

1
Freed to Serve God
Romans 3:9–26

1. In verses 10–18 Paul cites several Old Testament passages to illustrate the fact that everyone is “under sin” (v. 9). What portrait of humanity emerges from these verses?
2. How does this compare with the way you view people?
3. How does Paul use the various parts of the body to illustrate graphically the extent and effects of sin (vv. 13–18)?
4. The terminology Paul uses in this passage comes from the Roman legal system. In this courtroom scene God is the judge who is evaluating men and women on the basis of their obedience to his law. What do verses 19–20 tell us about the nature and outcome of this trial?
5. What do verses 9–20 reveal about our moral and spiritual condition?
6. Verses 21–26 introduce several key words which help us to understand the nature of salvation. A *justified* person (v. 24) has no legal charges against him or her and is therefore *righteous* in the eyes of the law. Why is our justification remarkable in light of our spiritual and moral condition?
7. How will a proper understanding of what God has done for you in Christ affect the way you view yourself?
8. The word *redemption* (v. 24) is borrowed from the slave market. It means to buy someone out of slavery. What are some of the ways we were enslaved as non-Christians?
9. What are some of the forms of enslavement or bondage that we struggle with as Christians?

How can Jesus free us in areas we continue to struggle with?
10. The expression *sacrifice of atonement* (v. 25) is taken from the Old Testament sacrificial system. The death of a sacrificial animal turned away God’s wrath from the sinner. How does this imagery help us to understand and appreciate what Jesus did for us on the cross?
11. How can the fact that God has accepted and forgiven us through Christ affect our relationships with one another and with God?

Acknowledging Jesus as Lord

Colossians 1:15–23

1. What characteristics of Jesus Christ impress you in this passage?

2. According to verse 15, “Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God” (Phillips). What are some of the difficulties we have in trying to know and relate to an invisible God?

How has Christ’s incarnation (God becoming a human being) overcome these difficulties?

3. Christ is also “the firstborn,” which means the one who is first (or Lord) over all creation (v. 15). In what ways are his lordship and supremacy indicated in verses 16–20?

4. How does this portrait of Christ enlarge your view of him?

5. According to verse 16, what is the purpose of all created things: nature, people, “rulers” and “authorities”?

How should this affect our attitude toward life including our possessions, relationships and goals?

6. Christ is also “the head of the body, the church” (v. 18). How can Christ’s authority make a visible difference in your church or fellowship group?

7. How does verse 20 help us to understand God’s overall plan and goal for the universe?

8. According to verses 21–22, what has God done to enable us to participate in his plan?

What kind of response does he expect from us (v. 23)?

9. Verse 18 summarizes the overall thrust of this passage: “So that in everything he might have the supremacy.” In what areas does Jesus not yet have first place in your life?

What steps can you take to submit these areas to his lordship?

10. How can this passage encourage you to “continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel” (v. 23)?

3

The Cost of Commitment

Luke 14:25–35

1. In verses 25–27 what does Jesus demand of those who would truly be his disciples?
2. The word *hate* (v. 26) is an obvious exaggeration for emphasis. In what sense are we to “hate” our family and even our own life?
3. A person carrying a cross in first-century Palestine was about to be executed. In this light, explain the meaning and implications of verse 27.
4. Imagine yourself building a tower (vv. 28–30). What types of costs would you need to consider before setting out to build?

What might keep you from finishing your task?

5. According to verses 31–32, what does the thoughtful king understand about battle?
6. What do these illustrations suggest about following Jesus (v. 33)?
7. Some have used verse 33 as a basis for renouncing ownership and for justifying an ascetic lifestyle or even monasticism. What is the difference between giving away everything that we have and “giving up” everything we have?
8. In New Testament times salt was used both as a preservative (to keep meat from rotting) and as a seasoning. How does this parallel our role as disciples of Jesus (vv. 34–35)?
9. How are those who do not wholeheartedly fulfill their commitment to follow Jesus like salt without saltiness?
10. Give some examples of how following Jesus could be costly for you. (Consider such areas as relationships, ambitions, finances, academics and so on.)
11. What one thing is God calling you to change today?

Resisting Temptation*Genesis 39*

1. In a few words how would you describe each of the main characters in this text—Joseph, Potiphar and Potiphar’s wife?

2. Imagine yourself in Joseph’s situation. What mental, emotional and physical struggles might you experience?

3. How did Joseph come to be in charge of Potiphar’s household (vv. 1–4)?

4. What were the results of Joseph being placed in this position (vv. 5–6)?

5. How might this position of authority, wealth and power have affected Joseph?

6. What do we learn about Joseph’s character from verses 7–9?

7. What would have made this temptation from Potiphar’s wife especially difficult to resist?

8. What can you learn about overcoming persistent temptation from Joseph’s example in verses 7–12?

9. What price did Joseph pay for his obedience (vv. 13–20)?

10. What are the “Potiphar’s wives” that persistently grab at your cloak and tempt you?

How might your refusal to succumb to them be costly?

11. What are some ways God has worked in your life to help you overcome temptation?

5

Trusting God

Genesis 22:1–19

1. Describe Abraham's predicament and his response.
2. How would you feel if God asked you to give up the most important person in your life?
3. What words and phrases in verses 1–2 emphasize the extremely painful nature of God's command to Abraham?
4. Why would this command seem so incomprehensible to Abraham (see 17:15–22)?
5. List the specific ways in which Abraham demonstrates faith in verses 1–10.
6. In verses 11–18 the angel of the Lord calls out to Abraham twice. How would the angel's words and actions have deepened Abraham's faith?
7. From Abraham's example in this passage, how would you define faith?
8. How did Abraham's faith have far-reaching consequences on other people (vv. 15–18)?
9. In what ways does your faith, or lack of it, affect people around you?
10. What did Abraham learn about God from this experience?
11. What tests of faith are confronting you today?
12. How can Abraham's example encourage you to trust God more fully?

6

Living Holy Lives

Ephesians 4:17–5:7

1. In verses 17–19 Paul describes how the Gentiles live. How does he characterize their minds, hearts and practices?
2. How does this description compare with the world you experience every day? Explain.
3. In contrast to the non-Christians described in verses 17–19, how were the Ephesians taught to live as Christians (vv. 20–24)?
4. Putting off our old self and putting on the new is a way of describing what happens when we become Christians. How does this description shed light on the nature of conversion?
5. If you are to become like God in true righteousness and holiness (v. 24), why is it essential for you to “be made new in the attitude of your mind” (v. 23)?
6. In practical terms, what can we do to renew our minds?
7. Because of our new identity in Christ, what things must be put away, and what things ought to take their place (vv. 25–32)?
8. With each command in verses 25–32, explain the reason Paul calls us to live differently.
9. How can we imitate God and Christ in our relationships with others (5:1–2)?
10. Why is it “improper” and “out of place” for God’s holy people to do the things mentioned in verses 3–4?

Which of these do you have the greatest difficulty avoiding? Explain.

11. Looking back over this passage, what different areas of our life are to be affected by holiness?
12. What type of behavior do you most need to put off and put on, and what steps can you take to change this area of your life?

Showing Compassion*Luke 10:25–37*

1. In your own words recount the context and the content of this parable.
2. What do you learn in verses 25–29 about the expert in the law?
3. The expert in the law quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. How do these two commands summarize the essence of what God desires in our lives?
4. In reply to the question “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells a story (vv. 30–35). Describe a modern-day equivalent of this incident.
5. Suggest possible reasons why the priests and Levites may have passed by on the other side.
6. What are some ways we tend to pass by those in need?
7. Describe the Samaritan’s involvement with the man from the moment he sees him (vv. 33–35).
8. Considering the racial and religious tensions that existed between Jews and Samaritans, why is the response of the Samaritan particularly surprising?
9. How have you personally been involved with people who are hurting financially, emotionally, physically or socially?
10. How does the extent of the Samaritan’s involvement compare with most attempts we make to help needy people?
11. How has the story of the good Samaritan challenged the lawyer’s understanding of “love your neighbor as yourself” (vv. 36–37)?
12. What things keep you from not only seeing but also acting in response to the needs of those around you?

How can you begin to be more of a neighbor to these people?

8
Serving Others
Philippians 2

1. What themes connect Jesus, Timothy and Epaphroditus in this passage?

2. How is verse 1 an incentive to obey Paul's commands in verse 2?

3. How do Paul's commands in verses 3–4 go against our natural tendencies?

How do they go against the spirit of our society?

4. How is Christ the supreme example of the humility and servanthood described in verses 3–4?

5. What did it cost him to be a servant (vv. 6–8)?

6. In verses 12–18 Paul exhorts the Philippians to live godly lives. In what way is he a model of servanthood for them?

7. How does Paul contrast Timothy with others (vv. 20–21)?

8. If Timothy were alive today, how might his “genuine interest” in the church's welfare be manifested in practical ways?

9. How has Epaphroditus been a servant to Paul and the Philippians (vv. 25–30)?

10. Jesus said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus demonstrated the same kind of lifestyle. What are some ways you might follow their example more fully today or this week?

How can you serve others joyfully without getting “burned out”?

Developing a Godly Self-Image*Exodus 3:1–15; 4:1–17*

1. Describe the setting in 3:1–3.
2. In 3:4 God calls Moses by name. What does this tell Moses about God?
3. Why does God send Moses to Pharaoh (3:7–10)?
4. In 3:11–15 Moses raises two objections against his going to Pharaoh. What do these objections reveal about Moses' view of himself and God?
5. In what situations do you feel inadequate to do what God commands or desires?

How can God's reply to Moses encourage you (3:12, 14–15)?

6. Moses gives his third objection in 4:1. How does God reassure him in 4:2–9?
7. What are some of the resources God has given you to accomplish his will in a difficult or fearful area?
8. In 4:10 Moses claims that he lacks the gifts to serve God effectively. How does his view of himself differ from God's perspective (4:11–12)?
9. When is it legitimate to admit that we are unqualified for an area of service, and when is it merely a faithless excuse?
10. In what way can a poor self-image become sin (4:13–17)?
11. In what areas do you allow your self-image to be determined by your emotions or by other people rather than by God and his Word? Explain.
12. According to this passage, how should our self-image be affected by our image of God?

10

Using Your Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:4–26

1. In what ways can our entire body be hindered if one of its parts isn't functioning properly?
2. In verses 4–11 what do we learn about the similarities and differences among spiritual gifts?
3. What is the purpose of the gifts?
4. How does Paul respond to the misconceptions in verses 15–16?
5. How do the people described in verse 21 view themselves and those with less “spectacular” gifts?
6. In contrast to verse 21, how should we view and treat those who seem to be weaker or less honorable (vv. 22–23)?

Where do you see examples of this in your church or fellowship group?

7. Why would the “presentable parts” of the body need no special treatment (v. 24)?
8. If the more “spectacular” members of the body don't need special treatment, why are they usually the first to receive it?
9. How does this passage correct some of our misconceptions about the difference between so-called “full-time Christian workers” and everyone else?
10. Comment on your understanding of your own place in the body of Christ. For instance, do you feel inferior? Superior? Unsure of how you fit? Are you a lone ranger?
11. According to 12:7, each Christian is given gifts “for the common good” of the body. In this light, what can you be doing to build up your local church or fellowship group?

Greatness Through Humility*Mark 10:32–45*

1. Describe the basic tension here between James and John on the one hand and Jesus on the other.
2. What does Jesus tell his disciples about what awaits him in Jerusalem (vv. 32–34)?
3. In light of this news, how is the request of James and John inappropriate (v. 35)?
4. In ways are you like James and John in this passage?
5. The words *baptism* and *cup* in verses 38–39 are sometimes used symbolically in Scripture to denote suffering. In this context, explain Jesus' reply to James and John.
6. Compare the sin of the other ten disciples with that of James and John (v. 41).
7. Have you ever felt envious or even indignant when others were honored and you were not? Explain.
8. How does Jesus contrast greatness in the world with greatness in God's kingdom (vv. 42–45)?
9. What is radical about his definition of greatness?
10. In what ways do Christians today still embrace the world's concept of greatness?
11. Give a positive example of humility in action that you've seen in your church, family or work.
12. Jesus' concept of greatness and humility could transform every area of our lives. Name one way you could begin to follow his example.

12

Called to Persevere

2 Timothy 1:8–2:7

1. What basic facts do we learn from this passage about Paul, Timothy and the relationship between the two?
2. Why might Timothy be ashamed to testify about the Lord or be ashamed of Paul (v. 8)?
3. After calling Timothy to suffer with him for the gospel, what specific truths does Paul focus on (1:9–10) and why?
4. How does the message of the gospel encourage you to stand firm when you are tempted to be ashamed of Christ or of another Christian?
5. What do verses 13–14 suggest about the difficulties Timothy will encounter?
6. Imagine yourself in Paul’s position—alone, imprisoned, deserted by “everyone in the province of Asia” (1:15). How do you think you would react?
7. What is distinctive about Onesiphorus (1:16–18)?
8. Against the background of Paul’s impending death and the disloyalty of the Asian church, what is the significance of Paul’s command in 2:2?¹

¹ Andrea Sterk and Peter Scazzero, [*Christian Character: 12 Studies for Individuals or Groups*](#), A LifeGuide Bible Study (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 1999), 9–45.