ Took Our Punishment

²¹But now God has shown us a different way of being right in his sight—not by obeying the law but by the way promised in the Scriptures long ago. ²²We are made right in God’s sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done.

²³For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard. ²⁴Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. ²⁵For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times. ²⁶And he is entirely fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus.

²⁷Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on our good deeds. It is based on our faith. ²⁸So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

²⁹After all, God is not the God of the Jews only, is he? Isn’t he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. ³⁰There is only one God, and there is only one way of being accepted by him. He makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. ³¹Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law.

CHAPTER 4

The Faith of Abraham

Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What were his experiences concerning this question of being saved by faith? ²Was it because of his good deeds that God accepted him? If so, he would have had something to boast about. But from God’s point of view Abraham had no basis at all for pride. ³For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous.”*

⁴When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. ⁵But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work.

⁶King David spoke of this, describing the

4:3 Gen 15:6.

Self-Perception

READ ROMANS 3:10-12

We may feel that we are different from other people—either much worse or much better. We may look down on ourself and continually compare ourself with “good” people. Or perhaps our addiction seems more socially acceptable than others. So we console ourself by looking down on others whose sins seem worse than ours.

“As the Scriptures say, ‘No one is good—not even one. No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God. All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong’” (Romans 3:10-12).

The first chapter of Romans is often used to condemn sexual sins or sexual addictions. People tend to skip over the last few verses, which condemn the more “acceptable” sins such as backbiting, disobeying parents, or bragging. In the second chapter the apostle Paul speaks to people who see themselves as better than others: “You may be saying, ‘What terrible people you have been talking about!’ But you are just as bad, and you have no excuse! When you say they are wicked and should be punished, you are condemning yourself, for you do these very same things” (Romans 2:1).

Every one of us is made of the same stuff—both good and bad. We may act out in different ways, but in God’s eyes we are all the same. When we focus on admitting our wrongs, it helps us remember that we are not so different from others after all. As we call on God and admit our helplessness, we can begin the steps toward healing and recovery. *Turn to page 241, Romans 4.*

happiness of an undeserving sinner who is declared to be righteous:

⁷“Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight.

⁸Yes, what joy for those whose sin is no longer counted against them by the Lord.”*

⁹Now then, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it for Gentiles, too? Well, what about Abraham? We have been saying he was declared righteous by God because of his faith. ¹⁰But how did his faith help him? Was he declared righteous only after he had been circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? The answer is that God accepted him first, and then he was circumcised later!

¹¹The circumcision ceremony was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are made right with God by faith. ¹²And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised.

¹³It is clear, then, that God’s promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was not based on obedience to God’s law, but on the new relationship with God that comes by faith. ¹⁴So if you claim that God’s promise is for those who obey God’s law and think they are “good enough” in God’s sight, then you are saying that faith is useless. And in that case, the promise is also meaningless. ¹⁵But the law brings punishment on those who try to

obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)

¹⁶So that’s why faith is the key! God’s promise is given to us as a free gift. And we are certain to receive it, whether or not we follow Jewish customs, if we have faith like Abraham’s. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. ¹⁷That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, “I have made you the father of many nations.”* This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who brings into existence what didn’t exist before.

¹⁸When God promised Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, Abraham believed him. God had also said, “Your descendants will be as numerous as the stars,”* even though such a promise seemed utterly impossible! ¹⁹And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though he knew that he was too old to be a father at the age of one hundred and that Sarah, his wife, had never been able to have children.

²⁰Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. ²¹He was absolutely convinced that God was able to do anything he promised. ²²And because of Abraham’s faith, God declared him to be righteous.

²³Now this wonderful truth—that God declared him to be righteous—wasn’t just for Abraham’s benefit. ²⁴It was for us, too, assuring us that God will also declare us to be righteous if we believe in God, who brought Jesus our Lord back from the dead. ²⁵He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised from the dead to make us right with God.

4:7-8 Ps 32:1-2. **4:17** Gen 17:5. **4:18** Gen 15:5.

4:23-25 When we believe in God and the restoration he offers in Jesus Christ, an exchange takes place. We turn our unmanageable life over to God, including all our sins and guilt, and he gives us his goodness and forgiveness in return. When Jesus died on the cross, he took our sins and guilt away. When Jesus rose from the grave, God demonstrated his power to transform us and fill us with his goodness. As we follow God’s program for restoration, we die to our sins and failures and experience a new and better life through God’s power.

5:12-14 How can we be judged for something Adam did thousands of years ago? It doesn’t seem fair. Many of us find it easy to blame others for our problems, citing our parents or even Adam and Eve as the cause of our failures and sins. Paul made it clear that Adam’s sin and the sins of our ancestors are not our primary concern. Our problems may have started with the mistakes of others, but we have all solidly aligned ourselves with Adam by repeatedly making the same mistakes. We are made of the same stuff, prone to rebel against God and his ways. We will suffer the consequences for our sins if God doesn’t intervene. We don’t need fairness from God; we need his mercy. And that is what God provides for all who believe in him.

CHAPTER 5
Faith Brings Joy

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. ²Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

³We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. ⁴And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. ⁵And this expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

⁶When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's judgment. ¹⁰For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life. ¹¹So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God—all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God.

Adam and Christ Contrasted

¹²When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. ¹³Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. And though there was no law to break, since it had not yet been given, ¹⁴they all died anyway—even though they did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. What a contrast between Adam and Christ, who was yet to come! ¹⁵And what a difference between our sin and God's generous gift of forgiveness. For this one man, Adam, brought death to many through his sin. But this other man, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness to many through God's bountiful gift. ¹⁶And the



Declared "Not Guilty"

BIBLE READING: Romans 3:23-28

We humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings.

What are our shortcomings? We all realize that we have them. Is this just another way of saying that we have fallen short of our personal ideals? At some time all of us have held high ideals to define what we think our life should be like. But most of us learned early on that we couldn't measure up to them. Worse yet, we have often fallen short of the expectations of others and the standards of God. Oh, the weight of guilt we carry! Oh, the pain to think of how we have disappointed those we love! Oh, the longing for some way to be what we should be!

The apostle Paul wrote: "For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins" (Romans 3:23-24). Paul goes on to ask, "Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on our good deeds. It is based on our faith. So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law" (3:27-28).

When God removes our sins, he does a great job! "He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). We can trust God to remove our shortcomings, moment by moment, if we humble ourselves to obey his Word. That means having faith in Jesus Christ to make up for our weaknesses in both character and action. *Turn to page 325, Philippians 2.*

result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but we have the free gift of being accepted by God, even though we are guilty of many sins. ¹⁷The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over us, but all who receive God's wonderful, gracious gift of righteousness will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸Yes, Adam's one sin brought condemnation upon everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness makes all people right in God's sight and gives them life. ¹⁹Because one person disobeyed God, many people became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many people will be made right in God's sight.

²⁰God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful kindness became more abundant. ²¹So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful kindness rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER 6

Sin's Power Is Broken

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more kindness and forgiveness? ²Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? ³Or have you forgotten that when we became Christians and were baptized to become one with Christ Jesus, we died with him? ⁴For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

⁵Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised as he was. ⁶Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. ⁷For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. ⁸And since we died with Christ, we know we will also share his new life. ⁹We are sure of this because Christ rose from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. ¹⁰He died once to defeat sin, and now he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹So you should consider yourselves dead to sin and

5:15-21 Paul had already asserted that we stand forgiven and joyful in God's grace (5:2), and here he elaborated on that reality. The essential nature of God's grace is that it rules over sin and death in our world. While Adam's sin brought sin and death, Jesus Christ has brought life through his grace for all who are willing to receive it. Our old sinful life represents the rule of death through Adam. Our life in recovery through Jesus Christ represents the rule of God's grace, kindness, and love. When we turn our life over to God, we can begin to receive the wonderful joy and forgiveness that he offers.

6:1-3 If God loves to forgive, why not sin to give him added opportunities to forgive us? We may not admit it, but we act on this principle all too often. Paul's response to this excuse for sin is an emphatic *no!* Such an attitude presumes upon God's grace and is clear evidence that we are in denial. When we knowingly continue to sin, we are making light of the tremendous cost of our salvation. It is unthinkable to continue to allow sin to be our master when we have turned our life over to God.

6:12-14 As we recover from our addiction or compulsive behaviors, we may become very discouraged because the old desires still tempt us. Paul recognized that temptation would be an ongoing problem, so he gave us this warning: "Do not give in." The temptations we face are extensions of the defects of character that exist in each of us. Though we cannot overcome our sinful nature alone, we can ask God to help us. As God helps us clear the destructive patterns from our life, we can replace them with healthy patterns and desires. As we are transformed with God's help, we will overcome the powerful temptations in our life.

6:19-22 It is impossible to be neutral. We all have a master—either sin or God. Making sin our master may seem easier and fun for a while, but it will lead only to pain and destruction. When we turn our life over to God and work on recovery, we are affirming that God is our master. This is the only way we can experience restoration for our life. At first God's way may look harder than the way of sin, but in time we will discover that God's way is the only way to a joyful and meaningful life.

7:1-6 Paul used a marriage analogy to clarify his reasoning. If the person we have married dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to us. We are not bound to the dead spouse. In the same way, when we turn our life over to God, our old bondage to sin no longer applies. We now are "married" to God, giving him a position of power and authority in our life. If we are willing to live under God's authority, we will experience the meaningful life that he wants for every one of his people.

able to live for the glory of God through Christ Jesus.

¹²Do not let sin control the way you live;* do not give in to its lustful desires. ¹³Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God. ¹⁴Sin is no longer your master, for you are no longer subject to the law, which enslaves you to sin. Instead, you are free by God's grace.

Freedom to Obey God

¹⁵So since God's grace has set us free from the law, does this mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! ¹⁶Don't you realize that whatever you choose to obey becomes your master? You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God and receive his approval. ¹⁷Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you have obeyed with all your heart the new teaching God has given you. ¹⁸Now you are free from sin, your old master, and you have become slaves to your new master, righteousness.

¹⁹I speak this way, using the illustration of slaves and masters, because it is easy to understand. Before, you let yourselves be slaves of impurity and lawlessness. Now you must choose to be slaves of righteousness so that you will become holy.

²⁰In those days, when you were slaves of sin, you weren't concerned with doing what was right. ²¹And what was the result? It was not good, since now you are ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. ²²But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHAPTER 7

No Longer Bound to the Law

Now, dear brothers and sisters*—you who are familiar with the law—don't you know that the law applies only to a person who is still living? ²Let me illustrate. When a woman marries, the law binds her to her husband as long as he is alive. But if he dies, the laws of marriage no longer apply to her. ³So while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery if she married another

6:12 Or *Do not let sin reign in your body, which is subject to death.* **7:1** Greek *brothers.*

Faith

READ ROMANS 4:1-5

Our addictive patterns are "sinful," so it is common to feel awkward about getting close to God. We may feel ineligible to receive God's love and, instead, expect his angry judgment. We might feel guilty and be afraid that God will reject us. Secretly we wish that we could have a loving relationship with God, but we are afraid we could never be good enough.

The apostle Paul has shown us that we can have the love and acceptance we desire: "For the Scriptures tell us, 'Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous.' When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work. . . . Now this wonderful truth—that God declared him to be righteous—wasn't just for Abraham's benefit. It was for us, too, assuring us that God will also declare us to be righteous if we believe in God, who brought Jesus our Lord back from the dead. He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised from the dead to make us right with God" (Romans 4:3-5, 23-25).

There are free gifts waiting for us that are essential to the recovery process: God's forgiveness, acceptance, and powerful support. God makes it clear that we have been declared "not guilty" in his court of justice if we have trusted Christ. He has promised to give us a special home in heaven with our name on it. There is no need for us to do anything but accept his free gifts. When we turn our life over to God, we gain far more than we could ever lose! *Turn to page 247, Romans 7.*

man. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and does not commit adultery when she remarries.

⁴So this is the point: The law no longer holds you in its power, because you died to its power when you died with Christ on the cross. And now you are united with the one who was raised from the dead. As a result, you can produce good fruit, that is, good deeds for God. ⁵When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced sinful deeds, resulting in death. ⁶But now we have been released from the law, for we died with Christ, and we are no longer captive to its power. Now we can really serve God, not in the old way by obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way, by the Spirit.

God's Law Reveals Our Sin

⁷Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is evil? Of course not! The law is not sinful, but it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "Do not covet."⁸ But sin took advantage of this law and aroused all kinds of forbidden desires

7:7 Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21.

within me! If there were no law, sin would not have that power.

⁹I felt fine when I did not understand what the law demanded. But when I learned the truth, I realized I had broken the law and was a sinner, doomed to die. ¹⁰So the good law, which was supposed to show me the way of life, instead gave me the death penalty. ¹¹Sin took advantage of the law and fooled me; it took the good law and used it to make me guilty of death. ¹²But still, the law itself is holy and right and good.

¹³But how can that be? Did the law, which is good, cause my doom? Of course not! Sin used what was good to bring about my condemnation. So we can see how terrible sin really is. It uses God's good commandment for its own evil purposes.

Struggling with Sin

¹⁴The law is good, then. The trouble is not with the law but with me, because I am sold into slavery, with sin as my master. ¹⁵I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my

7:13 Paul didn't want to leave us with the impression that God's laws are bad. They were meant to help us lead a godly life in close fellowship with him. The real problem is our inability to live up to the standard God has set. By nature we are flawed and sinful creatures. Few of us set out to become enslaved to a destructive substance or relationship, but we are overcome by our inherent tendency to sin. We can be thankful that God has made a provision for our sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now if we turn our life over to God, we can experience his transforming power. He will help us overcome our destructive behaviors.

7:14-17 We can all identify with the struggle Paul described. We long to do what is good, healthy, and right, but we end up doing the same old destructive things. As we take personal inventory, we admit our failures and seek to change, but then we fall right back into our destructive habits. We are not alone in this struggle—it is part of being human. We must not become discouraged. Instead, we must use our failures to inspire new moral inventory and then get on with recovery once again. In time our sins and failures will become fewer as God begins to transform us.

8:1 This is one of the great affirmations of Scripture. We will never be condemned by God for our sins, because Jesus Christ has paid the price once and for all. When we decide to turn our life over to God's care, we can be confident that we will not be condemned by him. If we have confessed our sins and accepted God's forgiveness in Christ, there is "no condemnation."

8:2-4 Once we recognize how helpless we are to fight our dependency, we must look outside ourself to God for the power we need. The life-giving Spirit that Paul mentioned here is the Holy Spirit. He was present at the creation of the world (Genesis 1–2) and is available to help us as we seek to rebuild our life. We cannot overcome our addiction or compulsion alone, but God is more than able to help us. He sent his Son and destroyed the power of sin through his death and resurrection. Now we can follow God's program for godly living through the power of the Holy Spirit within us.

8:5-6 Paul puts people in two categories—those who let themselves be controlled by their self-serving "sinful natures" and those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Once we have made the decision to turn our life over to God, we must consciously choose to follow his way for continued recovery daily. We need to continually reassess our progress, taking a regular moral inventory of our life.

bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things.

¹⁸I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. ¹⁹When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. ²⁰But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it.

²¹It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²²I love God's law with all my heart. ²³But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. ²⁴Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? ²⁵Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

CHAPTER 8

Life in the Spirit

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ²For the power* of the life-giving Spirit has freed you* through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. ³The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. God destroyed sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. ⁴He did this so that the requirement of the law would be fully accomplished for us* who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

⁵Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. ⁶If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace. ⁷For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. ⁸That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

7:24 Greek *from this body of death?* **8:2a** Greek *the law*; also in 8:2b. **8:2b** Some manuscripts read *me*. **8:4** Or *accomplished by us*.

STEP 10

Repeated Forgiveness

BIBLE READING: Romans 5:3-5

We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

We may grow impatient with ourselves when we continue to commit the same sins over and over again. This may cause us to get discouraged, or we may be afraid that we are doomed to relapse.

Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No!" Jesus replied, "seventy times seven!" (Matthew 18:21-22). If this is to be our attitude toward others, doesn't it make sense that we should extend the same grace to ourselves? We need to be as patient with ourselves as God expects us to be with others.

Paul wrote: "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. . . . For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love" (Romans 5:3-5).

Learning to wait patiently is an important characteristic for us to develop. Each time we admit sin and accept God's forgiveness, our hope and faith have a chance to be exercised and grow stronger. We no longer have to hide in shame every time we slip. We can admit our wrongs and move on. God's love for us is reaffirmed every time we rely on it. In this way God helps us hold our head high no matter what happens. *Turn to page 319, Ephesians 4.*

⁹But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all.) ¹⁰Since Christ lives within you, even though your body will die because of sin, your spirit is alive* because you have been made right with God. ¹¹The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you.

¹²So, dear brothers and sisters,* you have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. ¹³For if you keep on following it, you will perish. But if through the power of the Holy Spirit you turn from it* and its evil deeds, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children* of God.

¹⁵So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family*—calling him "Father, dear Father."* ¹⁶For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God's children. ¹⁷And since we are his children, we will share his treasures—for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours, too. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

The Future Glory

¹⁸Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later. ¹⁹For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. ²⁰Against its will, everything on earth was subjected to God's curse. ²¹All creation anticipates the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. ²²For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up

to the present time. ²³And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children,* including the new bodies he has promised us. ²⁴Now that we are saved, we eagerly look forward to this freedom. For if you already have something, you don't need to hope for it. ²⁵But if we look forward to something we don't have yet, we must wait patiently and confidently.

²⁶And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. ²⁷And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. ²⁸And we know that God causes everything to work together* for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters. ³⁰And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And he gave them right standing with himself, and he promised them his glory.

Nothing Can Separate Us from God's Love

³¹What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³²Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?

³³Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? Will God? No! He is the one who has given us right standing with himself. ³⁴Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is the one who died for us

8:10 Or *the Spirit will bring you eternal life.* **8:12** Greek *brothers*; also in 8:29. **8:13** Greek *put it to death.* **8:14** Greek *sons*; also in 8:19. **8:15a** Greek *You received a spirit of sonship.* **8:15b** Greek *"Abba, Father."* *Abba* is an Aramaic term for "father." **8:23** Greek *wait anxiously for sonship.* **8:28** Some manuscripts read *And we know that everything works together.*

8:9-11 Either we have the Spirit of God living in us, or we don't. How does the Spirit of God come to live within us? By our act of faith in turning our life over to God and by our acceptance of the work of Christ on our behalf. Can we feel the Spirit of God within us? Sometimes, but we can know he is there whether we feel his presence or not. God has promised to give us the Holy Spirit when we ask. We receive the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. God will use this same power in us to bring about our recovery.

8:31-39 Our security in life and in recovery is based on God's unshakable love for us. The love God has for us is not just an emotion but a matter of historical record. God proved his love for us by willingly sending his Son to suffer and die. So why would he hold back any lesser gift? In fact, there is nothing in the whole universe that can separate us from God's love! What more could God say or do to us to make us more secure in his love?

and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us.

³⁵Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death? ³⁶(Even the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.")^{*} ³⁷No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

³⁸And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels can't, and the demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. ³⁹Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHAPTER 9

God's Selection of Israel

In the presence of Christ, I speak with utter truthfulness—I do not lie—and my conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm that what I am saying is true. ²My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief ³for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters.* I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them. ⁴They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's special children.* God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave his law to them. They have the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises. ⁵Their ancestors were great people of God, and Christ himself was a Jew as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.*

⁶Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to the Jews? No, for not everyone born into a Jewish family is truly a Jew! ⁷Just the fact that they are descendants of Abraham doesn't make them truly Abraham's children. For the Scriptures say, "Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted,"* though Abraham had other children, too. ⁸This means that Abraham's physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. It is the children of the promise who

8:36 Ps 44:22. **9:3** Greek *my brothers*. **9:4** Greek *chosen for sonship*. **9:5** Or *May God, who rules over everything, be praised forever. Amen*. **9:7** Gen 21:12.



Removed, Not Improved

BIBLE READING: Romans 6:5-11

We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Most of us have made numerous attempts at self-improvement. Perhaps we have consciously tried to improve our attitudes, our education, our appearance, or our habits. We may have had success in self-improvement on some level. However, when it comes to our struggles with defects of character, chances are we have experienced only deep frustration.

There is a reason for our frustration. These character defects can only be removed, never improved! The illustration given us in the Bible is that our sins and defects of character must be put to death, as Jesus was, with the hope of new life to follow. The apostle Paul wrote: "Our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin" (Romans 6:6). "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there" (Galatians 5:24).

There is no Band-Aid cure for our sins and defects of character. They have been fatally wounded and must die on the cross. This process is never easy. Who goes to a crucifixion without some measure of anxiety? But when we accept this and allow God to remove our defects, we will be pleasantly surprised by the new life that awaits us. *Turn to page 327, Philipians 3.*

are considered to be Abraham's children. ⁹For God had promised, "Next year I will return, and Sarah will have a son."^{*}

¹⁰This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he grew up, he married Rebekah, who gave birth to twins. ¹¹But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message proves that God chooses according to his own plan, ¹²not according to our good or bad works.) She was told, "The descendants of your older son will serve the descendants of your younger son."^{*} ¹³In the words of the Scriptures, "I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau."^{*}

¹⁴What can we say? Was God being unfair? Of course not! ¹⁵For God said to Moses,

"I will show mercy to anyone I choose,
and I will show compassion to anyone I choose."^{*}

¹⁶So receiving God's promise is not up to us. We can't get it by choosing it or working hard for it. God will show mercy to anyone he chooses.

¹⁷For the Scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, "I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you, and so that my fame might spread throughout the earth."^{*} ¹⁸So you see, God shows mercy to some just because he wants to, and he chooses to make some people refuse to listen.

¹⁹Well then, you might say, "Why does God blame people for not listening? Haven't they simply done what he made them do?"

²⁰No, don't say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to criticize God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who made it, "Why have you made me like this?"

²¹When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and an-

other to throw garbage into? ²²God has every right to exercise his judgment and his power, but he also has the right to be very patient with those who are the objects of his judgment and are fit only for destruction. ²³He also has the right to pour out the riches of his glory upon those he prepared to be the objects of his mercy—²⁴even upon us, whom he selected, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles.

²⁵Concerning the Gentiles, God says in the prophecy of Hosea,

"Those who were not my people,
I will now call my people.
And I will love those
whom I did not love before."^{*}

²⁶And,

"Once they were told,
'You are not my people.'
But now he will say,
'You are children of the living God.'"^{*}

²⁷Concerning Israel, Isaiah the prophet cried out,

"Though the people of Israel are as
numerous as the sand on the
seashore,
only a small number will be saved.

²⁸For the Lord will carry out his sentence
upon the earth
quickly and with finality."^{*}

²⁹And Isaiah said in another place,

"If the Lord Almighty
had not spared a few of us,
we would have been wiped out
as completely as Sodom and
Gomorrah."^{*}

9:9 Gen 18:10, 14. **9:12** Gen 25:23. **9:13** Mal 1:2-3. **9:15** Exod 33:19. **9:17** Exod 9:16. **9:25** Hos 2:23. **9:26** Greek *You are sons of the living God.* Hos 1:10. **9:27-28** Isa 10:22-23. **9:29** Isa 1:9.

9:25-26 God specializes in loving those who are unlovely and undeserving. None of us deserve God's love, and those of us who think we do are in denial. God's love is bestowed on all who admit their need and respond to his love for them. Sometimes the most undeserving are the first to admit their need for God. No one is entirely innocent of wrongdoing; yet no sin is too great for God to forgive. Thus, desperate addicts who have confessed their sins are better off than "respectable" people who deny their need for God. Admitting that we have failed and that we need God is an essential part of the recovery process.

10:8-15 Salvation comes by trusting Jesus Christ; we can do nothing to earn it. Many of us have spent our entire life trying to earn the approval of others. Perhaps the pain we feel at our failure to achieve perfection is at the heart of our compulsive behavior. We can be thankful that God does not accept us on the basis of our performance. He accepts us because of what Christ has done on our behalf, no matter how great our sins have been. We have no reason to hide our sins from God; he wants only to relieve us of our burdens. He invites us to entrust our life to him and seek to follow his will.

Israel's Unbelief

³⁰Well then, what shall we say about these things? Just this: The Gentiles have been made right with God by faith, even though they were not seeking him. ³¹But the Jews, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. ³²Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law and being good instead of by depending on faith. They stumbled over the great rock in their path. ³³God warned them of this in the Scriptures when he said,

"I am placing a stone in Jerusalem* that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.* But anyone who believes in him will not be disappointed.*"

CHAPTER 10

Dear brothers and sisters,* the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is that the Jewish people might be saved. ²I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. ³For they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Instead, they are clinging to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. They won't go along with God's way. ⁴For Christ has accomplished the whole purpose* of the law. All who believe in him are made right with God.

Salvation Is for Everyone

⁵For Moses wrote that the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands.* ⁶But the way of getting right with God through faith says, "You don't need to go to heaven" (to find Christ and bring him down to help you). ⁷And it says, "You don't need to go to the place of the dead" (to bring Christ back to life again). ⁸Salvation that comes from trusting Christ—which is the message we preach—is already within easy reach. In fact, the Scriptures say, "The message is close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart."*

⁹For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. ¹¹As the Scriptures tell us,

9:33a Greek in Zion. **9:33b** Isa 8:14. **9:33c** Or will not be put to shame. Isa 28:16. **10:1** Greek Brothers. **10:4** Or the end. **10:5** Lev 18:5. **10:6-8** Deut 30:12-14.

Self-Perception

READ ROMANS 7:18-25

We may have begun to realize that we have character flaws that are beyond our control. Deep down inside there is a sense of brokenness that is a constant reminder of our humanity. Hopefully, we will get to a place where our behavior is under control, and we will be able to maintain sobriety. But as long as we are in a human body, we will have to contend with our sinful nature.

Paul said of himself, "I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. . . . There is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me" (Romans 7:18, 23). King David described God's tenderness toward us because of our human condition: "The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he understands how weak we are; he knows we are only dust" (Psalm 103:13-15).

No matter how far we progress, our sinful nature will always incline toward and be susceptible to the lure of our addiction. We can't afford to forget this or let down our guard. Maintaining sobriety is something we will need to nurture for the rest of our life, one day at a time. But we also have a reason for great hope. By trusting Christ and recognizing our helplessness against the power of sin, we open our life to the transforming power of God. **Turn to page 251, Romans 12.**