

Reading Together
New Testament Bible Reading Schedule
September 26th to October 2nd

Monday, September 26 – Romans 6: 15 – 7:6

Before you even begin to read or think too much about this passage, please look at what Paul says in verse 19, “I put this in human terms.” With those words Paul is telling us that his illustration isn’t a perfect illustration, but it is the best illustration he can use to explain a deep spiritual truth. Sometimes it is hard to explain spiritual things in human terms. Illustrations aren’t always perfect. In this passage, Paul uses the illustration of slavery to explain the difference between how those who are under Christ behave and those who are under the law behave. What makes this confusing is that Paul talks about Christians being set free to become slaves to righteousness. How can we be both slaves and free? How can we be free from the law and slaves to righteousness? We have to understand that like the song says, “You’ve got to serve somebody,” and Paul makes that clear in verses 15 and 16. We are either under the law and slaves to sin which leads to death or slaves to obedience which leads to righteousness. If we allow ourselves to become slaves to our sinful nature we will only spiral deeper and deeper into sin, which will ultimately lead us to death (verse 23). The problem is this, if we are trying to be righteous through the law we will never really be able to work on the root of our sin problems. Rather than seeing our sin and dealing with it we stay busy trying to justify ourselves and cover up our flaws.

But Christ sets us free from all of that. We no longer have to continue to spiral downward. We no longer have to try to earn our own righteousness through slavish obedience to the law. We no longer have to try to justify ourselves, and because of that we can begin to honestly deal with the sinful patterns of our lives. As we begin to see the depths of our sin, we also begin to see the greatness of our savior, which in turn should cause us to love Jesus more deeply and makes us willingly give up our lives to him. So, being a slave to righteousness becomes a voluntary act done out of love for Christ.

In Chapter 7, Paul makes the point that the law only has power over us as long as we are alive. Once we have died to sin through the cross the law no longer has power over us, instead Christ does. Make sure you understand that as Christians we are still called to be obedient, but now rather than just trying to be obedient to the law, which we could never do anyway, we are called to

obedience in Christ. When we come to Christ, it changes the motivation of our obedience from duty to love.

Tuesday, September 27 – Romans 7: 7 – 25

In these verses, Paul starts by making the point that the law isn't sin, but rather the law is the diagnostic tool that reveals the sin inside of us. As humans we always seem to desire what is forbidden. That is what Paul means when he says in verse 8 that "sin seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment produced in me every kind of covetous desire." What Paul is saying is that the law actually has the power to incite us to sin, by stimulating desires in us to have that which is forbidden. On top of that the law doesn't have the power to save us, because without Christ we don't have the power to be completely obedient to it. Therefore the law only has the power to condemn us. The law is holy because it comes from God, but sin uses the holy thing to an unholy end.

In verses 14-25, Paul describes the inner battle that rages inside of him. He wants to do good but cannot. In fact, Paul realizes that he is powerless to live the life he desires to live because he is a prisoner of the law of sin that is at work inside of him. Notice in verse 24 how this leads Paul to two conclusions. First, he is a wretched man who needs to be rescued, and second, Christ is the one who can rescue him. The good thing about our struggles with sin is that the struggle points us to our need for a savior. Notice how Paul's awareness of these two foundational truths—that he is a great sinner, and Christ is a great rescuer—causes Paul to break out in a great exclamation of praise in verse 25. If you see yourself as Paul saw himself, and you see Jesus as your great savior, you too will shout "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Wednesday, September 28 – Romans 8: 1 – 17

Romans chapter 8 is one of the most reassuring passages in all of the Bible. Chapter 8 starts with Paul's recognition that because of Christ Christians have nothing to fear, and tomorrow we will see that it ends with that thought as well. Notice what Paul says in verse 1, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Why? Because Jesus took the condemnation for us. By his death on the cross Jesus has set us free from the power of sin and the power of death. We were living under a death sentence but now in Christ we are set free. Look at the key truths that Paul points out in verses 3-4. In verse

3, Paul makes it clear once again that the Law has no power to save us, it can only condemn us. In order to save us, God sent his Son made in our likeness to be a sin offering for us. Jesus did what we could never do—he lived a perfect life, a sinless life, and then offered himself as the sacrifice for our sin. Jesus met all the requirements of the Law that we cannot meet, and his death doesn't just give us forgiveness it also brings us righteousness. His perfect record of obedience becomes our perfect record of obedience.

In verses 5-8 Paul lays out a contrast between those who live according to their sinful nature and those who live according to the Spirit of Christ. If you live according to your sinful nature you will always want what that nature desires, but if you live according to the Spirit you will want to live your life according to what the Spirit desires. The sinful nature brings death, the Spirit brings life, the sinful nature is hostile to God, the Spirit controlled nature is pleasing to God.

If you have the Spirit of Christ in you, you will be controlled by it (verse 9), and you can be certain that just as Christ was raised from the dead you too will be raised from the dead along with him (verse 11). Because of that, we have an obligation to live according to the Spirit. But it is not as a slave (verse 15) but as a Son. Just as Christ was God's Son, we also become God's Son (Daughter) when we unite our lives to his by faith in him. It is the Holy Spirit that is always at work to remind us that we are indeed children of God with the right to call God our papa or daddy (that is what the word Abba means). Because we are Sons we also have the rights of Sons—we are co-heirs with Christ. What are we co-heirs of? His Kingdom—all that is his (see Romans 8: 32).

Thursday, September 29 – Romans 8: 18 – 39

In the last half of Romans 8, Paul talks about the future glory that we have in Christ. It is glory that comes to us not just because of Jesus, but because of the Holy Spirit, who is often the forgotten member of the Trinity. Paul starts by explaining how, because of Christ, Christians can look at their world in a different way. Because of Christ our suffering can make sense. We suffer because all is not well with the world we live in (verses 18-23), but in the midst of our suffering we also have hope, because we know that even though all is not right with the world today, one day it will be (verses 18, 24-25).

It is the Holy Spirit who reminds us of the hope we have in Christ (verses 26-27), and even helps us to know how to pray when we can't find the right words.

In verses 28 – 30, Paul makes it clear that whatever is going on in our lives is because God is at work accomplishing his purpose in our lives. These verses can't make it any clearer—God is at work in our lives to make us what He wants us to be. God uses whatever is going on in our lives to accomplish good for our lives and bring glory to his name (verse 28), and to make us into the likeness of his son (verse 29). God is carrying out his master plan for each of our lives. And that brings us to verses 31-39. If God is the one who is at work in our lives, then we have nothing to be afraid of—no matter what may be happening in the present moments of our lives. Look and think about the great truths that Paul establishes in verses 31- 39. If God is for us, who can be against us (verse 31)? If God was willing to give up his Son for us, why wouldn't God be willing to give us everything else as well (verse 32)? How can we be condemned when Jesus, the one who would condemn us, is also the one who pleads for us (verse 34)? What could possibly ever separate us from the love of Christ? Nothing (verses 35-39)! Are you living your life as more than a conqueror?

Friday, September 30 – Romans 9: 1 – 33

Chapter 9 deals with the subject of what happened to Israel, God's chosen people, and these verses speak of God's ability and right to choose those whom he wants to save. What Paul is saying in verses 1-9 is that God's chosen people aren't those who are born into a certain race or a certain family, but rather, are those who are by faith trusting in God's promises. Look at verse 6. Just because a person was born an Israelite, doesn't make them a true Israelite. Many Israelites walked away from God's promises. Many Gentiles embraced God's promises and became part of God's chosen people. As proof of this, Paul reminds his readers of Jacob and Esau. By rights, as the older brother, Esau should have been the one the promises made to Abraham were passed down through. But instead God chose (elected) Jacob, and notice that God's choice wasn't based on performance. It was made while they were still in Rebekah's womb, before they had done anything (10-13). Many people have a hard time accepting this, but Paul makes the case very clear in the following verses. First in verse 15, Paul quotes what God said to Moses in Exodus 33:19 that he will have mercy on whom he has mercy and compassion on who he has compassion. In other words, God can choose to love and show compassion to whomever he wants to, in this case Jacob over Esau. Notice especially verse 16, "It" (God's choice) is not dependent on man's effort or desire, but on God's mercy.

In verses 17-29, Paul continues to make his case that God's mercy comes as a result of God's choice. First, he gives us the example of God allowing Pharaoh's heart to be hardened. Next, Paul compares God to a potter who takes a lump of clay and makes two different things out of it. In one case, God, as the potter, makes something for a noble purpose and in another case he makes something for a common purpose. In the same way, God chooses to work in our lives not based on who we are or what we do, but simply because of his choice. Look carefully at verses 22 – 23. These can be hard verses for us to swallow, but it seems as if Paul is clearly saying that God creates some people to be the objects of his mercy and others to be the objects of his wrath. We might not like to think about God this way, and we don't have to like what Paul says, but we do need to see that this is God's Word and we must let God be God and trust him.

Saturday, October 1 – Romans 10: 1 – 21

In chapter 10, Paul deals with the subject of salvation, specifically in terms of the Jews being saved. We also can learn some important truths as we read what Paul writes here. Let's start by looking at verse 4 where Paul writes, "Christ is the end of the law." What do those words mean? Think of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:17 "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them." Paul is not saying that the Law is no longer in effect. Paul is saying that Jesus has fulfilled all of the requirements of the Law, so that through faith in him we too might be called righteous by God.

Verses 9 and 10 have become the formula for how to become a Christian. Confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord really meant something in Paul's day (it should still in our day too, but all too often we say Jesus is Lord without really thinking about what we are saying.) If you lived during Paul's time, you were expected to say that Caesar was lord. If you refused, it meant persecution and even death. To say that Jesus is Lord means that we acknowledge that Jesus alone is the ruler of our lives. Coupled with a willingness to acknowledge Jesus as Lord is faith to believe that God was raised from the dead. We don't serve a dead king, but a living King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

At the end of this chapter Paul quotes extensively from the Book of Isaiah as he makes the point that both Jews and Gentiles can come to faith in Christ (verses 12-13). In verse 25 Paul quotes Isaiah's famous words "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news," (Isaiah 52:7). Even though the

good news has been brought to the Jews they have refused to hear it (verse 16, which is a quote from Isaiah 53:1), and since the Jews have refused to hear and believe, God has opened the Gospel up for all to come to Christ (verse 20, which is a quote from Isaiah 65:10)

Sunday, October 2 – Romans 11: 1 – 24

In chapter 11, Paul deals with what has happened to Israel—they have been cut off of the tree and the Gentiles have been grafted onto the tree. But Paul warns the Gentiles that if they fall into disbelief like Israel did they too can be cut off. Paul is not talking about an individual losing their salvation, but rather Paul is talking about a people group losing the Gospel in their culture so it no longer has effect over the lives of future generations. Paul also makes two very important references regarding Israel. The first is easy to understand and is found in verses 1-10. Paul's point in these verses is that, on the whole, Israel has rejected their Messiah, but not all of Israel has. There is a remnant who has heard and believed and is still part of the tree.