

Romans 6:1-14, 20-23, 7:16-8:17: The Paths of Life and Death

Leader Guide

Context: Paul wanted desperately to preach the gospel in Rome. He knew that if the gospel was understood and changed lives in Rome than there would be no limit to its influence in the known world. We see in Acts that Paul's desire to go to Rome was so strong that he risked his life and stayed imprisoned for months after he was offered release, just so he could get passage there. He spent his last years preaching in Rome and was martyred there. Paul was right that once the gospel hit Rome, it spread easily and quickly throughout the Mediterranean region and beyond.

Before he could get there, Paul wrote this epistle to the Roman church. Containing both Jewish and Gentile Christians, Paul took pains to show how the gospel related to both cultures and ways of thinking. The bad news was that neither set of religious views could produce righteousness and that both Jews and Gentiles needed salvation. The good news is that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is enough to save any person who believes. With this same salvation offered to all, Jew and Gentile believers were now brought together as the one people of God. They were to be living sacrifices to God and so put the gospel on display to the entire world. With these themes providing the structure of his diatribe, Paul's letter to the Romans became perhaps the most theologically thorough explanation of the gospel in the Bible.

The theme of Romans is from 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith (ESV).'" From chapters 1-8, Paul reasons and explains how this Gospel provides salvation for Jew and Gentile, by providing a righteousness that everyone needs from God. This righteousness comes from faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who traded it to us for our sin. He then put sin to death on the cross and came back to life, which shows His power over both sin and death. And because He went to such lengths to provide salvation, we know that nothing can condemn us or separate us from His love!

Theme: But what do these grand themes of the gospel have to do with Proverbs and living wisely? Proverbs 7 says, "Keep my commandments and live" but listening to the adulterer brings you "down to the chambers of death." What we have been studying in Proverbs, "living wisely," would be called "righteousness" by Paul and Solomon. Paul explains that the gospel has not changed the nature of the game, but that the ante has been raised significantly. Those who live by the Spirit, according to Romans 6-8, will receive *eternal* life, while the wages of sin is death.

However, Paul makes clear that you cannot achieve this eternal life on your own. You need the inheritance that comes from Christ's righteousness, which is a gift that God gives to you freely; and you need the Holy Spirit to help you live daily. So, what Christ has given you is: the power to live righteously, the hope that you will one day be made completely righteous, and the righteous standing before God, even when you fail. Praise Him!! Based on that knowledge, you should consider yourself dead to your bad patterns of behavior and a slave to God. Set your mind on the Spirit and you will begin to live as if you have already been made perfect (which is how God sees you and treats you, because of Christ).

Romans 6:1-8:17 describes the differences between life in the "flesh" and life in the Spirit. The one leads to death and the other leads to life and peace. Believers are encouraged to become slaves of righteousness as opposed to slaves of sin. Paul shows how the gospel and the Spirit help people break free from a life chained to destructive patterns. Though a believer may never completely kill sin in this lifetime, if they live by the Spirit they will be sons of God who receive the free gift of grace, which is eternal life. Our study will focus on the verses that distinguish between living by the Spirit and living by the flesh. Here is an outline for this week's study verses:

Romans 6:1-14 Dead to Sin, Alive to God- Christ put sin to death, die with Him and sin will have no power over you.

Romans 6:20-23 Slaves to Righteousness- You will be a slave to something, so it might as well be God

Romans 7:16-25 Every believer's battle- This does not mean you will be perfect right now, the mark of the Spirit is that you fight against your natural propensity to sin.

Romans 8:1-17 Life in the Spirit- The Spirit's resurrection power is here to help you walk in the newness of eternal life!

Aim: Hopefully, we are all trying to choose wisdom over giving in to temptation as a result of this series on Proverbs. Christ has given us resources to help us live wisely! We have His Gospel, which set us free from our bondage to sin, and we have His Spirit, which gives us strength to choose wisely and live in a righteous way. Finally, we have the hope that we will win this battle, not because of our ability, but because of God's faithfulness to us, through Christ.

Study Questions:

Opener: What were some of the points in Sunday's sermon that will most help you live wisely and avoid temptation?

[6:1-14] How does Jesus' death help us live better lives?

Christ took all of our sin into Himself and then put it all to death on the cross. This was a decisive victory against sin and all its effects. Therefore, in our smaller battles against sin we can realize that sin will not win over us. Though some habitual sin may seem so huge and difficult for us to overcome, realize that Christ has beaten it.

[6:1-14] How does Jesus' resurrection help us live better lives?

When we identify with Christ's death and resurrection, we naturally begin to act in a way that displays the new life that Christ has given us (which He demonstrated when He came to earth).

[6:20-23] What is the alternative that Paul presents to being slaves to sin? How is this analogy helpful to you in your efforts to live a righteous life?

Martin Luther described Romans' argument by saying that the human soul is always enslaved to something. By its very nature, our souls are enraptured by and worship whatever "god" we might choose. Our souls will then only be satisfied and lead us into good living when they are worshipping God, the One whom they were created to worship.

[6:20-23] List some of the results of being a slave to sin and of being a slave to righteousness. How good at being "a slave to righteousness" does someone have to be to receive eternal life?

Understand that our performance and our victory can never be enough. One wage will be given to all the workers in Christ's vineyard no matter how long or hard they have worked (Matt. 20:1-16). What matters is that you put your faith in Christ, which should include trying to act in the ways that He has called "righteous."

[7:15-25] Paul gets very personal in this chapter about his own efforts to live righteously. Does anything shock you about his description? In what ways are descriptions similar to how you would describe your life?

[7:15-25] How does Christ free a believer from this internal struggle?

Christ put sin to death on the cross, gave us His Spirit to help us, told us that one day we will be perfect, and gives us a right standing before God such that we do not need to feel guilt or shame if we try fall short in our efforts.

[8:1-17] If there is no condemnation for believers, then why should believers try so hard to live good lives?

We should live in a way that 1) shows appreciation for our salvation, 2) models Christ's character to the world, 3) shows faith that Christ has made us righteous, and 4) demonstrates that we prefer the Spirit's leading rather than being led by our feelings, desires, and passions

[8:1-17] How does the Spirit help a believer live righteously?

By filling our flesh with the same power that resurrected Christ. With that power, we can finally choose wisdom over our passions. The Spirit also guides us and gives us His fruits.

[8:1-17] How do we know if the Spirit dwells in us?

If there is a battle in us, where part of us wants to live in a righteous way, this is clear evidence of the Spirit. Also, if we believe in the hope that Christ will make us righteous, we have the Spirit in us.

What are some of the reasons why people find it difficult to choose to do the right things? Based on Romans 6-8, are there ways that believers can help each other make righteous decisions?