



**Christian Life Fellowship**  
*Becoming fully devoted followers of Christ*



## **Challenges and Encouragement From the Book of Romans**

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### **Introduction:**

This morning we are beginning a study on the book of Romans. I believe God has some challenges for us to consider from this letter that Paul wrote to the church in Rome.

To put this into context, one has to understand the times when Paul wrote. The Romans were a people who in many ways were like our culture today. All types of immorality were present along with the worship of many varieties of gods. The Roman Empire was out to conquer the world. The people had great philosophers and writers and artists. Paul had never met the people in Rome to whom he wrote. He had never visited the church there but he recognized these people as related in Christ. Apparently this church was made up of Jewish believers who had come to faith in Jesus at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The church had grown and Paul gives some clear, practical teaching in this letter.

It is not enough just *to know* the gospel. We must let the gospel transform our lives. The Christian life is not some abstract theology but it has practical implications that will affect how we choose to behave each day. Please take your Bibles and turn to the book of Romans and let's begin. Paul clearly sets the foundations of Christian faith. All people are sinful. Christ died to forgive sin. We are made right with God by faith which begins a new life with a new relationship with God. Romans 1:12; 16; 20

### **I. ANSWERS TO PRAYER and GOD'S WILL** **Romans 1:10-12**

We often don't see the big picture. Be careful what you pray for and how you pray. Paul's prayers were answered but not exactly the way he thought they would be. He prayed to get to Rome so he could teach these believers God's ways but when he finally arrived there, he was a prisoner. He prayed for a safe trip and he did arrive safely but only after being arrested, slapped in the face, shipwrecked and bitten by a poisonous snake. We don't always understand why things prevent us from doing something we have in our heart to do. There are times when the

good desires and passions are not God's best for us at that moment in time. If we settle for them, we miss the best that God has in mind.

Here in verse 11, Paul had a deep desire to come and meet these believers in person and teach them. I believe that this was truly a Godly desire that Paul had but obviously if he had gone when he wanted to, we would not have this portion of the Bible in our hands. God's sovereign hand prevented him from getting there for some time. Perhaps there are some "NO'S" in our lives right now that God is planning to use for great purposes if we would just faithfully

do what is directly in front of us instead of fretting about why we didn't get our way.

I remember one summer in college when I had been invited by Continental Singers to travel with them. I was looking forward to the experience and yet in the middle of the week, God spoke to my heart and mind and told me not to go. I figured I would never have another opportunity and yet I obeyed what I knew to be the voice of God. I worked at home through the summer and did what I needed to do at home. Wouldn't you know the next summer the group called again, asked me to join them and told me my way would be paid. All I needed to do was to get to California. That summer God gave me the joy of traveling throughout America and Europe. God's timing is perfect. He knows what is best, not just what is good.

Paul also writes about encouragement here; how important it is that we encourage one another. People who have studied human nature have determined that for every negative comment made, there have to be at least eight positive comments to neutralize the impact of that one negative comment. Encouragement is something that every one of us can do if we can just get past our self. Go out of your way to truly care about those around you. Jot a note, pick up the phone, take a meal or dessert, go out for coffee, take someone fishing or pick up a friend to go shopping. A smile, a kind word will always bring encouragement to someone. It doesn't really have to cost you anything but a little bit of time. There have been so many times in my life that something someone has said, or a note they have written, has lifted me and helped me to stay focused.

So often we are beaten down by the cares of life, by disappointments, sickness, hurtful things that people might say or do and encouragement helps to strengthen our courage to go on, to face the rest of our day, to feel better about ourselves and our worth. Don't ever tell someone s/he is worthless. Every single person has worth. Every single person has value. Every single person has potential and it is a joy to lift one another up and encourage each other. I remember my grandmother used to say, "If you can't find anything nice to say to someone, then keep still." **1 Thes. 5:11**- So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

## **II. WE SHOULD NOT BE ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL-ROMANS 1:16**

For centuries the Jews had been learning about God by obeying His laws, keeping certain festivals and living moral lives. Often they would forget God's laws, they would not respond to His plan and they would come under His discipline.

Now Paul wants them to know that they don't have to be ashamed of the message of the gospel. The message is that there is nothing in our works of righteousness that can save us from our sin. Repentance of sin and faith in Christ's work alone is what saves us and the gospel tells us that Jesus Christ is the Savior. He came as the perfect Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. Paul gives the gospel the importance that it should have. It is the means by which the power of God is communicated so that people might be brought to salvation.

I challenge you to read the word, study the word, meditate on the word, memorize the word, because it is spiritually nourishing and a powerful resource to use in evangelism and bringing people to salvation. We could not be rescued from the ways that displease God without the truth of the gospel finding its way into our lives. **Romans 10:14- But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?**

## **III. NO EXCUSE FOR NOT KNOWING GOD - Romans 1:20**

Just because God can't be seen with our physical eyes doesn't mean we can't know Him. Through everything God made we can clearly see His invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature. God has revealed Himself through His creation as well as through His Son, Jesus and the Bible or testaments that were written. There is no excuse for not knowing God. People who say there is no God have deceived themselves. All one has to do is look around and take notice of creation. It did not just happen by chance. The promoted theory that we evolved over trillions of years is just that, a theory. The truth is that God created us with purpose and intention. He created us in His image and likeness and I do believe that.

The point that Paul makes here is that there is no excuse for not knowing God. If you want to know God and seek to know Him, you will find Him. He will reveal Himself to you as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. **Jeremiah 29:13- If you look for me in earnest, you will find me when you seek me.**

1. Spend time reading His word.
2. Spend time in prayer – communicating with Him.
3. Spend time in worship.
4. Spend time in serving Him.

To be in earnest means that you are not being casual about it. Your spiritual, mental and emotional energy are focused and wholehearted in this matter of knowing God and seeking Him.

#### **IV. BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WORSHIP – *Don't be an idolater!***

Worship can be defined as the way you respond to something or some being; the power that thing or being has in your life and the service you give to that being or thing. Paul says people became foolish because they began to worship idols made to look like people and birds rather than worship the God who created everything. They became idolaters.

We may ask how intelligent people could stoop to such foolishness. It happens when they begin to reject what they know about God. They begin to see themselves as the center of the universe and not God. Money, power and possessions are also things that can make idols. They dominate our thinking. They control what we do and don't do and as a result we end up serving and worshipping them rather than the God who created us.

Paul shows the downward spiral to sin. SIN has consequences. If left to its own, it will bring one to destruction and eternal separation from God. First people reject God. Then they make up their own ideas about what God should do and be. Then they fall into every kind of wickedness, greed, hate, envy,

murder, deception and gossip. Finally they end up hating God.

I was so disappointed a couple of weeks ago when the courts in California validated same gender unions, placing the benefits of those relationships equal by law to the benefits of a union between a husband and wife. "In contrast to earlier times, our state now recognizes that an individual's capacity to establish a loving and long-term committed relationship with another person and responsibly to care for and raise children does not depend upon the individual's sexual orientation," Chief Justice Ronald George wrote for the majority .

California has an estimated 92,000 same-sex couples. "It's about human dignity. It's about human rights. It's about time in California," San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, pumping his fist in the air, told a roaring crowd at City Hall. It is sad that judges have disregarded the voice of over 60% of the people in California who have voted a number of times against legalizing same sex unions.

We are seeing first hand the same downward spiral of sin that Paul talked about here in his letter to the Romans. Women turning against what God made as pure and natural to indulge in sex with each other. Men, instead of having normal sexual relationships with a woman, burned with lust for each other and did shameful things with each other. According to the Bible, homosexuality is sin. God detests it. God loves the sinner, but hates the sin. This was not the way He created us and because of the bent of men's hearts toward sin and away from God, something that God designed to be beautiful between a husband and wife has been perverted and made into something that is despicable.

Be careful that we don't let the culture dictate to us that this is OK. Do people have the right to live in sin? YES. Will there be consequences? YES. In **Romans 6:23-** we read – **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

**Conclusion:**

Take a step this week in one of these areas. Don't just hear the challenge. Actually step up and do something with the challenge. Keep praying; God will answer. Be careful what you pray for. Encourage your family and brothers and sisters in Christ. Send a note, make a visit, bring a meal, serve someone else. Tell someone about Christ. Do not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. It is the power of God for salvation. Give thought to what you worship.