

## Romans: *Reign of Grace*

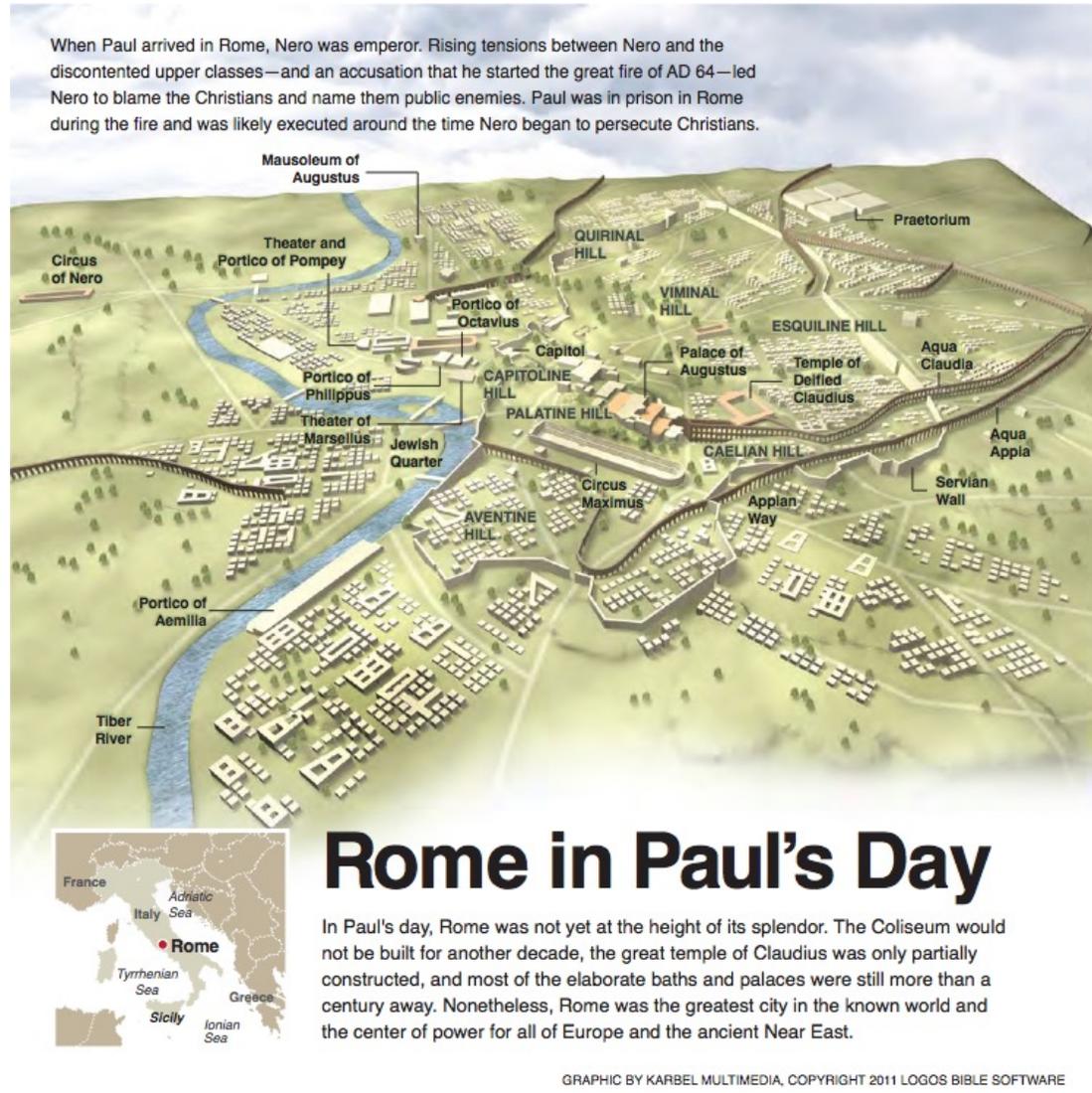


Paul's epistle to the Romans is an absolutely incredible chunk of Scripture! It is FILLED with powerful truth, foundational theology, and memorizing-worthy verses! It will no doubt stir up some pretty great conversations within your groups as we wrestle through the passages and could quite possibly lead some to discover the full truth of salvation for the first time.

This is a great study for any group for two primary reasons. 1) Though a good chunk of your group may have attended church for many years (if not all their lives), most of them deeply struggle with communicating what being a follower of Jesus means to others because they themselves don't really know. Romans provides a great foundational understanding. 2) The amount of guilt and shame many individuals feel is tragic to see and we want to enforce the truth that grace reigns through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:21) There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The graphic above is a very simple display of our hope. That through this process, all may truly pass from death (gray) in sin to life (red) in Christ.

**PART 1 (Weeks 1-5):**  
***The Bad News: Why Grace is Needed***

## SESSION 1 (ROMANS 1:1-7)



### Helpful Information about the Passage:

- The Greek word *doulos*, which Paul uses for “servant” comes from the root “deo” which means “to bind”. So, most properly, this means one who is **bound** to another. Paul was “a servant (bound to) of Jesus Christ”. Paul does not view it as an oppressive sense of binding, but a redemptive “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20) sense of binding...and we know what price was paid.
- The Greek word “called” here is *kletos* from the word *kaléo* which means “call”. Its definition is to be “invited or welcomed” and was originally used to designate those invited to a banquet.
- We have been invited by God in the proclamation of the Gospel to obtain eternal salvation through Christ. We have to know that we are not *awaiting* a call, or *awaiting* our invitation into the Kingdom...its been made. *Kaleois* not reserved for a special few, it's for all who would respond to the invitation.
- (v. 2) Jesus is the *Messiah* that the Prophets of the Old Testament prophesied about!

- Verses 3-4 are verses that you don't want to miss! They point out a very important part of our Christian Theology—that Jesus was fully man and fully God. There are many views out there that falsely teach that Jesus may not have been fully God or that He may not have been fully man. He had to be fully man in His death, but fully God in His resurrection.
- The Greek word *hagioi*, translated as “saints” or “holy ones,” refers to those who are set apart or belong to God. In the ot, “saints” refers to Israel, God’s chosen people (Ps. 16:3). Here, Paul applies it to the Gentile believers in Rome, identifying them as among God’s chosen people. The status of “holy one” results from a union with God, who is holy, through Jesus Christ.

**Group Time and Questions:**

1. Start Group off by asking the simple introductory questions of
  - What do you know about the Book of Romans?
  - How about Paul, the author?
2. PRAY together as a group that God would reveal Himself in fresh ways through your study/discussion of His word.
3. READ Romans 1:1-7 together.
4. Begin discussion with the following questions (or ones you have brought yourself, as the leader):
  - Who does Paul say he is?
  - Put yourself in the shoes of the Roman Christians and you just opened the letter up and read these 7 verses...what is your impression of this “Paul guy” so far?
  - What does it mean to be a “servant”?
  - Based off of verse 4, what is the key way we know that Jesus was the “Son of God”?
  - How many times do you find the word “called” in these verses? What do you think it means to be “called”? Do you believe that you are “called”? To what?
  - What hope does Paul’s story bring to you? (If they don’t know Paul’s story, go back and read Acts 9:1-19).

## **SESSION 2 (ROMANS 1:8-17)**

### ***Helpful information about the Passage:***

- **Unceasingly/without ceasing/constantly (v. 9)** is the Greek word “*adialeiptos*” it meant without intermission, incessantly, without ceasing. It was used to describe a continuous cough! Josephus used **adialeiptos** for incessant, continual hammering of a battering ram against the walls of Jerusalem. **Unceasingly** denotes that not much time elapsed between Paul’s prayers for the Roman Christians (like a frequent cough...) The point that Paul is conveying to the Roman saints is that were constantly, quite literally, in his thoughts and prayers.
- **Establish/strengthen (v. 11) is *sterizo*** meaning to make firm or solid, to set fast, to fix firmly in a place, to establish, to cause to be inwardly firm or committed, to strengthen. The basic idea is that of stabilizing something by providing a support or buttress (a projecting structure of masonry or wood for supporting or giving stability to a wall or building), so that it will not totter. →
- Pay special attention to “mutually encouraged” in verse 12. That has huge implications. Pritchard writes, “it’s the heart of what the Christian ministry is all about. You give something to me and I give something back to you. Ministry is not a one-way street. It’s a two-way street, with blessings and encouragement constantly being shared both ways.”
- **Brothers/Brethren (v. 13) is “*adelphos*”** from a = connective particle + delphus = the womb; refers to one from the same womb.
- One of the most noticeable observations are Paul’s three “I am” statements... “I AM UNDER OBLIGATION” (v. 14), “I AM EAGER” (v. 15) , “I AM NOT ASHAMED” (v. 16). Ray Stedman explained that he saw these three statements as the marks of Christian maturity.
  - “I am under obligation,” that is, “I am concerned about others.”
  - “I am eager,” that is, “I am committed, ready to fling myself without reserve into the work.”
  - And, third, “I am not ashamed,” that is, “I am confident, resting on unshakable experience in Christ.”
- The mature Christian is **concerned, committed, and confident.**
- **Under obligation (v. 14) is “*opheiletēs*”** from **opheilo** = owe, be in debt, conveys basic meaning of owing a debt) means one who owes another (e.g., think of someone who owes another a sum of money) and speaks of a strong moral obligation and personal duty.
  - \*Grace does not make you a debtor to God; but it does make you a debtor *to others* who need grace just as you did.
- In verse 14, Paul does not mention Jews, because, although full of longing toward them, he had been sent distinctly to Gentiles. See Acts 9:15 and 26:17
- **Some context:** Rome was a volatile place and the Christians there had already experienced persecution. He knew that the capital city of the empire was steeped in immorality and paganism, including emperor worship. He knew that most Romans would despise him and that many probably would do him harm. Yet he was boldly eager to go there, for his Lord’s sake and for the sake of the Lord’s people. Much of ancient Rome



mocked Christianity not only because the idea of a substitutionary atonement seemed ridiculous but also because their mythical gods were apathetic, detached and remote, in short, totally indifferent to the welfare of men. The idea of a caring, redeeming, self-sacrificing God was beyond their comprehension.

***Group Time and Questions:***

After you have initially welcomed everyone in and have time to catch up a bit...here is a process you are welcome to follow...

1. PRAY together as a group that God would reveal Himself in fresh ways through your study/discussion of His word.
2. READ Romans 1:8-17 together. (Feel free to share some of the background or things you learned from your pre-group preparation here).
3. Begin discussion with the following questions (or ones you have brought yourself, as the leader):
  - What stands out to you from this text, right away?
  - What are the key things you think Paul is trying to convey to his readers?
  - In v. 11, What does Paul say that he “longs” or “yearns” for? This is the Greek word **epipotheo**, which means to want something so bad it makes your heart hurt on the inside. Have you ever wanted something so badly it made your heart hurt when you thought about it?
  - Read through vv. 8-12 again, how do you think it made the Roman Christians receiving this letter feel when Paul said these things?
  - What are the three “I am” statements that Paul makes in vv. 14-16?
  - Would you call yourself obligated? Eager? Unashamed?
  - What is Paul’s explanation for why he is unashamed? (see v. 16).

**Optional:** Take some time to read Paul’s explanation of the gospel in 1 Cor. 15:1-11.

## SESSION 3 (ROMANS 1:18-2:11)

### *Helpful Information about the Passage:*

- This passage presents the Teleological Argument, here's an explanation: The Teleological Argument is also known as the "argument from design." Quite simply, it states that a designer must exist since the universe and living things exhibit marks of design in their order, consistency, unity, and pattern. A typical analogy of this is the Watchmaker Argument, which was given by William Paley (1743-1805). The argument goes as follows. If you found a watch in an empty field, you would logically conclude that it was designed and not the product of random formation. Likewise, when we look at life and the universe, it is natural to conclude there is a designer since we see how perfectly the universe and life forms operate. The eye is typically used as an example of design. It is a marvelous development. In order for it to work, there must be many different convergent parts that individually have no function but have value only in a designed whole. It is only in the combined total that they exhibit their total function. This function is by design. This argument is simple to understand and has merit since humans are designers by nature, and it is natural to think in terms of things having purpose. I think the teleological argument carries weight because it is consistent with Scripture. Evolutionists have difficulty accounting for apparent design in objects like the eye, the heart, and the brain where many different parts come together to form the whole. These individual parts have no purpose except in the function of the whole. How can evolution account for these detailed congruent occurrences? So far, it can't.
- Interesting to note in verse 22, it says the people "claimed to be wise", but what do we know to be the beginning of wisdom?—Fear of God! (Prov. 9:10). There is no fear of God within these people that Paul is talking about.
- From Paul's divinely inspired "pattern of moral/ethical devolution" here in Romans 1, notice how suppression and rejection of the knowledge of the true God naturally "devolves" into worship of false gods and how this false worship in turn is intimately associated with the practice of sexual immorality in all forms!
- **Gave... over "paradidomi"** is a very strong Greek verb meaning to hand someone over to the power and authority of another. It is that act of God whereby He hands over the men for judgment because of their sins. Interestingly *paradidomi* was a judicial term used for handing over a prisoner to his sentence.
- God delivered them over to the power of their own lusts to impurity so that they might become "prisoners" that had to obey their own lusts. God's "abandoning" of men on one hand reflects His righteous wrath (Ro 1:18) in allowing them to follow their own desires, but on the other hand His giving men over allows them to see what life is like without God! In that sense, there can be a *redemptive* purpose that stands behind the wrath of God. By letting men and women go their own way, God is not just punishing them but is also allowing them to see the emptiness of life without Him.
  - **Ray Pritchard:** It is only when a man comes to the end of himself that he is ready to think about Jesus Christ. But when that moment of emptiness comes, when he finally faces the "God-shaped vacuum" inside, when he discovers that disobedience only leads to pain, when he reaps the bitter harvest of his own sin, then and only then has he become a candidate for the grace of God!



Unfortunately, some people never figure it out in time. They die without realizing the folly of their own behavior. But others come to the end and finally, after many mistakes, they begin to look up. When they do, they find that God is there waiting for them.

- **William Barclay:** Before man there stands an open choice; and it has to be so. Without choice there can be no goodness and without choice there can be no love. A coerced goodness is not real goodness; and a coerced love is not love at all. If men deliberately choose to turn their backs on God after he has sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world, not even he can do anything about it.
- Rom. 1:26-27 is one of the most regarded texts in the scripture around the text of **Homosexuality**. Homosexuality was as widespread in Paul's day as it is now. I would encourage you to be prepared to have it be brought up in your groups. Here are a few resources I think you find valuable to read:
  - <https://carm.org/romans-1-26-27-homosexuality>
  - <https://carm.org/does-romans-1-condemn-homosexuality>
  - This also is a sermon from David Platt about this passage of scripture (1:18-32) with a special focus on homosexuality. It's long...but you can skip to parts you want to listen to/watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WY0zTygEyo>  
One thing we want to make sure we emphasize in this discussion is that Jesus came to redeem us and has the power to forgive all sin! This epic kindness leads us to repentance (2:4). Those living in homosexuality can be brought into the grace and mercy of God if they surrender themselves to Christ and ask Him to show them the way out of sin and into light and freedom.

### **Group Time and Questions:**

After you have initially welcomed everyone in and have time to catch up a bit...here is a process you are welcome to follow...

1. PRAY together as a group that God would reveal Himself in fresh ways through your study/discussion of His word.
2. READ Romans 1:18-2:11 together. (Feel free to share some of the background or things you learned from your pre-group preparation here).
3. Begin discussion with the following questions (or ones you have brought yourself, as the leader):

*(If I was leading a group, the question that I actually would start with—due to the nature of this passage and the many topics of discussion/confusion—is “what question do you have when reading this passage?” The only thing to be aware of when asking this question is the non-essential theological “rabbit trails”...don't get distracted from the main life-changing truths. A good measurement for topics of discussion is “Will an informed knowledge of this topic or answer to this question change to way I live out my life?”)*

- What are some of your favorite parts about nature (e.g. sunsets, mountains, leaves, etc.)? How does nature reveal God's eternal power and divinity? (Optional: Read Psalm 19:1-2)
- What is the “downward spiral” that you notice in this passage?
- What does the phrase “wrath of God” stir up within you? Why do you think you feel that way?
- Do you think “disobedience to parents” (1:30) belongs in this list of sinful behaviors?

Why or why not?

- How many times is the word “exchanged” pop up in this passage? In what areas of your life are you exchanging what is good for what is destructive?
- Do you think it was fair of God to *give them over* (v. 1:24, 26, 28)? Why or why not? (See the note on this in the helpful information)
- What does God’s kindness lead us toward (2:4)? Why?
- Take some time to reflect on Rom. 2:5-10. What do you take from this?

## **SESSION 4 (ROMANS 2:12-2:29)**

**A quick introduction to these verses:** These verses can produce a bit of confusion for those that read it, but something KEY that will help us as we read it is to remember the unalterable truth of the final verse of last weeks block of scripture. 2:11 states that “God shows no partiality.” One of God's unchangeable attributes is that He is **JUST** and so it is impossible for Him to be anything but impartial. No one before God get’s off easier than the next. He sees men through His own eyes of holiness and truth always. As we jump into talking about those with the law and those without the law, it might be tempting to think that God gives special treatment to the ignorant...but that is not the case. He is always just.

### ***Helpful information about the Passage:***

- **vv. 12-16:** The question may arise, “Does that mean people who have never heard about Jesus can go to heaven if they are good people?” It definitely could be inferred as such if these verses are taken alone, but we have to look at the bigger picture. Rom. 3:9-10a states that “all, both Jews and Greeks are under sin...No one is righteous, no, not one...” and 3:22b-23 explains “For there is no distinction: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We also must remember the words of Jesus in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Where as it is clear from these verses that the Lord will take into account ones knowledge of the law in the time of judgment, only those who have been justified by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 2:16, see below) will be saved. **“Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Gal. 2:16**
- **\*Follow up to last point:** It may sound harsh to think that God would not be lenient for those that never heard of Jesus, but the truth that we have to remember is that because of the sin of Adam, all are born into sin. (Rom. 5:12). Righteousness is not the default of humanity, but rather unrighteousness. It does not matter how “good” a person is. This ought to enlighten us to the gravity and importance of Jesus’ command to “Go and preach the gospel to all creation.” (Mark 16:15)
- **\*\*Another follow up:** The audience that Paul is writing to in Rome are *Christians*—both Jewish (with the law) and Gentile (without the law) Christians. Which means that they are familiar with the salvation that is in Jesus.
- **When reading these verses:** Remember what Paul states in Rom. 1:20. (...there is no excuse.)
- **“Rely on the Law” (v. 17):** Many Jews believed that their knowledge of the law would be enough to get them into the Kingdom. They believed that it granted them exemption from the final judgment. Obviously not the case.
- **v. 17-29:** These are POWERFUL verses relating to hypocrisy and empty religiosity. Within these verses are some GREAT lessons and insights for both you and for your group members. These might be verses that you want to read twice through to make sure your group members (especially the ones who have been coming to church for a long time) hear it.
- **2:19 a guide of the blind** In the ot, God describes Himself using similar language (Isa 42:16). Paul is most likely mocking an attitude of moral superiority.
- **2:25 circumcision** This practice was closely connected to the covenant and to Jewish identity. Paul argues that circumcision loses its value for those who disobey the rest of the law. Circumcision proves that a person did not act out of ignorance when they transgressed;

they knew the requirements of the law and still broke it. The outward sign of circumcision does not reflect faithfulness in the inward life (see Jer 9:25–26).

- **2:26 if the uncircumcised person** Refers to a Gentile.
- **2:29 circumcision is of the heart** Emphasizes genuine loyalty to God, becoming obedient with mind as well as body. Paul alludes to the prophecy of Jeremiah, who warned the people of Judah to circumcise their hearts (see Jer 4:4, 9:25–26). Christ is the one who does this work (Col 2:11; Eph 2:11; Phil 3:3).

***Group Time and Questions:***

- Who is the audience that Paul is writing to, specifically?
- What do you think this passage means? What questions arise?
- If it were possible to obey God's Law on your own, without His enabling power, would God declare you righteous without faith in Christ's work? Why or why not?  
*Follow up:* Does anyone in fact live up to the requirements of the law?
- Are there ways in which vv. 17-24 describe you? Explain.
- Do you believe hypocrisy is affecting the church today? In what ways?
- According to Rom. 2:25-29, what is circumcision of the heart, and how is it demonstrated?
- What can we take away from these passages for our daily lives?

## **SESSION 5 (ROMANS 3:1-20)**

### ***Helpful Information about the passage:***

- **Read 2:25-29 out again to put 3:1 into context.** (They flow together)
- **The first eight verses of Romans 3** can be interpreted as an "imaginary dialogue" that the apostle holds with his Jewish critics. The style Paul utilized here is known as "**diatribe**" which was common in Paul's time. Diatribe is a style of teaching used in ancient philosophical schools, generally characterized by rhetorical questions and imaginary debaters. And so to write in this style, the author engages in a dialogue with an imaginary opponent or questioner, and the writing is addressed directly to this questioner. You will see that Paul utilizes this style several times in Romans.
- **3:3 faithfulness of God:** Paul raises the question about God's faithfulness in light of His people's unfaithfulness. Despite the failure of God's people to maintain the obligations associated with God's covenants with them, God was committed to being faithful to His promises. The notion of the faithfulness of God comes from the OT, where it expresses God's fidelity to maintaining His obligations of the covenants with Israel.

In ch. 9, Paul addresses this issue with a series of OT citations to explain the tension between God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness.

- **3:5 Parenthetical "I speak in a human way":** Paul does not actually mean that God is unjust; he only makes this assertion for the sake of his argument.
- **A more readable understanding of context:** By this time, the Jews who would be reading this were undoubtedly beginning to become a bit annoyed with the apostle. In these verses they were saying to him, in effect: *"Look, the way you sound, it is as though these privileges that God has given to us--our great religious heritage -- really means nothing at all. You are undervaluing our heritage. And also if there is no partiality with God as you say, what good is it to be Jewish?"* To which Paul answers: *"No, I am not; these things mean a lot. The Jews have been given a position of privilege -- they were given the oracles of God! They were entrusted with the message of God! They were chosen as the channel by which God would communicate with humanity-- and this is a tremendous privilege!"*



- **John Piper writes that Paul** "has said something that is very provocative and that will not go unchallenged, namely, that some Jews are not really Jews and some Gentiles can really be Jews, even if they are not circumcised. The problem is that this seems to call into question the special position of Israel as God's chosen people. And that means it would call into question the whole Old Testament. And if Paul's gospel does that, it will not stand."
- **For further thought:** As Paul in a sense "undressed" his fellow Jews, he also undressed all who would ever read these passages, stripping away all our false pride and confidence that says "We must be okay with God since we have His Word and we go to the right church." Paul is building his case to show that the true righteousness which God accepts is a matter of the heart that believes God's gospel and receives His Son's perfect righteousness.
- **3:4 and 6-May it never be (me genoito)** - This is the strongest negative Greek expression and usually carried the connotation of impossibility, "Of course God cannot be unfaithful in His promises or in any other way," Paul was saying.
- In Biblical terms **righteousness** is that which is determined not by man or external

standards but only by God and as such is that which is acceptable to God and in keeping with what God is in His holy character.

- **3:5- Wrath (orge** from **orgaô**, meaning to teem or swell) is based on the root idea of a gradual swelling which eventually bursts, and thus describes an anger that proceeds from one's settled nature. It is a deep, inner resentment that seethes and smolders. God's **orge** in short is His constant, controlled and settled indignation and opposition toward sin. God's settled indignation means that His holiness cannot and will not coexist with sin in any form whatsoever. God's wrath is His holy hatred of all that is unholy and everything that is unrighteous.
  - \*Note that God's **orge** does not refer to sudden, explosive, uncontrollable outbursts of anger and rage to which men are so prone.
- In verses 5 and 6, Paul's point is that if God condoned sin, He would have no equitable, righteous basis for judgment. "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth judge justly?*" (Gen 18:25) **To summarize** - If there were any possibility of God's being unrighteous, then how could He be fit to judge the world? Yet all reading Paul's letter would admit that He will judge the world.
- **3:8- Slanderosly reported (blasphemo** from **blápto** = to hurt, injure, harm + **phéme** from **phemí** = to speak) means literally to speak to harm and in general therefore means to bring into ill repute. Tragically, the apostle's gospel message of salvation by grace through faith alone had been perverted by his opponents who argued it provided not only a license to sin, but outright encouragement to do so.
- "**Antinomianism**" is a term that has come to represent the particular perversion of the gospel that implies that, since believers are saved by the free grace of God, they are not responsible to live according to the moral law of God--or to speak more generally, to live in holiness...
- **The Doctrine of Total Depravity:** The doctrine understands the Bible to teach that, as a consequence of the Fall of man, every person born into the world is morally corrupt, enslaved to sin and is, apart from the grace of God, utterly unable to choose to follow God or choose to turn to Christ in faith for salvation. The idea of *total* in total depravity doesn't mean that all human beings are as wicked as they can possibly be. It means that the fall was so serious that it affects the whole person. The fallenness that captures and grips our human nature affects our bodies; that's why we become ill and die. It affects our minds and our thinking; we still have the capacity to think, but the Bible says the mind has become darkened and weakened. The will of man is no longer in its pristine state of moral power. The will is now in bondage. We are enslaved to the evil impulses and desires of our hearts. The body, the mind, the will, the spirit—indeed, the whole person—have been infected by the power of sin.
- There is no defense against the guilty verdict God pronounces on the entire human race. No one, whether Jew or Gentile, has grounds for appeal; none can claim to be free from guilt before God. All are lost.
- **J B Phillips** once said, "No man can justify himself before God by a perfect performance of the Law's demands - indeed it is **the straight-edge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are.**"
- **I love what Commentator R H Mounce has stated in response to 3:20:** "One would think that the sinner would love to be forgiven at no cost. Unfortunately that is not the case. After all, sinners have their pride. They desperately want to claim some role in their own redemption. Unacceptable, says God."

\*\*\*So, this section of scripture is often referred to as the "Bad News"...and I think you can see why. It paints a grim picture of our capacity to live righteously before God. However, this is the EXACT place Paul wants his readers to be in, so as to introduce the brilliantly GOOD news of Jesus Christ. He is teeing up the ball to knock out a home run in his sermon to the Romans.

**Questions:**

- After reading this passage of scripture, how do you feel?
- What do you think is the main thing Paul is trying to communicate to his readers? What is it in this passage that we ought not miss?!
- Reflective of the question asked in 3:1, what is the value of going to church? What advantage, if any, do you have if you are one who has grown up in church?
- What does a knowledge of the Law (or more understandably for us, the commands of the Bible) do for us?
- Do any of the rhetorical questions that Paul asks in this passage of scripture sound like questions you have heard before? Where or from whom? Explain.
- Reread vv. 10-18 out loud, each verse being read by a group member. Now, what personal sin struggles are you convicted of when you read it.

Take a good amount of time praying for each other to close out the night, lifting each other up after the vulnerably, humbling conversation about sin and total depravity.