

The background of the cover is a serene landscape. It features a range of mountains in the distance, some covered in a dense forest of evergreen trees. In the foreground, a calm body of water, likely a lake, perfectly reflects the sky and the surrounding landscape. The sky is a mix of soft, warm colors, suggesting a sunrise or sunset, with a gradient from light yellow to a pale blue. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

R O M A N S



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INTRODUCTION

Paul writes this letter to Christians he has not yet met but intends to visit soon. Since he has not preached in Rome, he writes a full and rich account of God's plan of salvation through faith in His Son and encourages the Romans to live as Christians in this sinful world. Martin Luther thought so highly of this letter he recommended that all Christians memorize the whole book.

CONTEXT

The city of Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire. Paul probably learned of the congregation in Rome from his dear friends, Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla), the couple who had been banished from Rome with all other Jews by Emperor Claudius (who reigned from AD 41 to 54). The Romans were so touched by this epistle, they traveled thirty or forty miles to meet Paul as he was being brought as a prisoner to Rome.

PURPOSE

Paul defends the heart of Christianity—justification through faith in Christ Jesus. He wrote this letter near the close of his third missionary journey in the east. Seeing that he had done most of the church planting he could in the eastern empire, he looked to travel throughout the western part of the Empire and sought the support of the Roman Christians. He possibly intended to make Rome the center of his missionary efforts into present-day Spain.

OUTLINE

Paul begins by establishing the guilt of every person—and asserting the fact that God will judge and punish sin. Paul then shows that Jesus already took that punishment for sin in our place on the cross. By faith we receive that forgiveness without cost. Next, Paul addresses how the righteousness from God helps us when we are feeling guilty, trapped in habitual sins, or overwhelmed by life's problems. After three chapters that discuss the position of the Jews, Paul closes with practical guidelines for living as God's people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT — ROMANS 1:1–3:20

Read 1:1–17

Paul spends only the first verse of his letter introducing himself and establishing his authority as an apostle. His focus is on Jesus, and notice how he spends verses 2–6 praising the Lord for His greatness. After greeting the Romans and asking God’s blessings upon them in verse 7, Paul tells of the Roman congregation’s great reputation throughout the Empire, and how he has long wanted to come and visit Rome to share the Gospel personally and be encouraged in their company.

Verses 16 and 17 form the theme of the entire epistle. Paul is not ashamed, but rather boasts of the power of the Gospel—which saves Jews and Greeks who believe. It saves because it reveals the righteousness that comes as a free gift of God through Jesus Christ.

Q 1: What feelings do you have toward the Gospel when you face being taunted and ridiculed for believing in it?

- Paul was so proud of the Gospel he willingly faced being imprisoned, beaten, stoned, and shipwrecked. We can share Paul’s great faith and confidence in the Gospel only as the Holy Spirit works faith in us. In the coming passages, Paul will establish why he feels such love toward and pride in the Gospel.

To understand Paul’s attitude toward the Gospel, you must first understand the role it plays in your life. Paul starts by pointing out the wrath of God that rests upon all of sinful mankind. He begins with the Gentiles who lived without a revelation of God’s will in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Read 1:18–32

Q 2: How can Paul say the Gentiles are without excuse when they didn’t have the Old Testament?

- Because God did not reveal His will only in the Old Testament. He also revealed Himself through natural revelation. All of creation carries His fingerprints—the complexity and beauty of life, the intricate balance required for life to survive, the astonishing beauty and diversity within God’s creatures. Since the Gentiles worshiped created things instead of the Creator

who had made His presence obvious, they were guilty. Even worse, they had dishonored their bodies by pursuing their sinful lusts and desires, even turning to unnatural passions and committing shameless acts such as homosexuality.

Paul now turns to his Jewish readers. It is easy for them to feel superior to the Gentiles who are groping in spiritual darkness, pursuing their shameful desires. But the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai show that the Jews are no better off than the Gentiles when it comes to God's judgment.

Read Chapter 2

Q 3: Why does Paul use the Second Table of the Ten Commandments to expose the sins of Jews?

- The Jewish people had the Old Testament revelation, and could more clearly see what sin was—yet that law made it clear they had sinned against God and others over and over again.

Now, like a prosecuting attorney, Paul sums up his case. It doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile—you are a sinner who deserves God's full wrath.

Read Chapter 3

Q 4: Why do you think we try so hard to justify ourselves and shift blame to others when we are confronted with our sin?

- This is part of our sinful nature. We seek to be right, like God. The problem is, in this life, surrounded by sinners, it is easy to feel smug and self-confident. But one day we must face God's judgment seat. Now is the day to face that judgment through God's Law; there is time to find salvation in Jesus Christ. But if we refuse to look into the mirror of God's Law today and delude ourselves into thinking we are good enough, it will be too late to find mercy and salvation the moment Jesus returns.

FREE RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD — ROMANS 3:21–5:11

Now Paul can switch from his role as prosecutor and become the defense lawyer. Though every one of us stands guilty and condemned, God has prepared a way for us to be just and righteous. God gives us His Son's righteousness as a free gift through Holy Spirit-given faith.

Read 3:21–31

Q 5: How does this glorious passage magnify God's steadfast love and His amazing grace?

- We have nothing whatsoever to offer God, yet He freely forgives and embraces us for the sake of His Son Jesus' perfect life and innocent suffering and death in our place.

Paul now chooses the perfect Old Testament example of this justification through faith. When God called Abraham, he was uncircumcised, worshipping false gods as did the Gentiles. But Abraham was justified by his faith in God's threefold promise before he did anything for God, including traveling to the Promised Land and undergoing circumcision.

Read Chapter 4

Q 6: How does Abraham's case (where he is justified by faith apart from works) show there is really no difference between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to faith and righteousness?

- Abraham was basically an uncircumcised Gentile when God called him to leave his father's home and travel to the Promised Land and gave him the glorious promise of the Savior (Genesis 12:1–3). This makes Abraham the father of both Jewish and Gentile believers—who are all saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone.

Having given us an example in Abraham, Paul returns to his point about our justification through faith in Jesus Christ.

Read Chapter 5

Q 7: How does Christ's death for all of us ungodly people shine a bright spotlight on God's love?

- Paul has already asserted that all of us are sinners and none of us has any merit or claim to God's help or favor. Yet in surpassing grace and love, Jesus died for us—not a quick, painless death, but the death of the cross! And even more, He was forsaken by

His Father and punished for all of our sins. Our Father's love is indeed amazing!

Q 8: Why does Paul bring in a comparison between Adam and Jesus?

- It might be difficult for us to believe that the sacrifice of the one man Jesus on the cross could pay for all the sins of every person in the world. So Paul reminds us that it was the disobedience of the one man Adam that passed through all mankind and made us all unworthy sinners. In the same way, the perfect obedience and righteousness of the God-man, Jesus, can pass through all mankind by faith and save all who believe. (And if that is not enough to convince you, consider that the one man who died for us all was the Son of God, whose precious life could balance out the sins of all of sinful humanity.)

WHAT IF I'M TRAPPED IN GUILT AND SIN AND BURDENED BY LIFE'S PROBLEMS? — ROMANS 6–8

Paul has established that we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ without works. Now he moves on to discuss the attitude God's children should have toward life.

Read Chapter 6

Q 9: How does it strike you to be called a “slave to righteousness”?

- It is hard to admit that we are slaves to anything—either to sin or to God. Our sinful nature is still motivated by Adam and Eve's desire to be like God. We want to be the masters of our own domain. But the truth is we are created to be servants of God. We cannot escape that role as servants or slaves. Either we will serve God, or we will serve sin, death, Satan, and hell. There is no other option. If we must be servants or slaves of God, it is a great comfort to know our Master is filled with selfless love toward us and has freed us and made us His own children (see John 8:34–36).

Though God has set us free from our slavery to sin, our sinful nature is still present. In chapter 7, Paul moves on to discuss the war waging between our sinful nature and the new creature God has made us to be.

Read Chapter 7

Q 10: What encouragement do you get from knowing a Christian leader such as Paul had the same struggles with his sinful desires as you do?

- It is not that Paul gives us an excuse to go ahead and indulge our sinful desires. Instead, he gives us an example. He is encouraging us to war against that desire, to see it clearly through the lens of God's Law, to see how destructive it is. At the same time, he teaches us to despair of our own strength and look outside ourselves to God, who gives us the victory over our sinful nature and will, at our death and resurrection, forever free us from its power and influence.

Paul moves on to give us a marvelous, comforting chapter, teaching us how to deal with sufferings we have in this life. He shows us how to find comfort first in our coming resurrection. If we compare our present sufferings to the glory that will be revealed, we will find there is no comparison. And setting our thoughts on that future will help us in the present. Beyond that, Paul points out how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit help us in the midst of our sufferings, not leaving it to us alone. The Spirit within us intercedes for us in the midst of our sufferings and situations. Then the Father makes all things work together for our good—even the painful trials we struggle through. Finally, Paul brings us into the throne room in heaven to show us Jesus Christ, our Savior, sitting at the Father's right hand and interceding for us.

Read Chapter 8

Q 11: Describe the worst struggle you have faced in your life up to this point. What impact do the insights of this chapter have on how you face such struggles?

- Paul puts all our sufferings in perspective. In this life, they can feel like mountains we are far too weak to climb. But God is here to comfort, strengthen, and deliver us. Just think of the day Jesus comes to judge the world and set us free—whatever is plaguing you today will be gone forever. Your health will be restored perfectly. Financial struggles will be gone forever. Relationship problems will be gone because all of us will be made holy and perfect forever. Sickness, injury, and death will not be able to touch us anymore, and our lost loved ones who died in faith will be restored to us. The fact that any problem in this life will eventually pass—but that blissful paradise will last eternally—makes it easier to endure today's problems.

But even more comforting is knowing that the Holy Spirit dwells in me as His temple, experiences all that I endure each day, and intercedes for me. Meanwhile, God the Father is ruling His entire creation, making every person, situation, and detail of my life work together for my benefit and that of those around me. And even more, my Savior Jesus is sitting at His right hand, pleading for me. Truly nothing can separate me from Christ's love. We are not talking about things that could drive me away from Christ and make me stop loving Him. It means, what could make Jesus stop loving me? The answer, of course, is nothing in all creation! No one and nothing can snatch me out of Jesus' hand.

WHAT ABOUT THE JEWISH PEOPLE? — ROMANS 9–11

In a sense, chapters 9–11 are a parenthesis or footnote in Paul's Letter to the Romans. It is the perfect place for him to speak about where the Jewish people stand with God—especially since more and more Gentiles are becoming believers.

Read Chapter 9

Q 12: Why is it important for Paul to point out that the Jewish people are not automatically saved just because they are physical descendants of Abraham?

- Because salvation is, always has been, and always will be through faith and faith alone. It is not based on works—either your own works or the works of your ancestors, even if that ancestor is Abraham. The history of Israel throughout the pages of the Old Testament shows that so many of the Israelites rejected God and perished in unbelief. But isn't it interesting to note that our salvation is based on the works of one man—Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Messiah, rejected by the Jewish people about whom Paul was speaking.

Paul has faced fierce opposition from his fellow Jews, so he knows their zeal. The problem is that they refuse to receive the righteousness God wants to give them, and they seek to establish their righteousness on their own terms before God.

Read Chapter 10

Q 13: In what way does sinful human pride weigh into the Jewish rejection of Jesus and His salvation?

- It is natural for sinful humans to pretend they are good and worthy of God's love. When a Jew looks back on all the good things God did for His people of old, it becomes easy to think the reason He did all that for Israel was based on their superiority to every other nation, rather than on God's free grace and favor toward an undeserving family.

In verses 18 and 19, Paul addresses two objections or excuses a Jew might use to pardon his rejection of God's Messiah, Jesus. First is the objection that not all the Jews heard the Gospel about Jesus. Paul quickly answers that. From Genesis 3:15, God has clearly proclaimed the Gospel to the descendants of Abraham. The entire Old Testament testifies to Jesus and prophesies His coming and His work of salvation. Then the second excuse is that Israel did

not understand the Gospel. But again, the fact that Gentiles understood and believed removes any excuse for the Jews. Jesus and His apostles made it clear to them; they simply rejected it without good reason.

Paul concludes his discussion of the Jewish people with a final reminder. There is still a remnant of Jews who will believe in Jesus Christ, their Messiah, and find salvation in Him.

Read Chapter 11

Q 14: What tremendous blessing is it to the Church when Jewish people are brought to faith in Jesus by the Holy Spirit?

- Since the rites, ceremonies, and festivals of the Jewish nation were given by God and pointed ahead to the coming Christ, they have a deep, rich meaning that is often difficult for Gentile Christians to grasp and appreciate. But Jesus was raised in that same rich cultural heritage, and our Jewish brothers and sisters can help us more easily see the beauty of God's plan of salvation.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR LIVING AS GOD'S CHILDREN — ROMANS 12–16

In the final five chapters, Paul turns to give us some guidelines for our Christian life. First, he encourages us to not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by God.

Read Chapter 12

Q 15: Consider closely the list of actions Paul recommends in 12:9–18. Pick one that you find particularly appealing and explain why you find it so.

- Paul gives us a tremendous number of great ideas that characterize the servant life Jesus lived. Emulating any and all of these would make our Christian witness so strong and our fellowship together so inviting to those who do not yet know Christ.

Next, Paul addresses our responsibility toward the governing authorities.

Read Chapter 13

Q 16: Clearly Paul wrote this at a time when the Roman authorities were not persecuting the Church. What advice would change in such a time? What would remain the same?

- When the Jewish governing authorities commanded the apostles to stop preaching in Jesus' name, Peter recognized they must obey God rather than men. In a time of government persecution, Paul would likely not say that Christians would receive the approval of rulers for doing good—that is, witnessing to Christ Jesus. But Paul would still encourage Christians to continue doing civil deeds that are good. That would help show the government had no real reason to be persecuting the Church.

Paul goes on to discuss how we should treat other Christians. He especially encourages Christians to not judge one another and to take special care not to cause a Christian brother or sister to stumble by how we use our Christian freedom.

Read Chapter 14

Q 17: What tensions in your congregation exist because members are judging one another wrongly?

- Answers will depend on the situation, but they provide a wonderful opportunity to address lingering bitterness in a congregation,

much of which is unrecognized by members. Often a person who is overly sensitive will be tempted to judge someone who says or does something he or she finds offensive. The key is to not try to play God and judge the secret motivations behind their words or actions, which we can't possibly know. Instead, we should put the best construction on their words or actions—which means to start with the assumption that they intended to do what they thought was best. If we did these things, our congregations would be so much healthier.

In the next chapter, Paul pivots toward his goal in coming to Rome. He desires to bring the Gospel to Gentiles who have not heard it before. Since his missionary journeys have covered the better part of the eastern half of the Empire, he intends to visit Rome and then move to the western part.

Read Chapter 15

Q 18: How exciting would it be if a missionary chose your congregation as a base of operations as he went out to spread the Gospel to people who have never heard it?

- Paul was offering the Romans an amazing privilege. They already had a tremendous reputation throughout the churches across the Empire. It would only grow greater if Paul would start his missionary journeys in the west from there. And it would be humbling to be a part of the congregation that helped accommodate that for Paul.

Paul closes his letter with some personal greetings to members of the Roman Church with whom he has become acquainted. In the case of Prisca and Aquilla, Paul met them when Emperor Claudius banished them and their fellow Jews from the capital city. For a time, Paul worked with them as tentmakers in Corinth. Now they were back in Rome again—just one couple who made that congregation what it was.

Read Chapter 16

Q 19: Consider the number of prominent members Paul mentions. Which families in your congregation stand out to you? How could you involve more families?

- These are the members and families who made this congregation so vital and so alive for Christ. The Church in Rome has been the center of Christianity in the West since before Paul and Peter were martyred there under Emperor Nero.

With this, we reach the close of Paul's Letter to the Romans. May our Lord richly bless your time spent in His Word, through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.