



# Sterling

# Study Guide to *Romans*

## How to use this guide

- The main purpose of this guide is to encourage groups to read and discuss Scripture together. It is meant to be life-giving, not a chore. If this becomes a chore, change it or use something different.
- Use what you find helpful, but do not let yourself be bound to the guide. Feel free to expand what you like and to not use what is not helpful for your group. Do not force conversation, but allow it to come naturally. Some parts will speak more to some groups than to others.
- This study has been divided into sections that should be readable in one sitting together. Again, do not be bound to the guide. If you read more or less than what is planned, that is okay. Work at your own pace.
- There are two models of questions provided to guide your conversation. There are **general questions** that can be applied to any text, as well as **text specific questions**. Use what works best for your group, or both.
- Remember to read Scripture in context. It is easy for us to pick and choose what we like and to miss the bigger picture. Be mindful of the difficulty of reading in context especially when we only read short sections at a time.
- Read, listen, share, pray. Allow the Spirit to work.

## General Questions (can be asked after each section)

1. Which parts of this text resonated with you? Which parts did you like?
2. Which parts of this text did not resonate with you? Which parts did you not like?
3. Which parts of this text did you not understand? What questions do you have?
4. Which parts of this text teach you something about God?
5. Which parts of this text can you apply in your daily life?

## Background to *Romans*

- *Romans* was a letter written by the apostle Paul to the Church in Rome around AD 57.
- Paul (formerly known as Saul) was a Roman citizen as well as a Jew. He was a devout follower of the Jewish faith.
- Paul is most famously known for his persecution of Christians and his later conversion to Christianity and becoming an apostle of Jesus. This account can be read in Acts 9.
- Rome, at the time, was the diplomatic and trade centre of the known world.
- The Church in Rome experienced immense persecution around AD 64 under emperor Nero.

## Major Themes

- Faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus as the only grounds of acceptance by God.
- God looks at all of us the same, no matter our race or heritage.
- Paul outlines the state of the world and God's plan of salvation, available to all.
- We are set free by Christ, but what does that mean?
- Who is Jesus to the Jewish people?
- No matter what background we come from, we do well to make Jesus our role-model.

**Text Specific Questions**

1. What does this introduction tell you about Paul and about the Church in Rome?
2. Paul calls himself a bond-servant or slave of Christ (1:1). Do you ever identify that way? Do you feel comfortable with that kind of a title?
3. Paul uses quite a bit of “called” language (1:6). Do you believe some people are called to belong to Jesus? Does that mean that some aren’t called?
4. Paul says that he is “eager to preach the gospel” (1:15). Before reading in Romans what Paul believes the gospel to be, what is the gospel to you? How would you describe it to someone who has never heard it before. Take note of this and see if your answer changes when you are finished reading Paul’s letter.
5. Paul claims to not be ashamed of the Gospel (1:16). Do you ever find yourself in places or at times where this is also true for you? Why or Why not?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul claims that God and His invisible attributes have been made known ever since creation in the things that have been made (1:20). Where in nature do you see God? What does this mean for people who have never heard the message of the Bible?
2. Twice Paul says that God gave humans up to their lusts of the heart and dishonourable passions (1:24, 26). What is your understanding of this? Why would God allow this to happen?
3. Paul says that one of the reason God gave people over to their passions is because they refused to acknowledge Him (1:28) and worshiped the created rather than the creator (1:25). In what ways do we do this in our lives?
4. Paul is painting a picture of human nature in this passage. How would you describe that picture?
5. What does Paul see as the appropriate penalty for doing the things he described?
6. Paul hints at the idea that those who approve of evil are just as guilty as those who do it (1:32). Do you agree with Paul? What does that say about our responsibility as Christians?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul tells us that in passing judgement, we condemn ourselves (2:1). What does this tell us about our role as Christians? How do we distinguish between judging others and helping others when we see them struggling with sin?
2. Is Paul telling us that we will be judged according to our works in verses 6-10? How does this passage relate to passages that say we are saved by grace and faith? How might we interpret Paul’s words? Note that Paul is still setting the stage for the gospel message to be explained later in this letter.
3. “God shows no partiality” (2:11). What does this verse mean to you? Do we show partiality in who we think should be allowed in the Church, in who we want to associate with and support?
4. How do you think Paul understands the law and its relation to humans? What point is he trying to make? Note that as Paul sets the stage for the message of Jesus, he first needs to describe what was before Jesus.
5. What is your understanding of the meaning behind circumcision? What does Paul mean when he says that “circumcision is a matter of the heart” (2:29)?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul asks whether the unfaithfulness of Israel nullifies the faithfulness of God (3:3). Reflect on what you know of the history of Israel as found in the Old Testament. What do you remember of Israel's disobedience to God and God's reaction to them? Does it ring true with what Paul is writing about?
2. Paul says that all are under sin (3:9, 3:23). What does this say about God? What does it say about humanity?
3. According to Paul, how is humanity saved from sin?
4. Paul asks what should become of our boasting (3:27). What do you think he means by this? Where in the story of salvation could we possibly find boasting? What is our response to that?
5. Paul talks about a law of faith and a law of works (3:27-31). Do these two work together? What is the difference between them? Which apply to us?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul is talking about Abraham in this chapter. Abraham lived before the time of Jesus, before the time when faith in Jesus as a way of salvation was even an option. What do you remember about Abraham and his story? You can read about Abraham in Genesis 12-25.
2. Paul explains what circumcision is in regards to Abraham (4:9-12). What do you understand Paul to be saying? Was circumcision a means to righteousness, or a sign of the gift of righteousness?
3. Circumcision is not a real point of discussion for our Western Church today. Why do you think Paul spent so much time explaining this point? What discussions were going on in the Church during Paul's time that would warrant this kind of clarification?
4. According to Paul, why does the promise of God depend on faith?
5. One way that Paul describes faith is by being fully convinced that God can do what He had promised (4:21). Abraham believed that God would make him into a great nation even though he was old and Sarah was barren. In what moments and in what times do you feel like you have or don't have this kind of faith? How can we develop that kind of faith?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul says that we have peace with God because we have been justified through faith (5:1). What does this say about the nature of peace? Is peace a gift like justification is a gift? How do we obtain peace?
2. Paul says we can rejoice in our suffering because of what it brings (5:3-5). What are some of the sufferings that you endure in your daily life? How could these words apply to you?
3. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (5:8). What does this say about the nature of God? What can we learn about love from Jesus? Is it possible for us to love in this way?
4. Paul shares from the story of Adam (which can be read in Genesis 1-5). What do you remember from this story? How did humanity get so acquainted with sin? How does the gift of Christ compare to the trespass of Adam and all of humanity?
5. Paul spends quite a bit of time comparing Jesus and Adam. From Adam comes sin and death to all mankind. From Jesus comes grace and life to all mankind. Are you convinced by this comparison? Does it seem to make sense? What questions do you have about it?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul spends a lot of time talking about new life in Christ. For us to have new life, however, we must first be buried with Christ in death. What happens if we allow this to happen?
2. Paul tells us to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ (6:11). What does this look like practically?
3. Paul tells us to not let sin reign in our mortal bodies (6:12). Is this possible? What does Paul mean here?
4. Paul says that we were at one point slaves to sin (6:20). However, he does not say that we are free in Jesus for freedom's sake. We are enslaved in another way. To what are we enslaved to in Jesus? Is it a freeing message to hear that Christians are actually called to be enslaved?
5. What is the fruit/wage of being enslaved to sin? What is the fruit of being enslaved to God? Paul makes it sound like these are the only two options. Either we are enslaved to one or the other. Do you agree? Do you see any other options?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul says that we used to belong to the law, but now we belong to Christ (8:4). What makes this possible? What does this mean for how we are to live?
2. Paul does not say that the law is useless, even though believers in Christ are no longer under it. According to Paul, what use does/did the law have?
3. Paul says that he does not understand his own actions. What he wants to do, he doesn't, and what he does not want to do, he does (8:15). Can you relate to this?
4. It seems as if Paul is making an excuse for the actions he commits in saying that it is not him, but the sin dwelling in him that does it (8:20). What do you think Paul means here? Do you agree with him?
5. Paul seems sick of his situation and calls out asking who will deliver him from this body of death (8:24). Who will deliver him? Who will deliver us?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Those who are in Christ are free and no longer condemned. According to Paul, how is this possible?
2. Paul talks about living according to the Spirit and according to the flesh (8:5-11). What is the difference between the two and how can we live according to the Spirit?
3. Paul says that those who live in the flesh cannot please God (8:8). What do you think this means? What about those who do good works but do not believe in God?
4. Paul suggests that as Children of God, we might also have to suffer with Christ in order to be glorified with Him (8:17) What do you think this means? Do you think you suffer with Christ?
5. Paul seems to include all of creation (not just humanity) in talking about freedom from bondage (8:21). Is this familiar? How might this change the conversation of salvation and creation care?
6. Paul asks: If God is for us, who can be against us (8:31)? What can separate us from the love of God (8:35)? How would you respond to these questions?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul refers to the promises made to the patriarchs of Israel. How familiar are you with these stories, promises and covenants? What are some of the things God did, according to Paul, to allow His promises to His people to be fulfilled?
2. Paul has some hard words about God's justice and mercy (9:14). According to Paul, what is humankind's relationship with God like?
3. Paul quotes the story of Pharaoh, saying that God raised him up to show His power through Pharaoh (9:17). How does this passage, and others of Paul, speak to humankind's free will?
4. Once again, Paul emphasizes the inclusion of the Gentiles into the fold of God (9:24). How might this relate to us now? Who are the people that we would consider outside of God's fold?
5. Paul talks about only a remnant of Israel that will be saved (9:27). What do you think Paul means here?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul explains the difference between the Gentiles pursuit of righteousness and the Jewish pursuit of righteousness. How are they different? What is the stumbling block that Paul refers to (9:32)?
2. Paul continues to speak about some of the stumbling blocks of the Jewish faith (10:1-3). What is Christ to the Jewish people as well as to everyone?
3. Paul points out two parts of salvation (10:9). How have you understood salvation in your experience? Does it include what Paul says? Is there more to it?
4. Once again Paul points out that there is no difference between Jew or Greek (10:12). All who believe in Jesus will be saved. Why do you think it is so important for Paul to bring this up over and over again?
5. What role do you think you play in Paul's questions of how will people believe if they have not heard (10:14-15)? Why does Paul then say that all have heard (10:18)?
6. How does Paul describe Israel (10:21)? How does this relate to what Paul quotes Moses and Isaiah to have said (10:19-20)?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Paul uses the story of Elijah (can be read in 1 Kings 19) to describe how God has not abandoned His people (Israel). How do these two stories fit together?
2. Paul says that grace is not based on works, otherwise it would not be grace (11:6). How do you describe grace? When have you experienced grace in your life?
3. Why has Israel stumbled according to Paul (11:11)?
4. What do you know about grafting in agriculture? How does Paul use this imagery when he is writing to the Gentiles? What warnings does he give them?
5. What do you think Paul means when he says that all have been consigned to disobedience, that God may have mercy on all (11:32)? Does he mean this individually or in terms of people groups?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. What is our spiritual worship according to Paul (12:1)? What do you find helpful in doing this?
2. What can we do to allow ourselves to be transformed (12:2)? What is the importance of testing if we want to know God's will? What are ways we can discern and test?
3. According to Paul, why should we not think too highly of ourselves? How are we to use the gifts we have been given in the body of Christ?
4. Paul gives many words on what we should and would not do as Christians (12:9-21). Which do you find hard? Do you find any to be impossible?
5. To whom does vengeance belong (12:19)? How then should we handle revenge?
6. How can we overcome evil? Is this easy for you to do? What are some experiences when you did this well, or not well?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. What claims does Paul make about the governing authorities? Who are they in relation to us? How are we supposed to interact with them?
2. How much do you know about the political state of Israel during Jesus' and Paul's day? In that context, how do you think Paul's words would have been received?
3. How much or how little does Paul's words, that the governing authority is God's servant for your good, ring true with you (13:4)? What about our human history? Have there been times when this seemed to be true or untrue?
4. According to Paul, what is the only thing we should owe another (13:8)? Through what is the law fulfilled?
5. What do you think Paul means when he writes that we should put on Jesus Christ (13:14)? How can we do this?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. What does Paul teach about judgement of our fellow believers?
2. What is your understanding of the role of food or sacred days in the Jewish culture of the day? How important might this message have been for early Christians who were both coming out of the Jewish and Gentile traditions?
3. Paul says that we will all stand before God in judgement one day and will have to give an account of ourselves (14:10-12). So far in life, what would your account be?
4. Paul writes that we should not judge and that we should not be a stumbling block for our brothers and sisters in Christ (14:13). What are some ways in which we do this? Paul also writes that we should work for peace and mutual upbuilding (14:19). What are some ways we can do this?
5. What to eat and which days are more sacred may seem to be trivial issues for us today. What are the issues in our time that divide us and on which we pass judgement on others?
6. How can we live so that what we do proceeds from faith (14:23)?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. Who do you think are the strong that Paul refers to (15:1)? Do you consider yourself to be strong in the faith? What help would you look for if you don't feel strong? How might you help those who are weak?
2. Paul encourages us to welcome one another (15:7). When is this hard for us to do? How can we become more welcoming of others?
3. Once again Paul shares how Christ came for the Jews, to fulfill God's promise, and also to show mercy to the Gentiles (15:8-9). What might they have learned about welcoming from Paul's words?
4. Paul prays that we would abound in hope (15:13). Do you feel hopeful in your faith? Are there times when you are lacking in hope? How can we become filled with joy and peace in believing?
5. How does Paul view his role and his ministry (15:14-21)? What does this tell us about Paul?

**Text Specific Questions**

1. How much do you know about Paul's journey as an apostle? What can we learn here of Paul's journey and where it fits in to his other work?
2. What is one of the reasons why we should give of our material blessings to the service of the Church (15:27)?
3. There is a lot we can learn from the personal greetings of Paul (16:1-16). What sticks out to you? What might this say about the historical nature of this letter; the state and danger of the Church; the inclusion of both males and females in the work of the Church?
4. Who should we avoid, according to Paul (16:17)? How can we avoid being these kinds of people?
5. What do you think Paul means when he writes that the God of peace will soon crush Satan underneath our feet (16:20)?
6. What can Paul's final words teach us about God (16:25-27)?