

# ROMANS Bible Reading Schedule

## 4 Weeks

I think a quote from the Theologian Martin Luther says it well: “Romans is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.” (1515 AD) I have done some advanced reading in Romans as it reminds me of how crucial this Book is to our understanding of our faith. But it does require some time and contemplation to glean the riches of Romans. Are you ready for our three-week journey through this profound letter?! Let’s go!

### WEEK 1

#### DAY 1 – Romans 1

The New Living Translation utilizes the title “Good News” for the word Gospel as the focus of Paul’s message. Good News is essentially the meaning of the word. After an appropriate introduction assuring the readers how much Paul cares about them, he gives them the theme of the Book in verses 16 & 17. There is much to appreciate in these two verses. The vehicle of salvation is summarized in the Gospel. The work of salvation comes by faith and this leads to being right with God, literally, the righteousness of God. This key phrase appears 8 times in Romans. This is closely tied to justification which means to be declared forgiven and complete in his sight. The phrase “makes us right” comes from the law court. It does not mean “makes us good people”; it means “puts us in right standing before God.” This is a small taste of what we will read and enjoy from this Book. We leave the high point of verse 17 and quickly move into the decline of mankind, apart from Christ, from verse 18 on. People have had ample opportunity to respond to God through His Word and through His Son. But beyond that, everyone is able to see the marvel of God in His creation. This is enough to stir the mind and heart to realize that there is One who created and he can be known. Each of these revelations of God is available to all so that “they have no excuse for not knowing God.” (Verse 20) The rest of the chapter can be upsetting. One reason is that we witness this all around us. People acknowledge God but do not worship him or give him thanks. The decline is treacherous. They know their deeds deserve punishment and even death but they do those things anyway. Paul chooses to delay his message about the righteousness of God until Romans 3:20. He will first clearly portray the universal sinfulness of human beings. But I would suggest that you read and reread verses 16 & 17 so that you realize and appreciate the gracious message of the Gospel as the foundation of your faith. What do you love about the Gospel?

## DAY 2 – Romans 2

My response to this chapter is colored by what I know from the rest of the Book, especially the next chapter which we will read tomorrow. You might get the impression that doing good is the key to God's favor like in verse 7 and following. But the standard for good is the absolute holiness of God. Only through perfection can sinners hope to find acceptance before God. Verse 12 brings us back to reality; Gentiles and Jews disobey and sin which points to God's judgment for all. Even so, God has placed in the human soul our conscience that directs us to our need for God's mercy (Verse 15). My favorite verse points to the mercy of God: "Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sins (repentance)." (Verse 4) This reminds me of 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise (to judge the world), as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." In our chapter for today, the Apostle Paul is emphasizing how we are all accountable to God for our sins. He summarizes this well in the final verse, "A true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people." (Verse 29) The Jews were especially in danger of living in outward conformity without inward reality. Nothing of human effort could make them right with God; only his mercy and the work of his Spirit could change a person's heart. These are glimpses of what is yet to come in the following chapters of Romans. This chapter is meant to create an uneasiness with people who justify themselves as right with God. No one is righteous; not even one. How has God spoken to you through this chapter?

## DAY 3 – Romans 3

This is an absolutely thrilling chapter. I have made plans to teach the message of this chapter to the male inmates who attend the Prison Fellowship Bible Study at Marion County Jail this Saturday. I love the Gospel and can't wait to affirm the unchanging truth of justification before God, through Christ, by faith! The outline of the Gospel in this chapter begins in verse 9. The guilt of all humanity is firmly established in these words culminating in verse 20: "For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are." The law never empowered us to live right; it is more of a mirror showing us how often we break the law. The Jews had such a hard time accepting this truth. Jesus, in the sermon on the mount, explained the law by telling them its true meaning. In Matthew 5 thru 7, Jesus redefines their understanding by equating adultery and lust, telling them that both are breaking the law. He does so again in murder and anger. Then, he points to loving your enemy, greed, and worry, along with judging others. Jesus is using the law to teach these self-righteous Jews that they are also guilty before God and without hope unless they are redeemed which means have their sins paid for. Verses 24 & 25 are some of the most powerful verses in the Bible. They express the meaning of the Gospel. "For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right (justified) with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood (on the cross)." Isaiah predicted the arrival of the Messiah and the plan of God to crush his own son (Isaiah 53:10). "He (Jesus) was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all." (53:5-6) There is more to say, but I will invite you to read through

this chapter more than once and I am sure that the inspiration of these words will bless your heart. What do you appreciate about the Gospel as outlined in this chapter?

#### DAY 4 – Romans 4

Obviously, our key character in this chapter is Abraham. There's no doubt he is an incredible example of faith. No other character gets more attention in Hebrews 11 (the chapter of faith) than Abraham. This chapter we read in Romans highlights the significance of faith from the very beginning of God's interaction with people on earth. Even Adam & Eve were clearly created for relationship with God and each other; this was meant to be lived out in faith. That is, believing the best about God. Adam & Eve failed in this regard. But the Apostle Paul's concern was the emphasis on "works" which every Jew would use to validate their right standing with God. Verse 5 is Paul's theme in this chapter: "But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners." Paul is very thorough in his presentation because this understanding of faith and how we relate to God was completely new to the Jewish people even though it had been announced in the Old Testament promising that God would establish a new covenant that would be received by faith. But I want to comment on Abraham's unwavering faith as verse 20 highlights: "Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise (for a son)." I am not questioning the genuine nature of Abraham's faith but it was not always unwavering. He listened to his wife who said he should have a child with her servant Hagar and he did so (Genesis 16). Later, when he was 99 years old, God spoke to him again about the promise and changed his name from Abram to Abraham, father of many. But in Genesis 17 beginning in verse 17, Abraham laughed to himself about how crazy it is to think that two old people could have a child. He believed the promise but, I would suggest, that a few doubts popped into his mind from time to time. I say that because we might have an unrealistic idea about genuine faith. It isn't the absence of all doubts. But rather genuine faith brings their doubts to God just like Abraham did in Genesis 17. It is important to remember that God is gracious and he knows we are mere human beings and will experience moments of weakness and wandering faith. You don't have to try to hide that from God. Tell him right now any doubts you might be tempted to dwell on. He will help you find renewal for your faith. Amen!

#### DAY 5 – Romans 5

There is doctrine and theology throughout the Book of Romans for 11 chapters. But I find verses 3 to 5 especially practical. The progression of spiritual growth begins with the refining work of trials. James 1:2-4 affirms the value of trials and it tells us to rejoice and that is exactly what the Apostle Paul says in verse 3: "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials..." Why do we rejoice in trials? Because they can be used by God to produce a step-by-step transformation that makes us more like Christ. How have you seen this spiritual progression take place in your life? These 3 verses are the most memorable for me but the theme of this chapter is GRACE. Grace is specifically mentioned 6 times in Romans 5. The grace of God is the theological bedrock for Paul. Paul continually rules out any idea that we merit our salvation because God acts by his grace. Grace is so important to the Christian experience that Paul can refer to our "standing in" grace according to the first two verses of this chapter. Because of grace, salvation is portrayed as a gift especially in verses 15-17. Verse 21 summarizes the power of grace with these words: "So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death (the wages of sin is death, 6:23), now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God..." Right

standing is often translated as “justified.” This word is mentioned 4 times in this chapter with verse 9 clearly presenting the truth of justification through the blood of Christ. “And since we have been made right (justified) in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation.” Along with grace, the truth of justification is one of the most reassuring doctrines of our faith. We could never stand before God as righteous but through Christ, we are made right by faith. This emphasis was the foundation of the Reformation in the 16 century and God brought new life and revive many souls through the ministry of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Erasmus...What do you appreciate about grace? How does the truth of justification by faith uplift you?

## WEEK 2

I know that reading a chapter a day is a lot in Romans. But I think most of you realize that one of the goals for reading God’s Word is to have a greater grasp of the whole counsel of God. We live in a time that people are reading one verse or two for their devotions and missing the larger message that God’s Word provides. We may need to read Romans again in the near future but I want us to read larger sections with a desire to take in more of God’s truth. The readings this week are monumental!

### DAY 1 – Romans 6

Much of this chapter compares sin and obedience. Sometimes this is referred to as the old realm and the new. The old realm is ruled by death, sin, the law, and the flesh. The new realm is characterized by life, righteous living, grace, and the Holy Spirit. These comparisons point to the summary of Romans 5 through 8. One key verse for me in this chapter is verse 11: “In the same way (like Jesus died to sin and for sin), count (consider) yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (NIV) Because of our new relationship with Jesus, we do not have to sin. Previously, we were slaves to sin. Instead, we now can be slaves to righteousness through Christ. We are in the new realm and are identified with Christ and enjoy the benefits of union with him. We have “died with Christ”; we have been “buried with Christ”; our new life with Christ anticipates the day when we will “live with Christ” forever. This chapter highlights the possibilities of freedom from sin and the pleasure of righteous living that leads to holiness and one day, eternal life. I am fixated on “righteous living.” Verse 16 affirms the possibility: “Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.” I am thinking about this more so because of what I said in chapter 3 about righteousness from God as a gift received by faith. The theological term is “justified,” to be made right with God. This is foundational to salvation and grace. We could not earn or live it without God’s gracious offer. But our right standing before God is meant to stir our hearts with abandonment to walk in righteousness which is delightful for us and pleasing to God. Again, this speaks of the possibilities of living freely and fully in this life with the assurance of living completely free and fully in heaven. Why would you want to live out this gift of righteousness in your life? What might that entail for you?

## DAY 2 – Romans 7

This is one of the more fascinating chapters in Romans, if not the whole Bible. There has been debate about whether Paul is addressing a nonbeliever or a believer. The surrounding emphasis is always on the believer. No doubt any honest believer will admit to the struggle not to sin. How often have you said to yourself, “I don’t want to do it, but I do it anyway.” To me, the crucial issue is the inability of the law to help anyone do the law. Verse 7 reminds us again that the law reveals our sin because we do not live up to the standard of the law. This is the essential purpose of the law. I think the second half of verse 6 summarizes chapters 7 & 8, “Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.” Now the law is not at fault. Paul says that God’s law is good and holy (Verse 12). Human effort (the flesh) is going to fall short every time. We may want to do what God tells us, but we find that we cannot. So, this chapter is creating a tension that trying harder and self-determination are not enough. We need to rely on the Spirit. He is our only hope for living victoriously over the power of sin. We already know that the only real victory is found in Jesus who has delivered us from the dominion of sin and death. (Verses 24 & 25) If God’s good and holy law cannot rescue us from our predicament and save us, how much less helpful are human laws that people rely on for religious or spiritual well-being? Whether those laws come from a religious figure, a tradition we have inherited, or a church we attend, none of them can change the human soul. They can tell us what to do, but they cannot empower us to do it. God’s law can provide guidelines in the new life God has given us by grace, but it can never substitute for the power of God’s grace, made available through the work of Christ, and lived out by His Spirit. That statement will prepare us for the most significant chapter in Romans tomorrow. What have you learned from this profound chapter?

## DAY 3 – Romans 8:1-17

It is impossible for us to have the slightest chance of taking in the truth of this chapter if we try to tackle all 39 verses in one day. Thus, the first seventeen verses will give us plenty to chew on. Recently, an inmate commented on the power of the Gospel and said everything you need to know is found in Romans 8. But I was teaching Romans 3. He was right; I had to agree with him. This chapter is off the charts with instruction, truth, and how to live out the Gospel as a believer. To me, this chapter clearly teaches us the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. The old highlighted the law and the idea of trying harder. The new covenant announces the beginning of the work of the Spirit who empowers us from the inside. Verse 11 jumps off the page with the idea that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. That makes an incredible difference and leads us to life and peace according to verse 6. Recently, I preached on Romans 8:12-17 (January 15) and emphasized the contrast between the influence of our flesh compared to the presence of the Spirit in our lives. They are opposed to each other. But the beauty of these words affirms the possibility of being led by the Spirit. Earlier in this chapter, Paul gives us the most important directive: “Letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.” (Verse 6) Another translation says that “those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” It reminds me that the truth of God, according to Jesus, sets me free. Jesus said he would give us the Spirit of truth who will be in us. The Spirit-led life is a life of possibilities. Paul tells us that God’s Spirit brings adoption, affirmation, and intimacy with God as we cry “Abba Father,” all leading to the assurance of heaven and the honor of being an heir of God. What do you learn about the Spirit-led life in these verses? How has the help of the Spirit made a difference in your life? What verse would you like to memorize so that you can have that truth dwelling in your mind?

#### DAY 4 – Romans 8:18-39

I was recalling that at one time I presented an eight-week sermon series on Romans 8. You can see why I wanted to break up this chapter into at least two sections. One of my goals for this season of reading God's Word is to read more of it. Most devotionals are highlighting one verse and a way to apply that to your life. Nothing wrong with that, but I want to know more about the fullness of God's Word. Oftentimes I will concentrate on one verse after I have read for 10-15 minutes. So, I did hesitate to divide this chapter in two but this chapter deserves two days! Paul highlights hope, God's plans for good, and his amazing love for us. Hope is summarized in verse 25, "But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently." What might a strong dose of hope mean to you? The NLT records verse 28 with these words, "And 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." Joseph essentially said the same thing to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people." (Genesis 50:20) That perspective allowed Joseph to forgive his brothers and remain humble because it was God behind it all. How does this monumental promise from verse 28 help you? "And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love..." (Verse 38 & 39) The Apostle Paul prayed that we would know how high, how wide, how deep, and how long God's love is (Ephesians 3:18). Why? Because the assurance of his unfailing love sustains us in the hardest of times and softens our hearts toward him. God is love. How would you describe God's love for you? I have chosen three things to emphasize in these verses but there are plenty more, of course. I appreciate Romans 8 as much as any chapter in the Bible, no kidding. Why not read these verses again and notice what God uses to stir your heart? Amen!

#### DAY 5 – Romans 9

With this chapter, we notice a shift of emphasis. Paul is addressing his concern for his fellow Jews. The first five verses reveal his heart for their salvation. It is hard to imagine that Paul would be willing to be forever cursed if the people of Israel would place their faith in Jesus the Messiah. (Verse 3) But he admits that God knows what he is doing. God's sovereign oversight is the subject of verses 6 to 29 with the statement "he chooses whom he chooses." In so many words Paul is saying, "God is in charge." We human beings always want to think that we are in charge. We think that we are the "captains of our souls" and that by our decisions and actions, we can determine what will happen. However, Scripture confronts us with quite a different scenario. In this chapter, Paul shows us that God determines the course of salvation. Human decisions alone cannot explain the situation as God said he will show mercy to anyone he chooses (Verse 15). While Christian theologians continue to debate the role of God's action and the role of human decision in salvation, God's sovereignty stands out. The contemporary world has set God to the side often ignoring the fact of divine influence in the affairs of mankind. But God's decisions really do direct the world as well as the personal journey of those who trust him. No wonder Paul wrote Romans 8:28 before this chapter. I do believe we struggle with God dictating the responses of people saying yes to God or no to God. But there is no question that the Bible clearly portrays the fact that God is in charge. However, the last verse affirms my decision to trust the Lord: "I am placing a stone in Jerusalem that makes people stumble, a rock that makes them fall. But anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." (Verse 33) The mystery of God's choosing and people's choosing will only be clear in heaven, but for now, I teach that both are true at the same time. They go "hand-in-hand" as Randy

Alcorn wrote in his book with the same title. What are your thoughts on this profound subject? How has God spoken to you through this intriguing chapter?

## WEEK 3

Romans 12 is one of my favorite chapters because it is so practical and gives me some handles for Christian living. But I was surprised by how meaningful chapters 10 & 11 were for me. All that says is we have an inspiring week ahead of us. Romans 13 highlights a very important topic of obeying the governing authorities which seems especially relevant during COVID. I would find myself disagreeing with our government but that didn't change the clear message of submission to the laws of the land unless they meant I couldn't worship the Lord and live for him. I say all of that to whet your appetite for our readings this week.

### DAY 1 – Romans 10

Doesn't verse 1 apply to us all? "Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is for the people (of Israel) to be saved." If we omit "Israel," the verse says we long for people to be saved. Paul's heart for the Jews makes complete sense because he is a Jew. I remember serving God in Youth for Christ, a parachurch ministry to young people. I was assigned to a high school in Omaha, NE with the prayer that the students of Central HS in Omaha would be saved. That was my heart and mission. If you have a similar heart and mission for people, this chapter will come alive for you. It pertains to people believing and being saved. Romans 10:9 is a marquee for us, "If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Paul argues that the Jews have had plenty of opportunities to hear and respond to the message of Jesus the Messiah. By the time Paul wrote Romans, early Christian missionaries had spread the Good News through most of the Roman empire. However, Paul's emphasis on preaching the truth about Christ continues so that faith might be birthed in the hearts of people who need Jesus for salvation. He said that faith comes from hearing. (V17) Sharing the message of Christ is challenging in a skeptical world but that doesn't change the need for Jesus; it actually only makes it stronger. This chapter is an affirmation of our call to evangelism which is simply sharing the Good News of Christ. I wonder what stood out to you? How does this chapter motivate you to share Christ? Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!" Whenever and however, you reach out in love for Christ, either through word or deed, this is beautiful to our God. God's love is for the whole world and when we reflect that kind of love, God is pleased. How might God be calling you to share the Good News, in word or deed?

### DAY 2 – Romans 11

This is a fascinating chapter with the hope that the Jews would be "grafted in again" to the tree of Christ and receive God's offer of salvation. Even though the Jews have mostly responded to the Gospel in unbelief, Paul is prophetic in his promise that the Jews will also enjoy God's gift of salvation through faith in Christ. I can't help but focus on the last few verses of this chapter because they are so hopeful and exciting. "Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of

Gentiles comes to Christ. And so, all Israel will be saved.” (Verse 25) The end of history will see a great community of both Jews and Gentiles praising God for his mercy. Finally, all people will see and understand the great wisdom and love of God as they surrender to him in faith. These final verses in the chapter are incredibly worshipful and announce the marvel of God’s plan to include the Jewish people in great numbers before the culmination of the age. Paul utilizes words from Isaiah 40 and Job 41 in verses 34 & 35. Isaiah 40, beginning in verse 11, uses words that are similar in awe and marvelous for us to take in. Our view of God is often too small. Paul is especially grateful for God’s rich wisdom and unending knowledge. It is truly amazing that we are invited into a Father/son or daughter relationship with our God who is beyond our understanding in every dimension. There are many aspects to this chapter that are worth contemplating, but none are greater than the character and nature of God who has revealed himself through his Son. An important aspect of prayer focuses on the significance of worship, gratitude and praise. I might suggest reading Isaiah 40 to launch prayers of worship to our God. But another helpful poem of worship is found in Psalm 46. Or, just read and reread verses 33 to 36, to assist you in a season of prayer that is solely dedicated to praising God.

### DAY 3 – Romans 12

I have been reading through the New Living Translation with each of these daily Scriptures and have appreciated it until this chapter. Here’s why: I have previously memorized Romans 12 from the NIV and have a sense of attachment to it. But I think you understand that every translation is a bit incomplete because it is a translation of Koine Greek from the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The English words of the NIV had become embedded in my mind which is good. But might I learn something from an accurate translation in more contemporary language? Of course. Verse 2 is an example, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” I underlined the words that were translated in a way that made God’s truth clearer to me. The phrase, “transformed by the renewing of your mind” is not as clear or as simple as the NLT translates it. My thinking needs to match the truth and then the truth will change me. What I dwell on has the greatest significance in how God shapes my heart. That was just one example in this very familiar reading. I love this chapter; it is the most profound and condensed expression of what Christian living looks like. Paul challenges us to surrender, have a humble view of ourselves, use our gifts, love in practical ways, be at peace with others as far as it depends upon you and me, and so on. I have shared six sermons on this one chapter to give you an idea of how deeply these words have impacted me. The rest of Romans also gives us instructions on practical living as Christians. As the saying goes, “this is where the rubber meets the road.” Verse 18 may have directed my life as much as any verse in this chapter because I might want to be at peace with everyone and if they don’t want it, I am powerless to make them. “Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.” But I shouldn’t kid myself into thinking that my motives are always pure in regard to offering peace. Am I really being a bridge-builder or do I want to look impressive as if I offer peace with no strings attached? This chapter has created a lot of self-examination in my life. What verse or verses are you identifying with? What might God be saying to you?

#### DAY 4 – Romans 13

This chapter launches an unexpected topic about respect for those governing us. It even says that God has placed them in their positions. It is a challenging subject that became front and center during COVID. What had previously been affirmed now was in question. Are we really supposed to obey the authorities when we don't agree with their decision? It turned into a very intense situation in the Body of Christ causing division even among believers. Other topics for this chapter concern love and obedience as well as living in the light. But the focus on governmental authority intrigues me the most. I would expect to learn from history that Christians in Rome would resist the authorities as things were heating up for Christians as the Roman government became harsher with each passing year. Many governments are led by pagan leaders. We could easily deduce that following a pagan leader is contrary to God's will. But these first seven verses tell us otherwise. The Bible is full of teaching that affirms God's activity in raising up the world's leaders and casting them down as well. The message is clear that God instituted governing authorities, so to rebel against them is rebelling against God. However, Peter and John were warned by the authorities to stop speaking about Jesus in Acts 4. "But Peter and John replied, 'Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.'" (Acts 4:19-20) If the authorities demand that we stop telling others about Jesus and/or worshipping him, we must disobey human leaders in proper honor to God. Also, in verses 6 & 7, Paul talks about paying taxes. Paying taxes would have been a controversial subject for Christians in Rome. Addressing this issue might have been sparked by Paul's knowledge that Roman Christians were participating in a tax revolt (Tacitus, Annals 13). Jesus wisely addressed taxes to Caesar, remember? "Whose picture and title are stamped on the coin?" "Caesar's," they replied. "Well, then," Jesus said, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." (Matthew 22:20-21) I invite you to not only obey the governing authorities but to pray for them. How does this topic touch your life? What else in this chapter caught your eye?

#### DAY 5 – Romans 14

What do we do with issues that are not essential to the faith? This chapter gives us some direction. Paul specifically addresses diet and days. What if I told you that I honor the Sabbath on Mondays? You would probably be just fine with that. But if you weren't, I would send you to Romans 14. Verse 1 points to the weak in faith. In Rome, most of the weak in faith were Jewish Christians whose consciences did not give them liberty from certain requirements of Jewish law. Many of these Christians held to the conviction of Daniel (Dan. 1:3-16), who refused to eat the rich food and wine that the king of Babylon offered them. So too, Rome was filled with pagan practices that might make the foot unclean, thus, jeopardizing Jewish ritual purity. Paul tells the strong Christians to accept these sincere convictions in the weaker believer. One's convictions before God are to be honored and even affirmed. The bottom line is described in verse 10, "So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will stand before the judgment seat of God." Paul reminds the Roman Christians that it is God, not other Christians, who will ultimately judge us. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 are relevant, "So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged (literally, the judgment seat of Christ). We will receive whatever we deserve for the good (useful, fruitful) or evil (useless, selfish) we have done in this earthly body." There will be a reward from Christ or a lack of reward as Paul clearly writes in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. As verse 12 of

Romans 14 says, “each of us will give a personal account to God.” Finally, the summary statement of this chapter is worth noting, “If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.” Wow, that is something to consider. Maybe you didn’t consider that violating your conscience is a sin. The message in these verses to the weak Christians in Rome, if you believe in your heart that you should not eat meat, drink wine, or ignore Jewish holy days, then doing so would be a sin. Paul affirms that their conscience is still to be honored. On the other hand, the “strong believer” should not try to force the weak Christian to act otherwise. How might this topic apply to your life?

## WEEK 4

### DAY 1 – Romans 15

I am especially drawn to the first thirteen verses about thinking of others and what it means to accept one another. Verse 13 is a marvelous prayer/benediction that wraps up Paul’s heart for God to work in a powerful way in the lives of believers. The crucial issue is the ongoing tension between Jews and Gentiles. Paul references the numerous times that the Old Testament promises that Gentiles would join the Jews in praising God. Isaiah 11:10, as quoted in verse 12, comes from the messianic promises of a chapter in Isaiah full of anticipation as out to the stump of Jesse a shoot will produce a Branch that will be a light to the Gentiles. The promises found in Jesus are for the whole world. But back then, as is now, the world is divided and the walls are high. Love and acceptance are rare in a world of judgment and pride. The issue of Jewish – Gentile relationships was fundamental to many disputes in the Roman Church. Through Christ, God made it possible for Jews and Gentiles to join together. Ephesians 2:14 says, “For Christ Himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.” The challenge is for us to be the peacemakers who take the initiative to build a bridge. “May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help YOU (& ME) live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus.” (Verse 5) So, how might this be possible? Again, Paul gives us insights into unity and harmony from his letter to the Philippians: “Make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other; loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. HOW? Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.” (2:2-4) What does this mean to you? How is God asking you to respond?

### DAY 2 – Romans 16

This might seem like the least inspiring chapter of the book but I think otherwise. It is a powerful message that Paul has so many partnerships and friends to recognize. Would you have expected that? I bet not. I have noticed the story behind some of these names. Phoebe is a servant-leader in the church of Cenchrea. A female leader is the focus as he begins this chapter. Priscilla and Aquila have been good friends of Paul for some time; co-workers in the ministry. They are introduced to us in Acts 18:1-3. Their home served as the church setting for believers in that area. And just think, Rufus, in verse 13, might be the individual mentioned as the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried Christ’s cross. (Mark 15:21) This is quite a tribute to the brothers and sisters who meant so much to Paul. Do I have that kind of connection and esteem for those around me? I perceive us as being rather distant in our relationships and often

loners in our approach to ministry and life. Paul surprises us and at the same time challenges us. Paul mentions 28 friends of the ministry from verses 1 to 16, giving us an example to follow. Let's make sure we do this together and we do it in love. Before Paul wraps up this letter, he warns them of the possible challenges they will face from the smooth talkers that the devil wants to use to shake up the foundation of their faith. He often closes with this concern in his letters. Verses 25 to 27 express a beautiful prayer for the Roman believers. All glory to Christ! How has God spoken to you in this chapter? What is the lasting message that sinks into your heart from this glorious book?