

The Righteousness of God

5 Growth Group studies in Romans



Statue of the Apostle Paul at the entrance of the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, Italy. The basilica was commissioned by the Roman Emperor Constantine allegedly at the site of Paul's burial in Rome. Paul is traditionally pictured with a sword as a reference to his pre-conversion persecution of believers.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_of_Saint_Paul_Outside_the_Walls

Welcome

Welcome to Bible Study for Term 2, 2016. This term, we're going to be digging deep into the opening chapters of Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

Week I	God's Power (Rom 1:1-17)
Week II	God's Wrath (Rom 1:18-3:20)
Week III	God's Righteousness (Rom 3:21-31)
Week IV	God's Gift (Rom 4)
Week V	God's Peace (Rom 5)
Week VI	God's Mission (Paul the Missionary)
Week VII	God's Mission (Prayer meeting)

The Righteousness of God

The Righteousness of God is one of the central themes in Romans. In the theme verses of Romans (1:16-17), Paul tells us that in the gospel 'the righteousness of God' is revealed. As we study these opening chapters of Romans, we're going to hear of God's righteousness again and again. We'll see that God is right when he judges and right when he forgives. God's righteousness is demonstrated as he faithfully keeps His promises. And God's righteousness is something that he credits to those who believe.

That's why these studies are called *The Righteousness of God*.

Romans

Romans is a treasured and influential part of the bible. Quite likely Martin Luther's conversion occurred as he pondered the meaning of 'the righteousness of God' in Romans 1:17. John Wesley was later converted whilst hearing the introduction that Luther wrote in his commentary on Romans. John Calvin wrote about Romans that 'when any one understands this Epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole Scripture.'¹ So as we read the opening chapters of this letter together at church and Bible Study groups, be prepared for God to work through his word!

This letter was written by the Apostle Paul, most likely whilst he was staying in the city of Corinth in the year 57AD (see Acts 20:3), about 25 years after his conversion on the road to Damascus.

Why did Paul write?

When he wrote this letter Paul had not visited Rome (Rom 1:13), yet he writes to the church there his longest and most detailed letter. Why did he do this? This is one of the big questions about Romans, possibly because Paul had a few reasons for writing. At the end of the letter, Paul gives us a hint of two reasons why he's written. First, this letter is a *bold reminder of the gospel* (Rom 15:15-16). As the 'apostle to the Gentiles', Paul writes to this church to remind them of what God has done for them in Jesus. Second, this letter is written so that they would *support his missionary work* (Rom 15:24).

This makes Romans a great part of the bible for us to read together. We need to be reminded of the gospel, and so Romans will serve us well. And as God's people who join in His mission and partner with others in it, this letter will encourage us in God's mission in the world.

¹ Calvin, *Commentary on Romans (opening dedication)*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.iii.html>

God's Power: Romans 1:1-17

In this opening section of Paul's letter, Paul introduces himself to the Christians in Rome. He tells of his great desire to visit them so that he can encourage them and be encouraged by them. Yet even as he's introducing **himself** and **his** aims, Paul can't help but talk about the gospel.

Read Romans 1:1-7:

1. What do these verses tell us about Paul?
2. What do these verses tell us about the Romans (also look at v8)?
3. For a part of the letter that's about introducing the writer and readers, it has more to say about Jesus! From these verses, draw a timeline of Jesus life (which started before he was born).
4. How does Paul say people should respond to the gospel?


Think it through:

5. Paul says that the Romans are 'loved by God' and are 'saints'. Are these words that could be said about you?

In these opening verses we've already learnt lots about Paul and his mission. We've seen he's a servant of Jesus who can't help but talk about his master. We've also seen he has a particular mission to the Gentiles (v5, c.f. Gal 2:7) and it's because of this focus in Paul's ministry he is writing to the Christians in Rome.

Read Romans 1:8-15

6. Why does Paul want to visit Rome?
7. Who is Paul obligated to?



Prayer Ideas:

- Pray for your Bible Study group, that you will grow in Christ this term.
- Share the names of a few non-Christian friends, and pray for opportunities to tell them about the gospel.
- Pray for RI teachers in our local schools.

8. What is he obligated to do?

Think it through:

9. One of the reasons that Paul wants to visit is for mutual encouragement (for another reason you could look at 15:24). How do Christians encourage each other? Can you think of a time that you've experienced mutual encouragement?

Paul wants to visit Rome to give them a spiritual gift, that is, to encourage the believers there. The way he's going to do this is by preaching the gospel in Rome. As we've already read, the gospel that Paul preaches is all about Jesus (vv2-4): it's about his life, death, resurrection; it's about how Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promises and Israel's hope. This gospel shapes Paul's life and ministry. In some ways the rest of the letter is Paul explaining the message of the gospel and its implications for our life. In these final verses of our passage, we find out why the gospel is so important for Paul (and us!).

Read Romans 1:16-17

10. Why might Paul be ashamed of the gospel?

11. How is the gospel God's power?

12. What does the gospel reveal? (You may need to see the 'Righteousness from God' box below.)

Think it through:

13. Are you sometimes ashamed of the gospel? How do vv16-17 help with that?

14. What does it look like to 'live by faith'?

Just as the gospel was central to Paul and his ministry amongst the Gentile's, it's also central to our lives as Christians. The gospel isn't 'Christianity 101' and once we understand it we move onto the deeper things of God. The gospel is God's power to save. Through the gospel we know God and experience his righteousness. The gospel is the beginning, middle and end of our life with God.

Just like Paul we also shouldn't be ashamed of God's gospel. Although it may seem a weak message and we may feel weak in sharing this message with others it's still God's power for salvation. Because of this, we should proclaim the message of salvation so that others can experience its power.

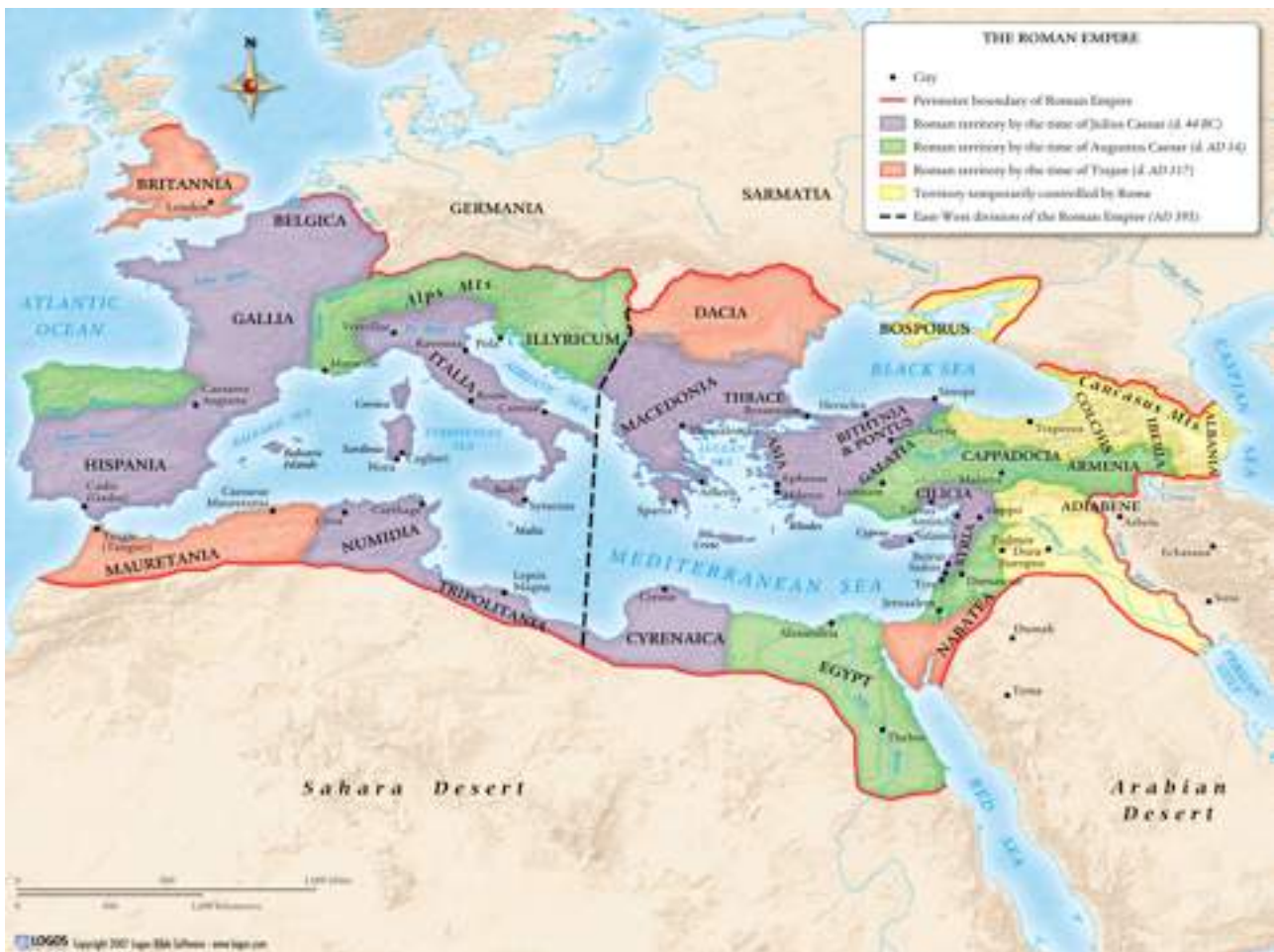
Pray

Thank God for his gospel and the power of salvation in it. Pray that, like Paul, we wouldn't be ashamed of it.

Righteousness From/Of God (v17)

Righteousness (or *justification*, it's the same greek word) is central to Paul's message in Romans. In v17 Paul talks about the *righteousness from God* (NIV, literally *righteousness of God*) which is found in the gospel. But what is this? There are three main things that the *righteousness of God* might mean.


1. *God's justice or faithfulness.* God is our creator and our judge. So the *righteousness of God* can refer to the way that God rightly judges sinners (e.g. 3:25-26 which talks about God's *justice*.) God is also righteous in the way that he keeps his promise. He is a righteous and faithful covenant keeper (possibly 3:21).
2. *Our right standing* before God through faith in Christ. Even though we are unrighteous people, because we are united to Christ through His Spirit, he takes our sin upon himself, and we receive Christ's right standing before God (e.g. 2 Cor 5:21)
3. *God's saving work.* This is the way that God's righteousness is often spoken about in the Old Testament. The Psalmist thanks God because He has saved him from some affliction and praises Him for His righteousness (e.g. Ps 7:17). However this meaning is often combined with the first. God's righteousness in saving His people has a flip side—He judges evil people (e.g. Ps 9:3-4).



God's Wrath: Romans 1:18-3:20

What comes to mind when you hear of God's wrath?

Last time we heard about Paul's desires to meet the Christians in Rome and to encourage them in the gospel. We also heard of God's power in the gospel—His power for salvation—because in the gospel we find God's righteousness. However, God's righteousness stands in stark contrast with our world and the inescapable problem of sin. This problem is the focus of this study.



Prayer Ideas:

- Pray for the children in our church.
- For Cooloola Christian College
- For churches in our Presbytery.

Read 1:18-32

1. What can people plainly know about God (v19-21, 32)?
2. What is the central nature of sin (v21, 25)?
3. What does it mean for God to 'give over' people (v24, 26, 28)?

Think it through:

4. How accurate is Paul's description of the world?
5. How has people's behaviour changed since Paul's time?
6. Do you think these things deserve death and God's wrath? Why/why not?

At the end of chapter 1 Paul demonstrates the deep problem of sin. At its heart sin is about idolatry—worshipping something that is not God. We might worship animals or lumps of wood, or we might 'worship' sexual pleasure, greed, etc.

One of the sad facets of our sinfulness is that it is self-deceptive. We read Paul's description of the downward spiral of sin and we use it to assess the world around us. We can imagine that some of Paul's audience (and some of us) would be cheering on Paul as he announces judgement upon the depravity of the world in which they (and we) live.

But in 2:1-16 Paul pulls the rug out from those who think he's describing *them* and not *us* as well. He sums up the situation in 2:13, 'For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.' God's wrath is for all sinners, not just people we tend to point fingers at.

Read 2:17-29

7. In what ways might Paul's Jewish audience feel superior to Gentiles?

8. Why shouldn't they feel superior?
9. What value does circumcision have?
10. What does 'inward circumcision' mean? (see Deuteronomy 10:16; **30:6**)

Think it through:

11. How does Paul's discussion about hypocrisy change the way we should address sinfulness in others?

As the final section of chapter 2 makes clear, Paul might seem to have been pointing the finger at Gentile sinners in 1:18-32, but he quickly pulls the rug out from under Jewish hypocrites in chapter 2. It appears that some Jews (maybe even Jewish Christians) thought the outward signs of God's covenant (e.g. circumcision) entitled them to show contempt to God's kindness and patience (2:4). Yet true Jewishness isn't found in outward signs but an inward reality. But the inward reality of both Jews and Gentiles is troubling.

Read 3:9-20

12. How are Jews and Gentiles alike?
13. What is the outcome of the law?

Think it through:

14. How has 'the law' made you conscious of sin?

At this point in the letter humanity's plight seems insurmountable. Even God's covenant people aren't immune to sin. The law hasn't declared anyone righteous, it's just made people more aware of their sin.

But (as I'm sure you know) God has a solution to this plight (because we don't have one). Paul's already hinted to it (we talked about it in chapter 1) and next week we're going to explore further the righteousness of God which has been revealed in the Gospel.



The Law

In Romans *the law* can refer to a few different things.

Often it refers to the law of Moses (e.g. 2:17, 4:13). However it can also refer to the whole Old Testament (e.g. 3:19), or even a principle or law of human behaviour (e.g. 7:21-23).

Pray

Are you guilty of any of the sins described in these chapters (especially hypocrisy)? Confess your sins to God (you might like to pray silently, or as a group pray a general confession).

God's Righteousness: Romans 3:21-31

Brainstorm: In what ways is God's justice the same as/different from the justice of Australia's legal system?

Over the past couple of weeks we've discovered the problem that all people (Jew and Gentile) face. God is righteous yet we are sinful, and God's wrath is being revealed against sinful people.

But at the beginning of Romans, Paul kept talking about the gospel—God's good news. In today's passage we hear again how God's righteousness is good news for sinful people.

(We're looking at a shorter section in this study so you might like to start by reading the whole passage to get a 'feel' before looking at each part in detail.)

Read Romans 3:21-24

1. There's a lot of big words in these passages. What words are big or do you not understand? Make a glossary for Romans 3:21-24.
2. Why has the righteousness from God² needed to be revealed apart from the law? (Hint, think back to last week.)
3. There are two ways that Paul says there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. What are they?
4. How can sinners be justified?

Think it through:

5. How do the law and the prophets testify to the righteousness of God?

This is good news. The promises of God have finally come to pass in Jesus Christ, and these promises are good for everyone—Jew and Gentile. But how has God done this?

Prayer Ideas:

- Pray for churches in Gympie.
- For our elders and their families.
- For people meeting in other Bible Study Groups.

Glossary:

² It might help to look at the sticky note on *Righteousness of God* (pg. 5) to understand this passage.

Read Romans 3:25-26

6. What has God done through Jesus?
7. How does this show God's justice?

Think it through:

8. How does Jesus death effect those who died before he came?
9. How can it be fair for God to forgive sinners?

Read Romans 3:27-28

10. What part does the law play in being justified?

Think it through:

11. Why can't believers boast?

Read Romans 3:29-31

12. Why is it important that God is God of both Jew and Gentile?

Think it through:

13. How does *faith* uphold the *law*?

These verses are one of the great passages of the bible; some have joked that it's the big **but** of the bible — '**but** now'. After Paul's long description of the depth of our sinfulness, which not even the law could curtail, it would be easy to feel hopeless in the face of God's righteous wrath. However these verses proclaim the good news that God justifies sinners through Jesus' sacrificial death.

Think it through:

14. In what ways do people (e.g. you!) still try and obtain righteousness through the law?
15. Why will this not work?
16. Are you trusting in Jesus sacrifice *alone* for your salvation?

Pray

Thank God for the righteousness that comes through faith. Thank God that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, that all people can be justified by faith.

God's Gift: Romans 4

Sometimes *faith* is thought of as 'believing in something *despite* the evidence'. Do you agree or disagree? How do you define *faith*?

Last week we heard the great news, God's gracious response to the big problem of sin and the 'failure' of the law—a righteousness of God apart from the law (3:21). However, at the end of chapter 3 we heard an objection to this good news. Does God's righteousness being displayed and coming *apart from the law* mean that the law is nullified (cancelled, overturned)? Does it undo everything that God has been doing since the time of Moses and Abraham?

In chapter 4 Paul does two things. First he answers this objection and second he helps us to understand what faith is.

Read Romans 3:27-4:8³

1. Why would Abraham have had a reason to boast?
2. What is different between a wage and a gift? Is being justified a wage or a gift?
3. What is the *blessing* that David talks about?⁴

Paul has begun to answer the objection by showing that both Abraham and David are examples of being credited righteousness and being forgiven freely as a gift.

In order to understand the rest of what Paul says about Abraham we need to dip into the story of Abraham in Genesis and then we'll read what Abraham demonstrates about the relationship between the Law and Faith.


Read Genesis 15:1-6

4. What is the problem? What is Abram's proposed solution?⁵
5. What does God promise?

³ Chapter divisions were added to the New Testament in the 13th century (see <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/euangelion/2012/05/chapter-divisions-in-the-ot-nt/>). Rereading these verses will help us see the 'question' that Paul is answering.

⁴ You might like to read Psalm 32 (which Paul is quoting) later. It's a Psalm that paints a picture of repentance and forgiveness.

⁵ Abraham's original name was Abram. God changed his name when he gave the sign of circumcision (Genesis 17:5).



Prayer Ideas:

- Pray for opportunities to speak of Jesus to those who don't know him.
- Pray for the High School students at our church.

6. How does Abram respond to the promise?
7. What does God do for Abram (v6)?
8. When does God make the covenant of circumcision with Abram (hint: look at the chapter headings in Genesis 12-17)?
9. Was Abraham credited with righteousness before or after he was circumcised?

Having gone back to Genesis to understand the background of Abraham, we'll now go back to Romans to see how Abraham's relationship with God is the same as ours.

Read Romans 4:9-15

10. Was Abraham credited with righteousness before or after he was circumcised?⁶
11. Who, then, is Abraham the father of?
12. How did Abraham receive the promise/blessing?
13. Who inherits Abraham's promise?

Think it through:

14. How are we tempted to think that we need to follow the law before we can be acceptable to God?

God's promise has always been about faith. And because of this God's promise to Abraham was never just for him—it's for *all* who believe.

Read Romans 4:16-25

15. Who are Abraham's offspring?
16. What are the benefits of being one of Abraham's offspring?
17. What two examples of God's power does Paul give in verse 17?
 1. How is this power shown in Abraham and Sarah's life?
 2. How is this power shown in Christians' lives?

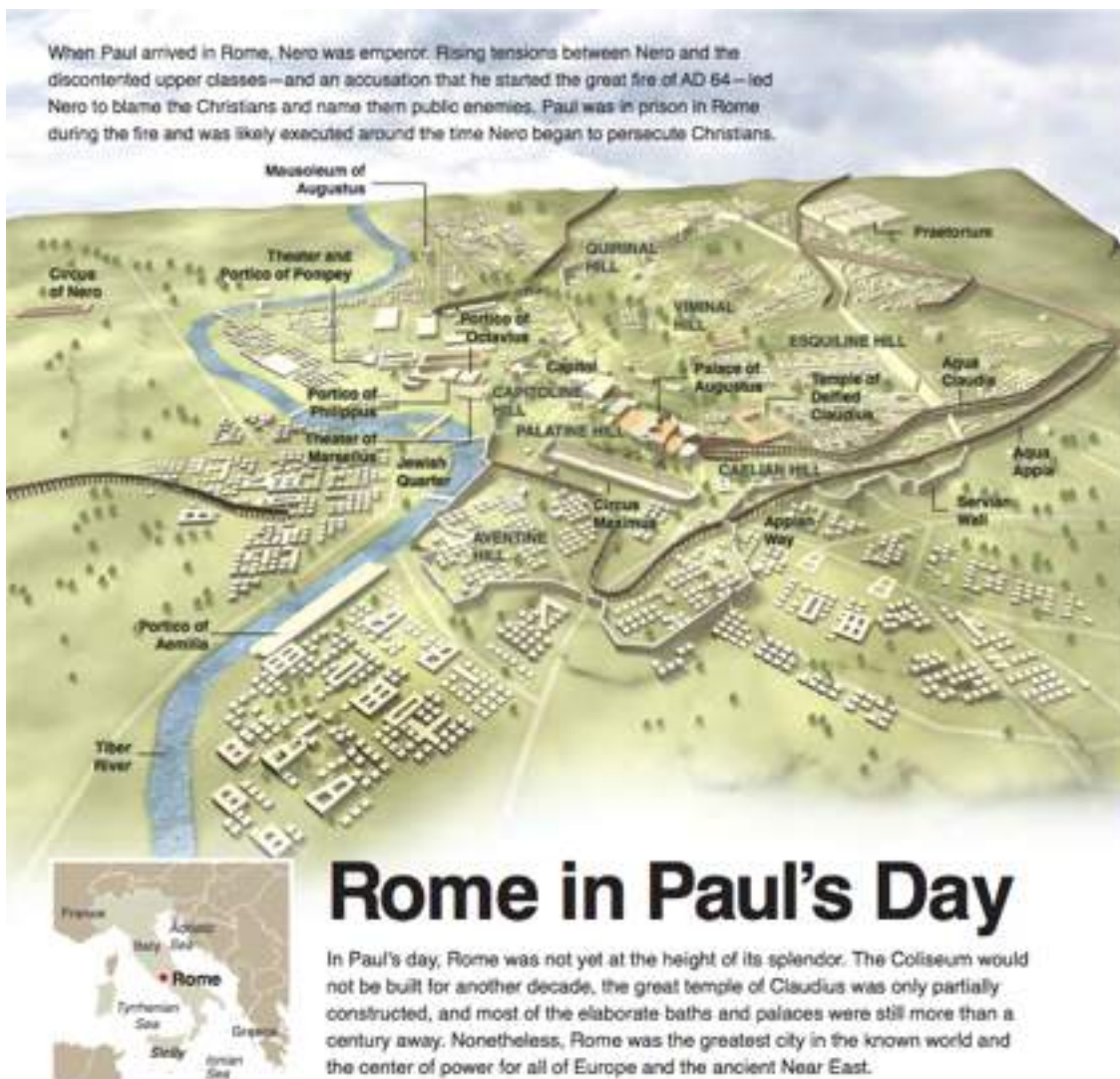
⁶ This question is not a typo.

Think it though:

- 18. How does this chapter describe *faith*?
- 19. What does it mean for faith to be credited as righteousness?
- 20. Why should we have faith in God?
- 21. Do you have faith in God?

Pray

Thank God that we can be the true children of Abraham through faith. Praise God for his mercy in crediting faith as righteousness.



God's Peace: Romans 5

Can you remember a time when you had a falling out with someone and then you were later reconciled? How were you able to be reconciled? How did you feel through this process?

In last week's study on Romans 4 we looked back to Abraham. We saw how being justified by faith apart from the law wasn't something Paul had made up—God had been crediting faith as righteousness since Abraham. Circumcision and doing the works of the law never was the way to be declared righteous. Righteousness always has only come by faith.

In today's study we're going to be looking at the privileges and benefits that come through Christ and also think about how the death of *one* can bring forgiveness to *many*.

Read Romans 5:1-8

1. What things do we have through faith in Christ?
2. What should cause us to rejoice?
3. Why was the time that Jesus died for us the right time?
4. How does God show his love for us?


Think it through:

5. How is it possible to rejoice in the midst of suffering?

There are a whole host of good things that are ours because of being justified by faith, not least of which is hope (v2, 5) and the knowledge of God's love (v5). However, in the midst of suffering we often forget that God loves us which can cause us to despair about the future.

Read Romand 5:9-11

6. What has happened to us (past tense)?
7. What does this give us confidence for (future tense)?
8. What should cause us to rejoice?



Prayer Ideas:

- For our Committee of Management.
- For those who are persecuted for the name of Jesus.
- For the PCQ Assembly which starts June .

Think it through:

- 9. Our confidence for future salvation is based on being presently justified. How can you be sure that you are justified?

- 10. Do you rejoice in the things that we've read about? How can we develop a culture of rejoicing in our Bible Study Group/Church?

Having just reminded us of the great benefits we receive through faith in Christ, Paul has raised a question—how can all of 'we' be reconciled through the death of God's one Son (v10). In the second part of chapter 5 Paul explains how this is possible by comparing Adam and Jesus.

Read Romans 5:12-14

- 11. How many people are affected by Adam's sin?

- 12. What is the relationship between sin and the law?

- 13. What is the relationship between sin and death?

Read Romans 5:15-21

- 14. Compare and contrast 'the gift' and 'the trespass'

	The Gift	The Trespass
v15		
v16		
v17		
v18		
v19		
v20		
v21		

Think it through:

- 15. In this section Paul says that Adam's sin impacted 'all people' (v12, 18) or 'the many' (v15,19) and similarly Jesus' righteousness impacts 'all people' (v18) and 'the many' (v15,19). Does this mean that every person has been automatically justified?

16. How can the death of one man (Jesus) bring salvation for others?

This brings us to the end of our Bible Study series in Romans 1-5. Right back at the beginning we saw that this letter was about the Gospel. The good news about Jesus that is the 'power of God for salvation' (1:16-17). We then dove into the depths of the sinfulness of sin; sin that effects all people, Jew and Gentile alike, and which turns the law into an opportunity for hypocrisy. Yet God's mercy is greater than our sin and he has provided a way 'apart from the law' (3:12) to be declared righteous—through having faith like Abraham.

As we've seen in today's study, God's righteousness results in many benefits: peace with God, access to Him, hope for the future and the ability to even rejoice when we suffer. And these have come through Jesus, the second Adam, who has broken the curse and brings grace to the many.

But we haven't even looked at half of Paul's letter. In the rest of the letter Paul explains how God's righteousness changes the way that we live, as we are united to Christ by His Spirit. He also considers how the inclusion of Gentiles into God's people—at the apparent expense of Jews—is in keeping with God's gracious promise. Since we won't be reading the rest of Romans together this year, it'd still be great to finish reading it. Maybe you could keep each other accountable to this through your Bible Study over the next few weeks?

Pray

Thank God for the many benefits he has given us in Christ, and that these benefits extend even to us.

Thank God for the things you've learned or been reminded of during our Romans studies.



God's Mission: Paul the Missionary

'Missionaries are terrorists, imposing their culture and religion upon people.' Should western Christians be sending 'missionaries' to other countries?

This week's study is a bit different. Next week we're going to have some prayer meetings focussing on our mission at church and partnership in mission around the world. This week, we're going to look at what Romans tells us about God's mission and how the Roman church supported Paul's 'missionary' work. We'll also spend some time praying for our mission partners.

The Big Picture of God's Mission

The story of God's mission goes back, way back. At least as far back as God's promise to Abram.

Read Genesis 12:1-3

1. What does God promise to Abram?
2. Who do these promises extend to?

Think it through:

Recall (or look back at) our studies on Romans 4. According to Romans 4, how have God's promises to Abram been fulfilled?

God's promised to bless Abram and his descendants, but ultimately these blessings were to flow out to all people on earth. This promise to Abram comes as God's intervention into a world ripped apart by sin (Genesis 3-11). Sin which is brought into the world by our first parents (you can read the account of this in Genesis 3:1-7, but we'll pick up the story after their disobedience).

Read Genesis 3:8-19

3. How does God curse the serpent, the woman, and the man?
4. Why does he curse them?
5. What hope is hinted at in v15?

Think it through:

6. Recall (or look back at) our study on Romans 5:12-21. According to Romans 5, how has Jesus reversed the curse? Who has Jesus done this for?

We could continue following the idea of God's mission to bless all the people of the earth right through the Old Testament but we don't have time. In our studies through Romans we've seen in the Gospel of Jesus fulfilment has come. In Christ's obedience the curse has been reversed, the serpent has been crushed, and

Adam's descendants can now be freed from sin and death. In Christ both Jew and Gentile can be blessed through faith in God just like their father, Abraham.

Participating in God's Mission

God calls us to participate in his mission. In this next section we're going to briefly look at Paul's mission, how the church in Rome joined with Him, and finally our part in God's mission.

Read Romans 15:14-33

7. What has Paul's ambition been?

8. What are Paul's plans?

9. How does Paul urge the Romans to partner with him?

Think it through:

10. How comparable is the relationship between Paul and the church in Rome and our relationship with our mission partners?

11. How could we better express our partnership with the missionaries we support?

The missionaries that we support are not quite like Paul—they aren't Apostles, not all of them are preaching the gospel where Christ is not known. However, they have been sent out as our partners in God's mission.

Read Romans 10:5-15

12. How are people (Jew and Gentile alike) saved?

13. What is the dilemma that Paul raises in v14, and what is its solution?

Think it through:

How can you have beautiful feet?

Pray

Pray briefly for our partners in God's mission. They may be people our whole church supports, or others that you know. (Don't worry, we'll spend more time praying together next week!)

The original version of these studies were produced for [Kenmore Presbyterian Church](#). They've been edited, with permission, for use at [Gympie Presbyterian Church](#).