

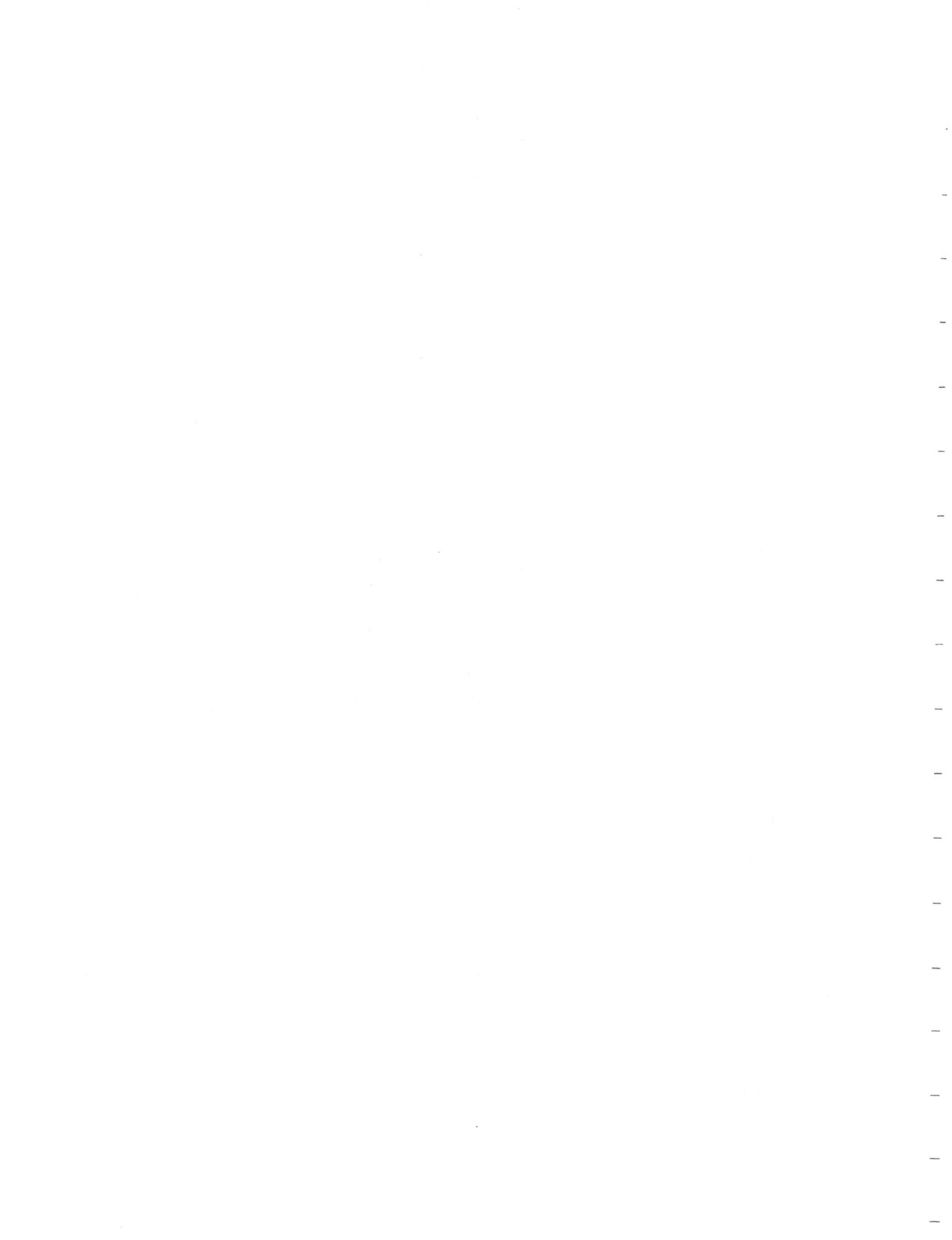
THE FACTOR

WHAT MAKES CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT?

A STUDY OF ROMANS 1-8

1. CHRISTIANS LIVE UNASHAMED
2. CHRISTIANS NEED THE GOSPEL
3. CHRISTIANS UNDERSTAND TRUE EQUALITY
4. CHRISTIANS BOAST IN THE GOODNESS OF ANOTHER
5. CHRISTIANS HAVE FAITH WITH BENEFITS
6. CHRISTIANS ARE INSTRUMENTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
7. CHRISTIANS ARE A BATTLEGROUND
8. CHRISTIANS ARE CONQUERORS





THE X FACTOR

WHAT MAKES CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT?

Lesson 1: Christians Live Unashamed

Introduction:

Imagine you and your friend Rachel are having dinner. The subject of religion comes up. Rachel has tried several organized religions, but nothing really “stuck.” Rachel now considers herself agnostic. She knows you attend the Lutheran church down the street. Rachel asks you, “So, why are a Christian? What makes it different from anything else?” What are three reasons you would give her?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Background: The Apostle Paul manifests the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout this book. Paul was writing to the church in Rome in about 57 AD. This is likely during his 3rd missionary journey, perhaps from Corinth, Greece. Paul was taking the Gospel to the West and he wanted Rome to be the base of his operations. Paul had never met the Roman Christians, but he was hoping to do so soon. It was a congregation that, like many early Christian communities, was experiencing some tension between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Paul believed the thing they both needed to hear most was the gospel.

“This epistle is truly the chief part of the New Testament and the purest gospel, being so valuable altogether that a Christian might well not only memorize it word for word, but keep in touch with it every day, as with the daily bread for his soul.” – Martin Luther on Romans

Romans 1:1-7

- 1) It's easy to pass over the first few verses without spending much time on them. Paul refers to himself and his ministry in a number of ways. Evaluate the following words or phrases Paul uses to describe himself. In your groups, identify the significance/meaning of each? Then, establish the one thing they all have in common.
 - a. Servant
 - b. Called
 - c. Apostle
 - d. Set apart

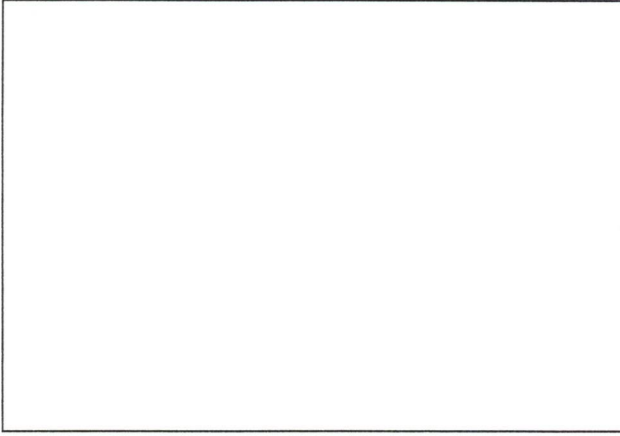
- 2) Consider these verses and apply them to yourself. List three words or phrases that summarize God's work in your life and explain why they are fitting?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

- 3) What is the significance in the order of Paul's wording of verse 7, "Grace" then "peace." Where do you sometimes hear this in worship on a Sunday? Why is it a fitting phrase to use at that point in the service?

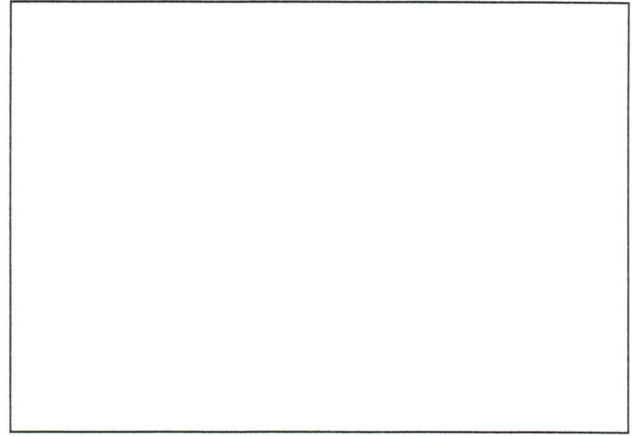
Romans 1:8-15

- 4) Verses 8-15 are important verses for both a pastor and a congregation to understand. They show us how God builds up a congregation. The Gospel ministry produces mutual edification between a pastor and the members of a church. In your groups, list the blessings a pastor receives from his congregation and the blessings a congregation receives from its pastor (Hint: Use Paul's examples for help).

Blessings for Pastor



Blessings for Congregation



If one of the above groups is not faithfully using their gifts to serve the Lord and one another, how is it going to affect the other?

Romans 1:16-17

5) Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel..." The majority of Christians would claim the same thing. However, it means very little to say that you're not "ashamed" of the gospel if you don't really know what the potential shame of the gospel is. In your groups, identify three potential reasons the gospel of Jesus Christ is so shameful/offensive to humanity? Be ready to give an explanation for each.

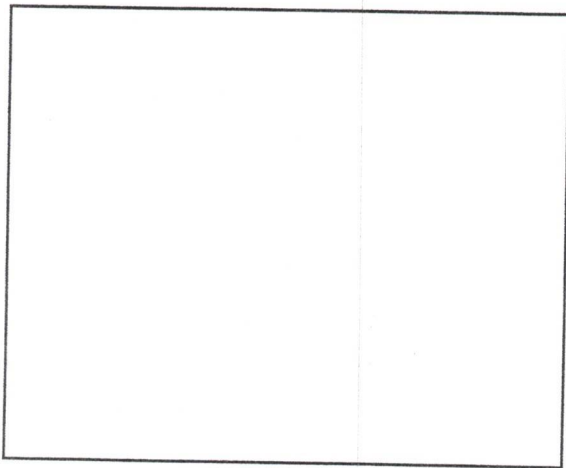
- a.
- b.
- c.

6) Verse 17 is the theme for the entire book of Romans. In his early life, Martin Luther read this verse and understood the expression **“the righteousness of God”** to mean *“that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous.”* Later in his life, the Spirit led Martin Luther to a different understanding - *“the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us by faith.”*

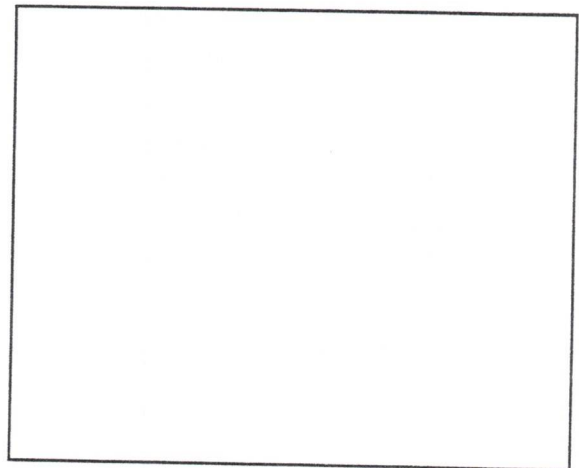
In your groups, contrast the effects that these two understandings of “righteousness of God” are going to have a person.

“The Righteousness of God”

“God demands righteousness from me”



“God gives me Jesus’ righteousness by faith”



Why is it so important that we understand the phrase “righteousness of God” correctly?

- 7) Imagine that you’re writing a letter to an inmate in prison. How might you apply Romans 1:17 to give them comfort? Write down some points.
- 8) Think back to the conversation with Rachel at the beginning of this lesson. With everything we’ve learned from chapter 1, in your own words, summarize what makes Christianity different from every other religion on the face of this earth.

THE FACTOR

WHAT MAKES CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT?

Lesson 2: Christians Need the Gospel

Introduction: Complete the following sentences:

- I appreciate water the most when I'm ...
- I appreciate food the most after I've been ...
- I appreciate a hot shower the most when ...

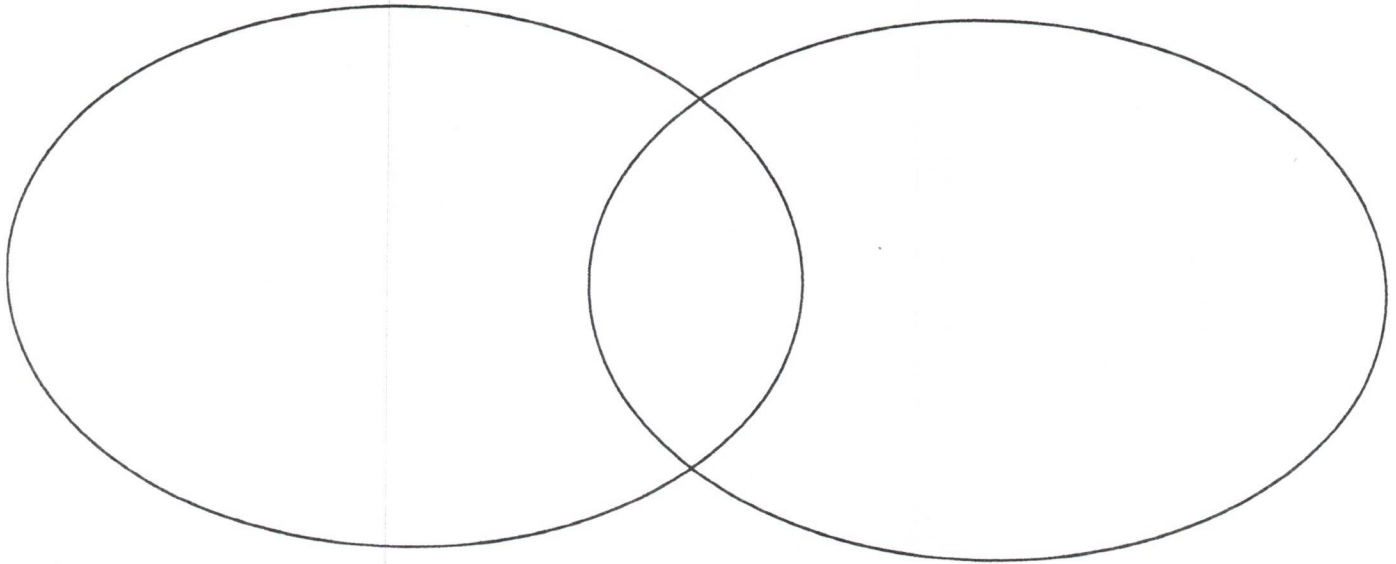
Background:

In Romans 1, Paul showed that the pagan Gentile world had rejected God. This would have been eagerly supported by listeners of Jewish descent. But they also would have assumed they were exempt from such judgment because, after all, **THEY** were law-keeping Jews. Religious people today would largely have the same opinion – “Of course God’s wrath will eventually come down upon the immoral pagans!” But Paul’s twist in chapter 2 is that anyone who believes they stand in judgment upon the pagans is actually proving themselves worthy of judgment also.

Romans 2:1-16

- 1) In these verses, Paul speaks against the judgment of others. With your group, come up with three other **passages/Bible stories** about people who condemn others for things they themselves practice. Explain why such a person is without excuse.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)

- 2) Now that we understand what Paul is talking about in Chapter 2, let's backtrack for a moment. In your group, take 5 minutes to compare and contrast the group of people he talks about in Romans 1:18-32 and the group of people he shows us in Romans 2. How are they similar? How are they different? Which one do Christians tend to struggle with most?



- 3) In 2007, there was a book that came out that sent shockwaves through the Christian community. The book was entitled, *Unchristian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity*. One of the most shocking statistics included in the book was this: In a nationwide poll, 9 out of 10 (near perfect agreement) young people in America thinks that Christians are judgmental.

In your groups analyze this statistic and give three reasons why you feel Christians are being labelled in such a way by young people today? What, if anything, should we glean from these statistics?

- a)
- b)
- c)

4) Look again at verses 5-9. Verses 6-7 could quite easily be misunderstood; we need to keep them in their context. On your own or with the person next to you, complete the following sentences.

- It sounds as if God is saying ...
- But when we read on to vv8-9 we're reminded that ...
- So the way we can properly understand vv6-7 is ... (Hint: look back at Romans 1:17)

5) Respond: Fred says to you, "I've been trying my best to live right, because I know that's what's right, and that's what a Christian's supposed to do. I'm a Christian. I'm sure I'm going to heaven, because I put the Word of God into practice." How do you respond to Fred?

6) Verses 14-15 remind us that we truly have no excuse as we stand before God. With what we've talked about so far in today's lesson, what are two reasons that truth is important for us understand?

a.

b.

7) Verses 14-15 reminds us of another really important truth when it comes to the natural knowledge of God. How might this truth impact the way we witness to a nonbeliever?

For Study at Home:

Read Romans 2:17-3:8 and consider the following question:

In chapter 2, Paul proved that the Jews were not superior to the pagans, and in fact, struggled with the same basic impulses of pride and selfishness. The conclusion, for some, might be that Paul is suggesting the Jewish faith and its rituals/customs served no value. If salvation, still today, is ultimately about relational trust in Christ, not performance of religious rituals, do these rituals, customs, and ceremonies retain any value?

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WHAT MAKES CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT?

Lesson 3: Christians Understand True Equality

Introduction: Each one of us is infested with the “I can do it myself” mentality. It exhibits itself in different ways at different times in our lives. Consider each of the following ages. In your groups, determine how does the “I can do it myself” mentality show itself at each of these ages?

- 3-year-old
- Teenager
- 20-something
- Middle age
- Senior citizen/aged

Through the course of our lives, God makes it clear in a variety of ways that there are all sorts of things that we can't do ourselves. (Indeed, there are very few things we CAN do ourselves.) Can you think of some ways God makes that clear to us?

Those lessons are hard to learn, but are ultimately oh-so-valuable, even freeing. Explain.

Background:

By this point in the letter, Paul has made the case that salvation comes apart from obedience to the Law (Rom. 1:17). Nonetheless, those who want nothing to do with God or his laws find themselves swept up in idolatry and immoral living (rest of Chapter 1). They're lost. But the religious who think they can earn their salvation through their performance (obedience to the Law, i.e. what they do) or pedigree (ancestry through Abraham, i.e. who they are) are just as lost (Chapter 2). EVERYONE needs good news that comes outside of themselves.

Romans 3:9-20

- 8) Paul begins this section like a prosecution attorney making his closing arguments against the defendant. Paul uses one phrase in particular six different times in verses 10-18. What is that phrase? What is Paul trying to drive home?

- 9) Paul quotes from the Old Testament to condemn everything our sinful nature does. As you read through verses 10-18, what three kinds of sins in our lives do these verses convict us of? What is the underlying cause for all of them (hint: verse 18)?
- 10) The purpose of everything in chapters 2 and 3 up to this point are detailed in verses 19 & 20. According to these verses, what is the value of the law? What would be the consequence if someone failed to understand or regularly meditate on the law?
- 11) Evaluate: A local church recently posted the following to its Facebook page: "Still praying this prayer today that people stepped into a relationship with Christ on Sunday, that Christ followers felt old chains break on Sunday and that the people of God were caught on fire to accept the invitation to be a part of the story of God where He has put them in their workplaces, schools, and homes, AMEN!"
Evaluate this statement. What about this statement can we agree with and rejoice in? What in this statement would we say aren't Scripturally possible based upon today's section from Romans?

Romans 3:21-31

- 12) Paul takes us back to the heart of Christianity in Romans 3:21-24. In your groups, walk through each phrase and put them into your own words:
- "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known,"
 - "to which the Law and the Prophets testify."
 - "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."
 - "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,"
 - "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"
 - "and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

13) Verse 25 could be challenging. In the Old Testament times, it seemed as if God were allowing sins to go unpunished. Rather, it was God being patient; He would punish all sins at the cross. How does understanding that God is patient help you and me as we approach life?

14) Consider v26. Is the cross ... a) all good news. b) all bad news. c) a combination of both. (Explain your answer.)

15) In verses 21-31, Paul continues to drive home the differences between believers and non-believers. In your groups, contrast believers and unbelievers when it comes to the following personal topics:

	Believer	Non-Believer
Self-image (feeling of acceptance and love)		
Happiness/Fulfillment		
Failure		
Goals		

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Lesson 4: Christians Boast in the Goodness of Another

Introduction:

1. When you think of great faith, who comes to mind? Write down three of your greatest “heroes of faith” in the Bible and why you regard them so highly?

2. With these heroes in mind, take one minute to write down your own definition of faith.

Background:

In this section of Romans, chapter 4, Paul talks about spiritual “boasting.” A boast is the reason someone gives for why they believe they have a positive identity, value, and meaning, as well as why they should receive a favorable outcome in the end. For the Jews, their spiritual “boast” was in their genes (ancestors of Abraham) and their works (their obedience to the Mosaic Law). Paul spends the chapter teaching them why that boast is misplaced.

Romans 4:1-12

1. Paul points to Abraham and David in this section because these are two men in whom the Jews put their boast. Why do you think the Jews wanted to boast particularly in them?
2. Paul uses both Jewish fathers to prove his point to the opposite effect, that salvation is all God's work. Look first at verse 3. What does that verse teach us?
3. Paul is quoting Genesis 15:6 in verse 3. In your groups, compare Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 (note specifically the timeline here). What is the ultimate point that Paul is making to his audience on salvation and its relationship to circumcision?
4. Verses 4 and 5 can be a bit confusing: "the one who works" is not credited, but "the one who does not work" is credited as righteous. It almost sounds as if being a Christian allows you to be spiritually lazy. Discuss with your groups what is meant by the two types of people. What truth does the Holy Spirit want us to glean from this?
5. Read James 2:21-24. James seems to contradict Paul in Romans. With your groups, discuss how James' words on faith and works can be reconciled with these verses from Romans. (Hint: Keep in mind they are speaking to different audiences)

6. When Christians are asked, “If God were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into heaven’ what would you say?”, a good percentage of Christians will answer something along the lines of the responses below. In your groups evaluate each statement and identify what is wrong with each in light of what we’ve studied thus far in Romans.

- “I try my hardest to be a good Christian”
- “God gave me the grace to believe in him”
- “I believe in God and try to do his will”
- “I believe in God with all my heart”

What then, would be an appropriate response to the question above?

Romans 4:13-25

7. In your groups, come up with at least three instances in Abraham’s life where he wavered in his faith. Why is this good to know, particularly as you read through these final verses?
8. Verse 21 might be the best definition of “faith” that you’ll find in the Bible. How does that verse help you better understand what faith is all about (two things)? How has Romans chapter 4 changed your definition of faith?

THE X FACTOR

WHAT MAKES CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT?

Lesson 5: Christians Have Faith with Benefits

Introduction: List 4 common ways you've heard people finish the phrase below.

I hope...

When people say those phrases how might they be defining the word *hope*?

Romans 5:1-5

1) Read verses 1-5. List the benefits that flow from faith in the box below.

Label each of those benefits above as a PAST, PRESENT, or FUTURE benefit. PAST

PRESENT

FUTURE

- 2) Pick one of those benefits you'd say is your personal favorite.

In your groups, take turns telling each other why that particular benefit stands out to you?

- 3) Paul says suffering → perseverance → character → hope.
What is Paul's line of logic of how one leads to the next? And why is "hope" the ultimate goal of a Christian in this life? Discuss this in your groups.

- 4) Imagine that you're visiting a loved one or fellow Christian in the hospital. How might you apply Romans 5:1-5 to give them comfort? Write down some points and then practice it! Give a few comforting thoughts to the person seated next to you as if you were visiting them in the hospital. Then switch roles.

Romans 5:6-11

- 5) Read verses 6-8. How do these verses define Biblical love? How is that different from the way the world tends to define love? (Confer 1 John 3:16)

- 6) Read verses 9-11. In your own words, how does Paul drive home the certainty of salvation?

- 7) Count how many times in Romans 5:1-11 the phrase "through our Lord Jesus Christ" comes up. (Or a variation of that phrase) What's Paul point with this?
- 8) Come up with a Biblical definition of **peace**. Also consult Psalm 46.
- 9) Come up with a Biblical definition of **hope**. Also consult 1 Peter 1:3-9.

THE X FACTOR

WHAT MAKES CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT?

Lesson 6: Christians are Instruments of Righteousness

Introduction: Agree or disagree: “Apart from Jesus living, dying, and rising for me, baptism is the single greatest thing that has ever happened to me.”

Romans 6:1-10

1) Paul comes at this section as a relationship with sin. And now it’s time to have that awkward breakup conversation. Take a three minutes. As you look especially at verses 1-7, jot down at least 3 reasons why *you have to breakup* with sin.

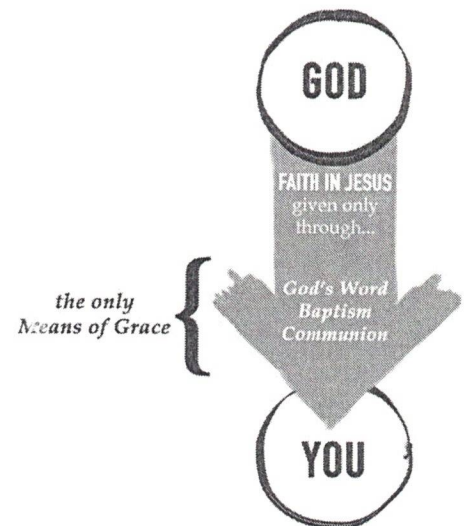
a.

b.

c.

2) Now pair up. One of you will be yourself and one of you will be “sin” (sorry). Practice telling “sin” your relationship is over and use those reasons you jotted down above. (Don’t feel like you have to hold back, this is one breakup you can be harsh about.)

3) We’ve also got to spend some time looking at how baptism fits in here. Lutherans teach that Baptism is a *Means of Grace*: the means by which God offers and gives us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. The Means of Grace are found in the Word and Sacraments.



You and your coworker, Lucy, get into a conversation at lunch about your faith. You've both been baptized. Lucy says, "My baptism means so much to me because it was the moment I dedicated my life to God."

Now it's your turn. Why does your baptism mean so much to you? How will your answer be different from Lucy's? In your groups come up with a short response using thoughts from these verses.

- 4) Let's try to visualize what's happening in these verses. Identify the best artist in your group. Then, as a group, come up with a way to diagram the truths in verses 1-10. Help your artist draw up a diagram that can summarize the connection we have with Jesus.

- 5) Now identify a speaker in your group. Have that person give a simple walkthrough of the diagram.

Like chapter 5, this chapter has implications for our past, present, and future. Baptism, specifically, has lifelong effects. List phrases from verses 1-10 under one of those labels.

PAST

PRESENT

FUTURE

Romans 6:11-14

- 6) Starting here, Paul finally uses some imperative verbs (commands) in the book of Romans. Yet even in these verses he gives gospel motivation for being able to carry out a godly attitude or action. Within verses 11-14, identify both the gospel statements and the Christian attitudes/actions that flow from the gospel.

GOSPEL STATEMENTS

ATTITUDE/ACTION

- 7) Musical instruments can only be played if they have someone to play them. In your own words, explain why this is a good analogy for a Christian being either an instrument of righteousness or wickedness.
- 8) What does being an instrument of righteousness look like? In your groups come up with 4 examples that could be shown in your life.
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
- 9) Finish the sentence: My baptism is a really big deal because...
(Try to include at least 3 big points)

THE FACTOR

WHAT MAKES CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT?

Lesson 7: Christians are a Battleground

Introduction: What's your favorite battle scene from a movie you've seen?

What made that battle scene so good or so moving for you?

What were the stakes?

What "clinched" the battle for the victors?

Share in your groups.

Background: In the opening verses of chapter 7 Paul says we "have died to the law through the body of Christ...now by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code." Christians have been released from the law's burdens by Christ. But that doesn't mean the law has no place in the life of a Christian. Paul defines what that place is in the following verses.

Romans 7:7-13

1) Dead or Alive? Based on verses 7-11, fill in the blanks below with the words *dead* or *alive*.

NO LAW

Sin is _____

I'm _____

LAW

Sin is _____

I'm _____

In your groups, take a stab at explaining, in your own words, what Paul is describing here.

- 2) If what you filled in the blanks above is correct, then why would we *want to hear* God's Law? What is the Law's purpose?
- 3) In your groups, come up with 4 real-life examples of God's Law being a *good* thing for us. (v.12,13) Hint: Think of the 10 commandments.
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Romans 7:14-25

- 4) Paul looks into his heart and sees a battle going on. Even as a Christian, he sees his sinful nature using God's good commandments for its own evil purposes. Examine this struggle by putting an "O" or "N" in each blank to designate whether Paul is referring to his old sinful flesh or the new person created in him by the gospel.

Verse 14: We know that the law is spiritual; but I (___) am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

Verse 15: I (___) do not understand what I (___) do. For what I (___) want to do I (___) do not do, but what I (___) hate I (___) do.

Verse 16: And if I (___) do what I (___) do not want to do, I (___) agree that the law is good.

Verse 17: As it is, it is no longer I myself (___) who do it, but it is sin living in me.

Verse 18: I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I (___) have the desire to do what is good, but I (___) cannot carry it out.

Verse 19: For what I (___) do is not the good I (___) want to do; no, the evil I (___) do not want to do—this I (___) keep on doing.

Verse 20: Now if I (___) do what I (___) do not want to do, it is no longer I (___) who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

- 5) Use some points from Paul's struggle in the verses above to back up this statement made by Martin Luther: "Christians are at the same time both sinner and saint." (Saint = holy)
How does the picture below also help give perspective?



- 6) Name 3 strategies you can use in your battle against the sinful nature.

a.

b.

c.

- 7) How might you encourage a friend who admits to you that they're struggling with a particular sin? They want to stop doing it but keep falling. How might you use Paul's words in verses 14-25 to assure and encourage them?

In your groups, write down a few big points you'd like to get across to your friend.

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THE X FACTOR

WHAT MAKES CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT?

Lesson 8: Christians are Conquerors

Introduction: Christians are called conquerors in this chapter but we don't always feel like one. List five or more things that cause suffering in the lives of believers and unbelievers alike.

Background: Chapter 8 can be seen as Paul's complete answer to his own cry of pain at the end of chapter 7, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" In this chapter, Paul switches to a triumphant and defiant tone as he describes the full implications for us of our Savior's triumph over death. As "Sin" dominated chapter 6, and "Law" chapter 7, so the triumph over the last enemy "Death" becomes the dominant theme of chapter 8.

Romans 8:18-25

- 1) In verse 18 Paul says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." That means all those things we wrote down at the beginning of the lesson will be reversed or taken away in the future.
Look back up at the things we just listed. Share some thoughts on what life would be like if those things didn't exist:

- 2) In your groups, discuss how sin frustrates all creation. List 3 ways the results of sin manifest themselves in the world God created.
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

- 3) Read verses 22-25. In your groups discuss these 3 questions:
- a. Paul intends these passages to be a comfort. What specific points of comfort can you identify?
(Terms to look at: firstfruits of the Spirit; adoption; redemption of our bodies; hope)
 - b. In what kind of specific situations can you see these passages being applicable?
 - c. What do you think Martin Luther meant when he wrote, "For if it were a glory we could see before our eyes, ah, what excellent and patient martyrs we would be"?

Romans 8:28-34

- 4) Verses 28-34 teach us that nothing can stop God's grace from doing its work in our lives. Explain how each of these terms or phrases teaches God's unconditional grace in Christ.
- *works for the good of those who love him*
 - *foreknew*
 - *predestined*
 - *called*
 - *justified*
 - *glorified*
 - *who can be against us?*
 - *but gave him up for us all*
 - *who is he that condemns?*
 - *is also interceding for us*

Romans 8:35-39

- 5) This chapter begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation.

Read verse 35. Write down a definition or example for each of the items on Paul's list of things that can't separate us from God's love. What types of things fit under each term?

DEFINITION

Trouble

Hardship

Persecution

Famine

Nakedness

Danger

Sword

- 6) In verse 37 Paul says nothing he listed previously can separate him from the love of Christ. And he's convinced that nothing listed in verses 38-39 can separate him from the love of Christ either. This is a pretty comprehensive list! But are there any more specific items you'd like to add to the list as a reminder for yourself? Write them below.

7) In lesson 6 we “broke-up” with sin. Now we get to hear the truth that Christ and the love of God will never “break-up” with us. Knowing you have this inseparable relationship with God’s love through Christ, choose 3 things that try to separate you from God and write down a response expressing your confidence that they can’t come between you and his love.

Try using this formula:

“I’m with Jesus now so...”

a.

b.

c.

(Example: “I’m with Jesus now so death has no claim on me. Death has lost it’s sting because Jesus defeated it for me. Since I’m with Jesus now, death will only bring me even closer to him in heaven.)

This course was co-created in 2020 by Eric Melso (Living Hope – Chattanooga) and Andrew Stuebs (Living Word – Johnson City).

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