

Dec 3-9

## **Week 49**

This week we will continue in Act 3, scene 4, “Christ’s Church: God’s People Advance the Kingdom.” Our readings will take us through the wonderful book of Romans, and in Acts we will follow Paul’s ministry from the end of the third missionary journey through his defense before the governor, Festus, and King Agrippa II.

As you read Romans, follow the nuances of Paul’s argument. Pay careful attention to what he said about the Spirit, the law, sin, righteousness, justification, grace, and faith. From chapter 12 to the end, meditate on the practical instructions Paul gave the church in Rome and carefully think about how you should apply the Word to your life.

As we continue in Acts, notice the dynamics that were going on surrounding Paul’s ministry. He seemed to be heading for trouble but had a strong sense that God wanted him to go back to Jerusalem. He met trouble there, but God delivered him from very violent opposition. As you read, recognize the various groups around Paul: traveling companions, believers he met along the way, the Christian community in Jerusalem, Jewish opponents from across the Mediterranean world, Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, and various Roman authorities.

*What is God saying to you through this portion of Acts? How does this history instruct you about the Christian life and God’s agenda for the world?*

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**Day 1****Read Romans 1-4; Acts 20:1-3****Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 25**

During his three months in Corinth, toward the end of the third missionary journey, Paul wrote the book of Romans. Having never visited that church and seeing that he would be delayed in coming to them, he wanted to send them a summary of the gospel and basic teachings on the Christian life. After an introduction (see Romans 1:1-17), in which he presented the letter's main topic (see 1:16-17), Paul laid the foundation of the letter in 1:18–3:20, showing that all people are enslaved and condemned by their sin. Whether pagans who give no attention to the one true God or religious persons whose self-righteousness keeps them from God, all are locked in sin's power.

This section culminates with a string of Old Testament texts reinforcing that all people have a sin problem (see Romans 3:9-20). At 3:21, however, the apostle turned to the solution to this devastating problem: God, in his grace, provided a way for people to be declared righteous. The key is faith, as Paul argued in Romans 4.

*Do you depend on your own righteousness for a right relationship with God?  
There is a better way, the way of faith in Christ.*

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## **Day 2**

### **Read Romans 5-8**

#### **Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 26**

Continue to notice the emphasis on a life lived by the relationship of faith, set against a life lived by behavioral works of the law. Romans 5:1-11 wraps up the section on the triumph of faith, proclaiming that those who are declared righteous by faith are in right relationship with God.

In Romans 5:12–7:25 Paul treated the universal reach of the righteousness offered through Christ (see 5:12-21), spoke of a Christian's relationship to sin and the law (see 6:1–7:3), and declared the futility of a religious life apart from the life-giving Spirit (see 7:7-25). So the law of God is set against the law, or dynamic, of sin in a person's life.

In chapter 8 the apostle turned to the real law by which a believer must live: the law of the Spirit. Take your time in chapter 8. Savor all it says God has done for us in Christ, by the work of the Spirit.

*Praise God for your relationship with him through salvation in Christ and the work of the indwelling Spirit.*

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**Day 3**

**Read Romans 9-12**

**Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 27**

In Romans 9–11 we hear Paul’s deep burden for the Jewish people. Watch for the theme of God’s faithfulness to work according to his promise, as contrasted with the unfaithfulness of many Israelites from the Old Testament era to Paul’s day. Paul began with a lament (a heartfelt cry) about the current spiritual condition of his fellow Jews (see Romans 9:1-5). In Romans 9:6-29 he extolled God’s faithfulness to his promise. God shows mercy to children of the promise who come to him by faith rather than to those who approach him on the basis of religious works.

In Romans 9:30–10:21 Paul turned to the unfaithfulness of Israel, who to a great extent had rejected the gospel. Finally, in Romans 11:1-32 Paul explained that a remnant of Israel (recall that theme in the Prophets) had been saved through the gospel. He pointed to a time when the Jewish people would turn to the gospel.

Having laid out his theology of God’s gift of righteousness in the previous chapters, Paul then gave a series of exhortations in chapter 12, detailing how believers should live out God’s righteousness.

*Which of Paul’s exhortations in Romans 12 is most pertinent for you today?*

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**Day 4**

**Read Romans 13-16**

**Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 28**

Paul often began his letters with a theological foundation and then moved to practical exhortation. Yesterday in Romans 12 we encountered the beginning of a section offering practical exhortation. Today the practical encouragement continues as Paul dealt with a Christian's responsibility to the government (see Romans 13:1-7), the primacy of love and the importance of holy living (see 13:8-14), caution against judgmental attitudes toward other believers (see 14:1-12), and a warning about causing others to stumble and the need to build others up (see 14:13–15:13).

To conclude the letter, the apostle reflected on his ministry (see Romans 15:14-21); shared his travel plans (see 15:22-33); and offered encouragement, greetings, warnings, and a benediction of glory to God (see 16:1-27). Notice that Paul balanced encouragement with warning, weaving together Scripture and practical insights.

*Choose one of Paul's practical exhortations to apply today or choose a theological point on which to meditate.*

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**Day 5****Read Acts 20:4-23:25****Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 29**

As you read the narrative of Paul's journeys in Acts, carefully track the characters and the cause-and-effect events. It will also help to keep a map handy (find a map of Paul's journeys at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary). As we rejoin Paul in the story today, he was wrapping up his third missionary journey and moving to the climactic events at the conclusion of Acts.

In chapters 20–21 notice the elements that indicated life was about to change for Paul. As you read about the controversies that led to Paul's arrest, you will need to make a careful distinction between those in the Christian movement who were concerned about Paul's teaching (see Acts 21:17-25) and Jewish opponents of Paul from the broader Mediterranean world (see 21:26-29). Jewish zealots, in fact, threatened by Paul's effectiveness, bound themselves with an oath to kill the apostle. Paul's Roman citizenship and the role of the Roman military and government were important to the story as things progressed.

*How does the reading today affect your perspective on the controversial nature of Christianity in the world?*

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**Day 6****Read Acts 24-26****Act 3 - Scene 4 - Reading 30**

Paul was in the custody of the Roman governor Felix in Caesarea. Roman historians describe Felix as a thug and a poor ruler. Paul remained in custody in Caesarea for two years. Felix, recalled to Rome by the Emperor Nero, was replaced by Festus as governor. Festus was a much better ruler of Judea than Felix, but he died in office after about two years.

Intending to do the Jewish leaders a favor, Festus asked Paul whether he was willing to stand trial in Jerusalem. At this point Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar, a request to go to Rome to stand trial before the emperor himself, thwarting Festus's intention to send him to Jerusalem.

Before he was sent to Rome, however, Paul made a defense speech and shared his testimony before King Agrippa II, a puppet king of the Romans, who ruled over an area in the north and northwest of Palestine. As you read, notice Paul's passionate argument for the gospel, which he saw as both true and reasonable.

*Paul shared the gospel with everyone he met, including powerful rulers. How do you bear witness to your faith?*

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**Day 7**

**Reading Summary for Week 49**

Paul turned his church-planting heart west. He longed to teach Christians in Rome and then preach in Spain. To introduce himself to the Romans, he composed his greatest letter. This week we've read the Mount Everest of Paul's theology. The apostle brilliantly diagnosed the dilemma of sin and then related God's gracious remedy: salvation by faith alone. He then showed that salvation results in Christlike living and service. Paul's subsequent arrest and imprisonment modified his travel plans.

**Prayer/Meditation**

Lord God of Paul, I thank you for giving such a wonderful apostle to your church. I confess how difficult it is for me to grasp the grand and glorious teachings of Romans—which Paul must have thought ordinary Christians should understand. Lord, help me today by your mercies to present my body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to you. Help me not be conformed to this age, but to be transformed by the renewing of my mind. Amen.

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