

ADVANCED

Bible Study



UNVARNISHED TRUTH: LIFE'S GREATEST STORY

UNSTOPPABLE GOSPEL

Fall 2016

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

Born Again

Have you ever wondered what the phrase “born again” means? The Bible records that Jesus used the words in a conversation with a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus approached Jesus at night. He was curious about Jesus and the kingdom of God.

Jesus told him: “Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Nicodemus responded, “But how can anyone be born when he is old?” (v. 4).

Nicodemus was a highly moral man who obeyed God’s law. He was a respected leader of the Jewish community. No doubt he was a fine man. Yet something was lacking. Like Nicodemus, many people today confuse religion with new birth in Christ. Phrases such as “I pray regularly” or “I believe there is a God” often are confused with a real new-birth experience.

New birth begins with the Holy Spirit convicting a person that he or she is a sinner. Because of sin, we are spiritually dead. For this reason, spiritual birth, as Jesus described it, is necessary. God loves us and gives us spiritual birth when we ask Him for it.

The Bible says all people are sinners (Romans 3:23). Jesus died on a cross and was raised from the dead to save sinners. To be born again means that a person admits to God that he or she is a sinner, repents of sin, believes in or trusts Christ, and confesses faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. Jesus told Nicodemus that everyone who believes in (that is, places their faith in) Christ would not perish (John 3:16). Jesus is the only One who can save us (14:6).

To believe in Jesus is to be born again. Confess your sins and ask Jesus to save you right now. The Bible says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21). After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, share your decision with another person, and following Christ’s example, ask for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:6).

UNVARNISHED TRUTH: LIFE'S GREATEST STORY

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Bible Study

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

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Unvarnished Truth: Life's Greatest Story

Why This Study Is Important:

Churches talk about the importance of evangelism and reaching the lost, but the truth is that it is a low priority in the lives of so many Christians. Yet Jesus made it clear how important evangelism is to Him when He told His earliest followers they would be fishers for people (Matt. 4:19). We need to rediscover this unvarnished truth about the gospel and accept the challenge to share our faith as personal soul-winners.

This study connects to Christ because the all-powerful, sovereign God created everything through Christ and for His glory. God is holy and righteous, and His wrath is against our sin. Jesus took God's wrath for us, forgives us when we believe in Him, and brings us into a relationship with God.

This study connects to community in that believers encourage each other to trust and follow Christ. We should not assume, however, that people have made a commitment to Christ simply because they are in our group or church. Further, we can encourage each other to share our faith with others.

This study connects to culture for we bring glory to God by living for Christ in a world that does not know Him. As believers, we are to share verbally the good news of Christ with lost individuals.

SESSION 1

ONE GREAT CREATOR

THE PASSAGE

Psalm 33:6-9,13-15; Colossians 1:15-17

THE POINT

God created us—and He knows each of us.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Bill listened intently to his pastor's sermon on the lack of priority for evangelism by most Christians. He followed the leadership of the Holy Spirit and made the commitment to make sharing his faith a priority. The next day as Bill was sitting in the teachers' lounge, Maria asked if she could sit down and talk with Bill. She told him that she knew he was a Christian by the way he acted. Maria told Bill she didn't really understand Christianity and asked if he could explain it to her in five or six basic truths. Bill told Maria that his Bible study group at church was beginning a new study called "Unvarnished Truth: Life's Greatest Story" on Sunday and asked if she would like to go with him and his wife. Maria agreed to meet Bill in the lobby of the church on Sunday morning.

THE SETTING

David, the first King of Israel, wrote half of the psalms (75 of them). Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible, having only two verses. Psalm 119 is the longest psalm. Having 176 verses, it is longer than 30 books in the Bible. In Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament, the word *psalm* (*mizmor*) signified music accompanied by stringed instruments.

The purpose of Psalm 33 is to lead God's people to praise Him for His complete control over all the universe. The 22 verses of this psalm likely recalled the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet to help one memorize it. Many scholars divide Psalm 33 in this way: introduction to praise (vv. 1-3); the hymn of praise (vv. 4-19); and the conclusion of praise (vv. 20-22).

For further background, see the article "Creation: Beyond Genesis" in the current, Fall 2016, issue of *The Biblical Illustrator*.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Psalm 33:6-9

- ⁶ The heavens were made by the word
of the LORD,
and all the stars, by the breath of His mouth.**
- ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea into a heap;
He puts the depths into storehouses.**
- ⁸ Let the whole earth tremble before the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world
stand in awe of Him.**
- ⁹ For He spoke, and it came into being;
He commanded, and it came into existence.**

God Created Me. The first three verses of Psalm 33 list a number of actions for God’s people to take: “rejoice,” “praise,” “make music,” and “play skillfully on the strings.” The reason behind these actions is listed in verses 4-5: “For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is trustworthy. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the LORD’S unfailing love.” These five verses introduce our first focal passage, verses 6-9, which focuses on God’s creative work.

In verses 6-9, the psalmist began at the beginning—creation. The picture is that of a three-story universe: **the heavens** (the part of creation above the earth, that is, the sky, the stars, the planets, and so forth), the **earth** (the land and what lives on it), and **the sea** (what surrounds and is under the earth).

The first part of verse 6 reads, **the heavens were made by the word of the LORD.** The word **made** means “to produce,” “to fashion.” **By the word of the LORD** completes the first half of verse 6. However, in the Hebrew word order, the first two Hebrew words of verse 6 are **by the word** and **LORD.** In Hebrew, the order of words in a sentence is determined by their importance. So, these words are the most important words in verse 6.

The Hebrew term **word** represents what is spoken (v. 6, **by the breath of His mouth**; v. 9, **for He spoke**). **Word** is also used in the Greek New Testament to represent Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14; Col. 1:16). **LORD** is the Hebrew term *Yahweh*, the covenant name of God. Built on the verb “to be,” perhaps the best way to translate this term is “I will be who I always have been,” stressing God’s eternity and consistency.

The second part of Psalm 33:6 reads: **and all the stars, by the breath of His mouth.** Technically, this is known as

synonymous parallelism, emphasizing the first line by writing the same ideas in the second line using different words. Hence, **the heavens** of verse 6a reflects **the stars** of verse 6b; **the word of the LORD** of verse 6a reflects **the breath of His mouth** of verse 6b.

In verse 7, the psalmist described creation in more detail, using the second part of the verse to repeat the first part of the verse using different words. The word **heap** is also translated as “boundaries” (“He assigned the sea its boundaries,” NLT). The second part of verse 7 uses the word **storehouses** as parallel to **heap**.

As the result of such a creation (vv. 6-7), the psalmist presented the response that all created beings should make (v. 8). The response of **the whole earth** (v. 8a) or **all the inhabitants of the world** (v. 8b) should be to **tremble** (v. 8a) and **stand in awe** (v. 8b). The psalmist addressed this response to everyone, not just God’s people. In earlier centuries, most in American society—not just Christians—recognized God’s role as creator and trembled before Him. Unfortunately, that isn’t the common belief now. What would our country be like if we appropriately recognized God’s role as creator as well as all its implications?

In a similar way, what would our world be like if we *trembled* and *stood in awe* of God? The word **tremble** means “to fear,” “to be afraid,” and “to revere.” When we recognize God for who He is, for what He has done, and for what He will do, we should tremble. Too often society’s picture of God is that of a doting old grandfather who never disciplines anyone or of some sentimental fool we should pity. The Bible’s picture of God is diametrically opposed to these false ideas that are so prevalent in our society today. We also should fear God. What are the implications for us and our culture if we use society’s concept of God (the old,

dotting man upstairs) or the Bible’s concept of God (the all-powerful, to-be-feared, Creator)?

So why should we **tremble** and **stand in awe** of God? The psalmist provided the reason in verse 9: **for He spoke, and it came into being**, or said another way, **He commanded, and it came into existence**. The word **it** again refers to creation, all of creation. That’s why this focal passage’s focus is “God created me.” The word **He** refers to God. The words **spoke** and **commanded** give us insight as to “the how” of creation. God didn’t need parts or plans; He simply **spoke** creation into existence. How powerful He is!

What are a couple of lasting truths from Psalm 33:6-9?

1. God created all things by His word alone.
2. Because of God’s creative power, all people should fear Him; that is, they should stand in awe of Him and tremble before Him.

Psalm 33:13-15

- ¹³ **The LORD looks down from heaven;
He observes everyone.**
- ¹⁴ **He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth
from His dwelling place.**
- ¹⁵ **He alone shapes their hearts;
He considers all their works.**

God Knows Me. In the previous verses (vv. 6-9), the psalmist stressed God’s role as the Lord of all creation. In verses 13-15, the psalmist stressed God’s role as the Lord of all history. Given God’s role as the Lord of all creation coupled with His role as the Lord of all history, our focus for this section is “God knows me.” Steven Lawson wrote: “God observes every person on the earth. ... God who forms the

hearts of all rules over all things in accordance with His own sovereign purposes.”¹

In verse 13, the psalmist again used God’s personal name, Yahweh, translated **LORD**, that was first revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:14). The psalmist also pointed out that God’s home is **heaven**. Each of the four times the Old Testament writers used the phrase **looks down** (Pss. 14:2; 33:13; 53:2; Lam. 3:50), they revealed God’s home is **heaven**.

The psalmist described the result when God **looks down from heaven**: God **observes** (“beholdeth,” KJV; “sees,” NLT) **everyone**. The word **observes** also means “to look at,” “to consider,” and “to discern.” God **observes everyone**. The word **everyone** is more literally translated “all the sons of men” (KJV). The Hebrew word translated “men” put into English letters is actually *adam* (meaning man of the red earth; it is also used as a proper name: Adam). **Everyone** is also rendered “the whole human race” (NLT). These translations point out the magnitude of what God sees, that He knows us, and that He has an intimate knowledge of us.

Psalms 33:14 is parallel to verse 13. Verse 13 reads, **the LORD looks**; verse 14 has, **He gazes**. Verse 13 says, **He looks down from heaven**; verse 14 states, **He gazes ... from His dwelling place**. Verse 13 notes, **God observes everyone**; verse 14 declares, **He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth**. The parallel words in verse 14 either repeat, clarify, or expand the words in verse 13.

How impossible it is for us to try to hide from God! What difference does it make for you to know that God is watching what you think, say, and do? Who does God **observe**? These verses provide the answer: **everyone**.

While verses 13-14 focus on God’s actions toward all people, verse 15 seems to narrow that focus to individual people. In verses 13-14, God’s actions toward people were

passive; in verse 15, God takes an active role: **He alone shapes their hearts.**

When we consider God's gift of free will to us, how do we understand our free will in light of God's sovereignty? When the psalmist wrote, **He alone shapes their hearts**, what did He mean? Perhaps different versions and translations of the Bible can help us understand. Since the psalmist had been speaking of creation and history, possibly the translation "he fashioneth their hearts alike" (KJV) or "He made their hearts" (NLT) refers to God's creative act and not to God's ongoing influence over a person.

On the other hand, if **He alone shapes their hearts** refers to God's actions in guiding people, how can we be responsible for the choices we make? Artur Weiser wrote: "Nothing remains of the divine presence hidden from Him who created the heart of man, not even the most secret thoughts in the innermost recesses of man's heart. Whatever man may do is done in the sight of the omniscient God; and this accounts for the ultimate seriousness of man's responsibility."²

Certainly this argument does not exhaust the depth of meaning to understand the tension between all the Bible's references to God's sovereignty and His gift of free will for humans, but this approach can help us understand what the psalmist meant in verse 15. Notice also that God and **He alone** has the ability to create our heart, our innermost being. We may be able to influence another person, but we can't create their hearts; only God can make their hearts (Ps. 139:13).

In addition to looking at creation to help us understand the phrase **He alone shapes their hearts**, perhaps creation will help us also understand what the psalmist meant by the phrase **He considers all their works**. The New

Living Translation renders this, “so he understands everything they do.” In other words, “so” links what God did in creating their hearts with the results (**considers all their works** or “understands everything they do,” NLT).

What are some lasting truths in Psalm 33:13-15?

1. God is present and active in His creation.
2. God is present and active in history.
3. God sees everything; therefore, He knows everything.
4. God—and God alone—shapes and forms people’s innermost beings.

Colossians 1:15-17

- ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.**
- ¹⁶ For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him.**
- ¹⁷ He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together.**

Jesus Is Central to All Creation. So far, we have studied how God created the universe (and us as a part of it; Ps. 33:6-9) and as a result learned that God knows us (all of our actions; Ps. 33:13-15). In Colossians 1:15-17, we find that Jesus is central to all creation.

New Testament scholars agree that most of Paul’s letters were written to address various situations. Colossians was written to correct false teaching about who Christ

was and is and what He had done and is doing. Many Bible students also recognize through linguistic study that Colossians 1:15-20 forms a “hymn” (a poem used in worship) or an early creedal statement of faith. Many scholars also agree that verses 15-17 present truths about Jesus and creation and that verses 18-20 present truths about Jesus and the church (re-creation). However, Bible students disagree about specifics of the authorship of this hymn and its exact form. For example, did the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to adapt and correct a poem the church at Colossae already used? Did the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to write these words years before and use them when he wrote his letter to the Colossians? Or did the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to write the words as he was writing the other parts of the Book of Colossians? Although we can’t be absolute about answers to these questions, we can be absolutely sure that the Holy Spirit did inspire Paul to use the words of this hymn or early confessional statement.

Likely, Colossians 1:15-17 forms the first stanza of a hymn or a section of a creed dealing with Christ’s supremacy to and involvement in creation (see also John 1:1-18; Heb. 1:1-4). These verses from Colossians elaborate on the verses we studied in Psalm 33. Maxie Dunnam explained: “The ‘false teachers’ [in Colossae], trying to ‘*deceive with persuasive words*’ (2:4), were demeaning Christ, proposing a substitute philosophy for the gospel Paul preached, which gospel the Colossians had received through Epaphras.”³

In Colossians 1:15, Paul continued his description of the real Jesus Christ as opposed to the Christ of the false teachers in Colossae. In this verse, Paul described God’s Son by two titles: **image** and **firstborn**. Whereas **image** describes the relationship between Son and Father, **firstborn** describes the relationship between Son and creation.

The descriptive title **image** reflects the Greek word behind our English word *icon*; it means “visible expression,” “an exact likeness.” Whereas Jesus is the visible representation of God, the Father Himself is **invisible** (John 1:18). One translation of Colossians 1:15 makes this explicit: “Christ is the visible image of the invisible God” (NLT). In Jesus, God revealed Himself. Although this points to Jesus’ pre-existence, Paul’s next title for Jesus makes that point more clearly.

The descriptive title **the firstborn over all creation** has led to confusion by some. From the followers of Arius in the fourth century A.D. to the Jehovah’s Witnesses of today, some have misunderstood this title as meaning that Jesus was the first to be born. According to their false ideas, they think **firstborn** means that Jesus is not eternal and therefore He is not fully God. At first glance **firstborn** seems to focus on time, but further study of how this word is used in Scripture reveals the focus is on “priority of rank” or “supremacy” (see also Ps. 89:27). If Paul had wanted to say that Christ was the first to be born, he likely would have used Greek words translated “created first” or “formed first.” As **firstborn** “Christ is unique, being distinguished from all creation (cf. Heb. 1:6). He is both prior to and supreme over that creation since He is its Lord.”⁴

In Colossians 1:16, Paul continued his description of Christ (as evidenced by the connective word **for**). Verse 16 has a complicated structure or form. For example, **heaven** relates to **the invisible**, **earth** relates to **the visible**; **dominions** and **authorities** are **invisible**, **thrones** and **rulers** are **visible**. The first line of the verse, **for everything was created by Him** is further explained by the last line of the verse: **all things have been created through Him and for Him**. Both the first line and last line of verse 16 express our focus for verses 15-17: Jesus is central to all creation.

Although the word **for** in verse 16 links that verse to the previous and following verses, this Greek word is also translated “because,” a word that makes the connection even stronger. The grammar of the Greek verb translated **was created** (a Greek aorist tense) emphasizes the past completed act. At the end of verse 16, the Greek verb translated **has been created** (a Greek perfect tense) emphasizes the continuing result—creation’s continuing existence.

The singular **everything** and the plural **all things** refer to the totality of creation. The eight qualifiers (**heaven ... earth ... visible ... invisible ... thrones ... dominions ... rulers ... authorities**) further explain **everything** and **all things** of creation. The qualifiers **thrones ... dominions ... rulers ... authorities** may also address the erroneous ideas of false teachers in Colossae who saw these qualifiers as rankings of angels that they worshiped.

Max Anders, in the *Holman New Testament Commentary*, wrote: “In making the assertion that Christ is the Creator of the angelic host, the point is clearly made that the angels are not to have a place of priority or even equality with Christ. Only Christ can have the place of supremacy.”⁵

Verse 16 stresses the truth that the Son was the agent of creation (**through Him**, which in no way contradicts Gen. 1:1). Elsewhere, the New Testament also stresses this truth (John 1:4; 1 Cor. 8:6). The phrase **for Him** may indicate *for* Christ’s glory or benefit, or this phrase may indicate that Christ *is* the ultimate goal of creation (1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 1:10). In either case, Colossians 1:15-17 certainly teaches that Jesus is central to all creation.

Verse 17 both sums up the previous two verses and introduces the next stanza of the hymn that focuses on Jesus and the church; that is, verses 15-17 focus on creation, verses 18-20 focus on re-creation. Paul began verse 17 by

stating that Jesus **is before all things**. This phrase focuses on Christ's superiority and preexistence, reinforcing the truths presented in the previous verses. His preexistence stresses that Jesus was present before He created the universe. His preexistence also addressed the error of both Arius (in the fourth century A.D.) and of the Jehovah's Witnesses (today).

Paul's second statement in verse 17, **and by Him all things hold together**, emphasizes Christ's role in sustaining the universe. In Christ, and in Him alone, we see the unifying principle of all life. The Greek perfect tense of the verb translated **hold together** emphasizes the continuing result of the Son being the agent of creation—His sustaining and unifying power (see also Heb. 1:2-3). The Greek verb translated **hold together** has also been translated "consist" (KJV) and "he holds all creation together" (NLT). The verb translated **hold together** is a compound verb, made up of two root words: the preposition translated "together" or "with" and the verb translated "stand," "place," or "put." Thus, the phrases "stand together," "put together," or "establish" help us understand the meaning of **hold together**.

What are some lasting truths in Colossians 1:15-17?

1. Jesus, the Son, was God's agent in creating this world.
2. Jesus continues to hold together—or sustain, preserve, and protect—all of creation.
3. The truths we have encountered in this session emphasize that Jesus is central to all creation.
4. Jesus existed before all created things.
5. Jesus is superior to all creation.

LIVE IT OUT

As you reflect on this Bible study, respond to the following:

How will the truth that God created all things impact your life this week? _____

What does the fact that God created all things through His word alone say about His power? _____

How will you change your life to stand in awe of Him and tremble before Him? _____

How will you respond to the truth that God sees and knows everything? _____

What does it mean for you that Jesus (who was God’s agent in creation) holds all of creation together? _____

¹ Steven J. Lawson, *Psalms 1-75*, vol. 11, in *The Holman Old Testament Commentary* [Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2003], 181.

² Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, in *The Old Testament Library* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962], 293.

³ Maxie D. Dunnam, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 8, in *The Communicator’s Commentary* [Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1982], 346.

⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, in the *Word Biblical Commentary* [Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1982], 45.

⁵ Max Anders, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians*, vol. 8, in the *Holman New Testament Commentary* [Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1999], 296.

SESSION 2

ONE GREAT PURPOSE

THE PASSAGE

Isaiah 43:1-7

THE POINT

We were created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

On Monday, Maria stopped by Bill's table in the teachers' lounge (see the previous study to learn about Maria and Bill). She sat down and began talking with him. She summarized yesterday's Bible study on "One Great Creator." Then Maria told Bill she needed some time to reflect on this lesson. They made plans to eat lunch together on Friday. On Friday, as they were eating lunch, Maria told Bill that she understood that God had created her—and that He knows her. Maria then told Bill that she didn't understand why God would do that. Bill told her that most people he had talked with wanted to know where they fit in. Maria said: "That's it." She asked: "Why am I here? And does the Bible help me answer that question?" Bill told her that was exactly what they were going to study on Sunday. As she was leaving, Maria said: "I'll see you there."

THE SETTING

Isaiah was one of the great eighth-century B.C. prophets (among others were Hosea, Amos, Jonah, and Micah). Scholars usually divide the Book of Isaiah into three parts: (1) Chapters 1-39 refer to Judah before the Babylonian Exile (587 B.C.); (2) Chapters 40-55 deal with the Jewish exiles (587-539 B.C.); and (3) Chapters 56-66 deal with the Jewish exiles after the Babylonian exile (after 539 B.C.). Isaiah prophesied under the reigns of four kings of Judah—Uzziah (783-742 B.C.), Jotham (742-735 B.C.), Ahaz (735-716 B.C.), and Hezekiah (716-686 B.C.)—for 40 years (about 740 B.C. to about 700 B.C.).

Isaiah 42-44 address a hope for redemption and righteousness. God loved His people despite their following other gods. To encourage them return to Him following their Babylonian captivity (587-539 B.C.), God gave them hope for a new future as His servants—living out His salvation as His witnesses. The seven verses in this Bible study form an arch structure:

A-1. Yahweh, Israel's creator and shaper (v. 1a-c)

B-1. I called you by name (v. 1e)

C-1. Fear not (v. 1d)

D-1. Nations given in exchange for you (v. 3c-d)

**Keystone: Because you are precious and
He loves you (v. 4a-b)**

D-2. People given in exchange for your life
(v. 4c-d)

C-2. Fear not (v. 5)

B-2. Everyone called by name (v. 7a)

A-2. I created and shaped him (v. 7b-c)¹

STUDY THE BIBLE*Isaiah 43:1-2*

- ¹ **Now this is what the LORD says—
the One who created you, Jacob,
and the One who formed you, Israel—
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name; you are Mine.**
- ² **I will be with you
when you pass through the waters,
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not overwhelm you.
You will not be scorched
when you walk through the fire,
and the flame will not burn you.”**

We Are Intended to Be In Relationship with God.

Whereas Isaiah 42 focused on reproach for Israel’s worship of so-called gods, chapter 43 begins with consolation—a hope for the future based on God’s relationship with and His love for His people. Their punishment had lasted long enough. This change in focus is evidenced by the word **now**.

Franz Delitzsch wrote that the opening verses of Isaiah 43 “gave them to understand, that no meritorious work of their own would come in between what Israel was and what it was to be, but that it was God’s free grace which came to meet it.”² Thus free grace is based on the relationship between God and His people (Rom. 5:8).

Isaiah 43:1 emphasizes the authority of **what the LORD says**. The Hebrew personal and covenant name for God, Yahweh, is used here. Isaiah went on to elaborate about

the **LORD**—the **One who created you, Jacob, and the One who formed you, Israel**. Abraham’s grandson and Isaac’s son, **Jacob** (whose name means “trickster”) was renamed **Israel** (whose name means “wrestled with God,” Gen. 32:28).

The Lord’s creative activity is expressed with two words: **created** and its parallel, **formed**. The Hebrew word rendered **created** in Isaiah 43:1 (and in Gen. 1:1) always has God as the subject. The parallel word, **formed**, expresses the idea of squeezing into shape. These two words (used in vv. 1 and 7) reveal that God intended for us to be in relationship to Him.

The three main statements in verse 1 are: first, **Do not fear, for I have redeemed you**; second, **I have called you by your name**; and third, **you are Mine**. First, throughout the Bible, we encounter the words **do not fear** (or something similar) frequently during times when God or His angels appeared. God gave the reason for them not to be afraid in verse 1: **for I have redeemed you**. *To redeem* someone or something means “to buy it back.” Often this word is associated with the slave markets. At least one English translation used the word “ransomed” (NLT) instead of **redeemed**. In this context, God would “buy back” His people (**Jacob** or **Israel**), from their captivity (they spent 70 years in captivity).

Second, Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, wrote, **I have called you by your name**. In the Bible, knowing someone by **name** meant you had a personal knowledge of that person and his or her character. This verse takes that idea a little further.

Third, because God had **created** and **formed** Israel, because He had **redeemed** them and **called** them by **name**, they were His—they belonged to Him. What would happen

in your life if you really believed you belonged to God? How would that change your thoughts, your words, and your actions?

Isaiah 43:2 is based on the truth that we are helpless without God—a truth that has support also in verse 1. God pointed out two areas of concern in verse 2: **waters/rivers** and **fire/flame**.

Verse 2 opens with a reminder: **I will be with you** (truth from v. 1). What does God’s being with us mean? Certainly it implies that without God, we are helpless. But God’s presence also means deliverance. In verse 2, God’s response was not only **I will be with you**, His response was also that **the waters** would not **overwhelm** them. Additionally, they would **not be scorched** by **the fire**, and **the flame** would **not burn** them. Perhaps this is a prophecy about or in reference to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace (Dan. 3). Only the God who created the water, the fire, and all people (and everything else in the universe) had the power, the authority, to protect His people from these dangers.

But not only would the Lord protect them, His constant and consistent presence (**I will be with you**) would guide them. Jesus’ final words to His disciples were, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). How do those words apply to your life today? What difference would it make in your decisions if you relied on the fact that the Lord is with you—always?

What are some lasting truths from Isaiah 43:1-2?

1. God created and formed all people.
2. Because God has redeemed us and calls us by our names, we should not fear.
3. God will be with us, no matter what dangers we face.

Isaiah 43:3-4

- ³ **“For I Yahweh your God,
the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior,
give Egypt as a ransom for you,
Cush and Seba in your place.**
- ⁴ **Because you are precious in My sight
and honored, and I love you,
I will give people in exchange for you
and nations instead of your life.”**

We Are Intended to Enjoy God’s Love. Whereas verses 1-2 focused on God’s creating us, redeeming us, and knowing us, verses 3-4 focus on the relationship we enjoy because of God’s love. The first word in verse 3, **For**, connects to the previous verses.

The first half of verse 3 reveals five titles for God the Father: **I ... Yahweh ... your God ... the Holy One of Israel ... your Savior.** These titles stand in apposition to and affirm each other; each one adds more information about God.

First, the title **I** calls attention to the personal nature of God. He dwells in heaven, but He also lives among His people on Earth. He is the great I AM (Ex. 3:14). This title is also reflected in Jesus’ seven great “I am” statements in the Gospel according to John (“I am the bread of life,” 6:35; “I am the light of the world,” 8:12; “I am the door of the sheep,” 10:7; “I am the good shepherd,” 10:11; “I am the resurrection and the life,” 11:25; “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” 14:6; “I am the true vine,” 15:1).

Second, the title **Yahweh**, a word built on the verb “to be.” Taking the consonants from this Hebrew word and the vowels from another Hebrew word meaning “Lord,” when

they are put together they form the word “Jehovah,” used in some older English translations of the Bible. The term here is perhaps best translated as “I will be who I always have been,” a phrase that describes God’s eternal nature and His consistency.

Third, the title **your God** reflects the personal nature of God, or perhaps better, God’s possession of the people whom He created. The word **God** refers to Lord or Master.

The fourth title of God in Isaiah 43:3 is **the holy one of Israel**. This title for God is used 25 times in Isaiah and only 5 times in the rest of the Old Testament. It points to the uniqueness of God (**the**), to being set apart with a purpose (**Holy One**), and to those who belong to Him (**Israel**, particularly the remnant in Isaiah and the new Israel [those circumcised by the Spirit] in Rom. 2:28-29). John J. Parsons described **the Holy One of Israel** in this way: He “is utterly unique, distinct, sacred, and set apart as the only One of its kind. He alone is worthy of true worship and adoration, since He alone is utterly peerless, without rival, and stands in relation to the world as Creator and Lord. Yes, only the Lord is infinitely and eternally Other. . . . To say that God is holy is to affirm that He is uniquely to be hallowed as utterly sacred.”³

The fifth title for God in the first half of Isaiah 43:3 is **your Savior**. Also translated as “save,” “free,” “deliver,” “salvation,” “defend,” “rescue,” “preserve,” and other similar words, the word **Savior** refers to the person who brings about these actions. The word **your** added to **Savior** reveals the personal nature of God’s actions toward His people.

The titles in the first part of verse 3 lay the basis for the actions in the latter part of verse 3. Because God is the reality behind these titles, He is able to do these actions. God will **give Egypt as a ransom for you** (that is, for Israel,

His people). Indeed, the exodus revealed that God already had done this. Exactly what was this **ransom**? People in Egypt died; the Israelites did not (God protected them). *To ransom* someone meant “to pay the price so that this person would be freed”; it is a term coming out of the slave markets. **Egypt** was first to be given as a ransom. Were **Cush** (Ethiopia) and **Seba** (possibly Yemen in northeast Africa, south of Egypt) given at the same time as Egypt or were they given in ransom later? The timing may not be settled for us, but for God who is outside of the realm of time, yesterday, today, and tomorrow are all the same. The word **Egypt** stands in parallel to **Cush** and **Seba**. The word **ransom** stands in parallel to and is explained by the phrase **in your place**.

In Isaiah 43:4, we find three statements of how God feels about Israel. First, they were **precious in His sight**. Second, they were **honored** as His people, His possession (at least the remnant of them who would leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem and the surrounding areas). Third, God said **I love you**. God feels the same way about Christians today. What difference does it make in your life that you are **precious** in God’s **sight**, that you are **honored** by Him, and that He loves **you**?

On the basis of how He felt about Israel (first part of v. 4), He would act on their behalf. The final two lines of verse 4 state that same truth in different ways (technically called synonymous parallelism). God stated, **I will give people in exchange for you and nations instead of your life**. Even though Israel would be living in exile in Babylon, God would bring in Cyrus (called “the anointed one,” or “messiah,” in Isa. 45:1) to release His people from Babylonian captivity (**people in exchange for you**). In a much greater way, God brought Jesus to give salvation to His people. God

loves us so much that He has provided the way for our salvation as well (John 3:16-18).

From Isaiah 43:3-4, God made it clear how much He loves His people. From the New Testament, we see how far God went to show that love—by sending His Only Son to redeem us (Luke 19:10). Clearly, God intends for us to enjoy His love.

What are some lasting truths from Isaiah 43:3-4?

1. God is Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, our personal and the only Savior.
2. Because of His great love for us, God has ransomed us even though we sinned against Him.
3. We should enjoy God’s love, immersing ourselves completely in it, rather than splashing in its puddles.

Isaiah 43:5-7

- ⁵ **“Do not fear, for I am with you;
I will bring your descendants from the east,
and gather you from the west.**
- ⁶ **I will say to the north: Give them up!
and to the south: Do not hold them back!
Bring My sons from far away,
and My daughters from the ends of the earth—**
- ⁷ **everyone called by My name
and created for My glory.
I have formed him; indeed, I have made him.”**

We Are Intended to Bring God Glory. Isaiah 43:1-2 revealed that because God created (formed) us, redeemed us, and called us by His name, we belong to Him and He protects us in difficult situations. We are intended to be in relationship with God. Verses 3-4 further describe God’s

ransom and give us the reasons: we are precious in God's sight, we are honored by God, and God loves us. We are intended to enjoy God's love. Verses 5-7 show that we are intended to bring God glory.

In verse 1, God told His people "Do not fear" because He had redeemed them. In verse 5, God told His people **Do not fear, for I am with you**. Today, many people in our country live in fear. Some of this fear results from the actions of terrorists. This week marks the 15th anniversary of 9/11. The memory of the 2,996 people killed on that day certainly causes us sorrow but should not cause us fear. The American military has lost thousands of brave men and women who protect our freedoms and we certainly need to honor them. But we (followers of Christ) must realize that God is with us—no matter what we face, even terrorists. Jesus has redeemed us personally just as God redeemed the people of Israel. How amazing! How wonderful!

The phrases **do not fear** and "do not be afraid" occur 54 times in the HCSB translation of the Bible. How many times does God need to say this for us to believe it? When we don't believe it, are we not sinning in our failure to trust God? What steps will you take this week to follow God's command **do not fear**?

As the result of God being with us (v. 5), God made a promise: He will gather His people from all directions (**from the ends of the earth**). In 539 B.C., God used a pagan military leader, Cyrus, to issue edicts allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to the surrounding areas (other returns were in 458 B.C. and 444 B.C.). In complete fulfillment of this promise, at the end of history, Jesus will return to **gather Christians from the east and from the west**—that is, **from the ends of the earth**—to be in heaven with Him.

Who are these people who will be gathered **from the ends of the earth**? In verse 6, God called them **My sons** and **My daughters**. In verse 7, God called them **everyone called by My name and created for My glory**.

What happens if you are not God's son or daughter, not one called by His name? Without redemption, those not called by His name do have something to fear. Jesus answered that question when He said, "Anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God" (John 3:18). If we really believed Jesus, would we not constantly be looking for ways to share our faith with those who do not know Him?

What lies ahead for me if I am not redeemed? Jesus answered that question in this way: they will be thrown "into the blazing furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:50). It is also a place "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). Eternal punishment and separation from God await those who are not rightly related to God. And that's another reason for us to share our faith with the lost.

In Isaiah 43:7, God stated that **everyone called by My name was created for My glory**. God answered the why question of creation. *To glorify God* is to appreciate Him (our attitudes), adore Him (our emotions), and subject ourselves to Him (our actions). This truth was incorporated into the *Westminster Shorter Catechism of Faith* (A.D. 1647), which reads in part, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever"—which is surely a good statement for all Christians to affirm and live by.

Think about that: we were created to bring **glory** to God. Is that your goal each day? If not, why not? What will you change in your life this week so your focus each day will be

to bring glory to God? How can you do that? You can spend part of each day with the Lord in prayer and in Bible reading and Bible study. But you should do more than that. You should seek out unbelievers to share your faith with them. You—and all Christians—should be God’s agents in serving those who need help around us: those who are ill (mentally or physically). You should help those who need food, clothing, shelter, or other essentials of life. You should stand with God in defending the unborn and living out God’s plan for sexuality and marriage. You should live in ways that attract people to God. You should stand up for justice—true justice, God’s righteous ways in the world.

In the last part of Isaiah 43:7, God reminded us that we need to bring Him glory because He **formed** us and **made** us. This also reflects similar statements in verse 1, thus providing, as it were, “book ends” to our focal verses. This truth is the basis for our duty of obedience to the God who loves us and desires that we live in relationship with Him.

The point of this Bible study is that we are created by God to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Our next three Bible studies come from the Book of Romans. Our next study, “One Great Problem,” focuses on the truth that without Christ, we are condemned forever.

What are some lasting truths from Isaiah 43:5-7?

1. We should not fear because God is with us.
2. God loves us so much—we are precious in His sight—that He has redeemed us (through Jesus’ blood as we will see in the next several Bible studies).
3. We are created by God, and thus our chief focus (end and goal) in life should be to glorify Him.

LIVE IT OUT

As you reflect on this Bible study, respond to the following:

Realizing that God created and formed all people, what should be our response to Him? _____

Since God is with us, no matter what dangers we face, how should we live this week? _____

What are some things you will do this month to enjoy God's love? _____

What will you change so you will glorify God in the way you live? _____

How does the truth that God loves you and that you are precious in His sight impact your self-image?

¹ Adapted from Mark Worthing, as quoted by John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, vol. 25 in the *Word Biblical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987], 129.

² Franz Delitzsch, "Isaiah," vol. 2, in vol. VII of *Commentary on the Old Testament In Ten Volumes* by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973 reprint (1884)], 189.

³ John J. Parsons, Hebrew for Christians, http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Names_of_G-d/names_of_g-d.html, "Hebrew names for God," "Hakadosh, The Holy One," downloaded from the *Internet*, February 1, 2016.

SESSION 3

ONE GREAT PROBLEM

THE PASSAGE

Romans 3:9-12,19-20,23

THE POINT

Without Christ, we are condemned forever.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

On Monday, Maria stopped by Bill's table in the teachers' lounge. She sat down and began talking with him. Maria told Bill that she did not understand what it meant to glorify God. As they talked, Bill began to realize that Maria did not understand her problem: sin. As they began to discuss sin, Maria said that she lived a good life, she helped people in need, and didn't do bad things. She asked Bill if she were OK, if she would earn her place in heaven. Bill told her that they would be discussing that in their Bible study group at church on Sunday. Maria told Bill that she was interested in the answer to her question so she would meet him there.

THE SETTING

Paul wrote the Book of Romans from Corinth about A.D. 56-57 to introduce himself and the doctrine he preached to the believers in Rome. He hoped to see them soon on his way to Spain (Rom. 15:24,28). Since the Book of Romans summarizes Paul's gospel, likely it was also sent to other churches as well. Paul did arrive in Rome, about A.D. 60, and lived in his own rented house until A.D. 62. However, he was under house arrest during this time. This gave him numerous opportunities to share the gospel. Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, writing in the *Holman New Testament Commentary* on Romans, said this: "Chapters 1–11 lay out the most logical and systematic presentation of God's righteousness effecting salvation for humankind that has ever been penned. Chapters 12–15 are the 'therefore'—the practical outworking of such a great salvation. Chapter 16 is a personal postscript from the apostle that brings this exemplary epistle down from polemic heights to people's hearts—people whom Paul knew and cared deeply about."¹

For further background, see "Justified: The Meaning" in the current, Fall 2016, issue of *The Biblical Illustrator*.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Romans 3:9-12

⁹ What then? Are we any better? Not at all! For we have previously charged that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

There is no one righteous, not even one.

**¹¹ There is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.**

**¹² All have turned away;
all alike have become useless.
There is no one who does what is good,
not even one.**

We Are All Sinners. In Romans 1, Paul introduced himself and the gospel of Jesus Christ he proclaimed (vv. 16-17). He also began to present the spiritual condition of the Gentiles—and of all people. In Romans 2, Paul moved from his theme of the power of the gospel to how this truth applied to Jews. In Romans 3, Paul stressed the accountability of both Jews and Gentiles before God. In other words, we are all sinners; no one is righteous in God’s eyes. In Romans 3:9-12, Paul introduced these verses by reinforcing the truth that all are sinners and without Christ, thus all are condemned forever.

In Romans 3:9, the connective words **what then** tie verse 9 to the previous verses (3:1-8) in which Paul revealed the truth that Jews do have an advantage over Greeks and Gentiles. So the question became, “Are Jews better off when it comes to God’s judgment?” Paul’s response was: **Not at all!** (or “No, not at all,” NLT). This same answer applies to us when we ask if our good deeds help us when we stand before God’s judgment.

Next, Paul gave the reason: **For we have previously charged that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin.** The words **previously charged** refer to Paul’s arguments in Romans 1:18–2:29, in which he pointed out that without Christ all of us are condemned forever.

The Greek word translated **sin** pictures an archer shooting at a target and falling short (theologically, falling short of obeying God). Paul first used this word in Romans 3:9 and then 47 other times in Romans (in the whole New Testa-

ment this word for **sin** is used 173 times). The phrase **under sin** (singular) reveals the domination of this evil force on **all** people. Some Bible students suggest that sins (plural) are the individual acts that reveal the overwhelming evil in our lives, **sin** (singular). **Sin** describes heart direction away from God and His revealed truth, the Bible. Sin governs everyone's life until they repent of their sins, trust and confess Christ as Savior, and allow Him to begin to transform them.

Although Paul answered the questions **What then?** and **Are we any better?** in v. 9, he supported his answer in verses 10-18 by stringing together a series of seven Old Testament quotations. These come from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (in this order: Pss. 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Isa. 59:7-8; Ps. 36:1) with the usual phrase **it is written** as the introduction.

Following Paul's statement that both Jews and Gentiles are guilty of sin (v. 9), William Newell outlined six charges God had against people who Paul presented in verses 10-12. (1) No one is righteous, not even one. (2) No one understands. (3) No one seeks God. (4) All have turned away. (5) All are useless. (6) No one does what is good.²

The first Old Testament quotation in verses 10-12 comes from Psalm 14:1-3. However, Paul added the word **righteous** to these verses from the Psalms. He does this to indicate that no people are in a right relationship with God. While *righteousness* is a consistent theme in the Book of Romans (34 times), Paul and other New Testament writers frequently used the terms *righteous* and *righteousness* (171 times). The lack of righteousness (which Rom. 3:10 reveals) supports the truth that we are all sinners. John Murray wrote: "Righteousness is the criterion by which sin is judged and the absence of righteousness means the presence of sin."³

Romans 3:11 continues the Old Testament quotation from Psalm 14:2 (or Ps. 53:2), however, it is not verbatim. Paul rephrased the Psalm in the negative, but the meaning is the same. Psalm 53 makes it clear that God is looking down from heaven and sees into the people's hearts He created. Because they don't place their faith in Him, they neither understand nor seek God. This also reveals the state of people today: those without God neither understand nor seek Him.

Romans 3:12 echoes Psalm 14:3 (or Ps. 53:3) and draws our attention back to the type of people described in Romans 1:21: "For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened."

Notice Paul's progressive description of people who do not respond to God based on the revelation of Himself in His creation or through His eternal attributes: (1) **All have turned away;** (2) **all alike have become useless.** (3) **There is no one who does what is good, not even one.**

Paul continued this description of people without God by stringing together the other quotations from the Old Testament in verses 13-18.

What are some lasting truths from Romans 3:9-12?

1. All people are sinners.
2. All people—regardless of religious or racial background—are sinners.
3. All people without God are not righteous, do not understand, do not seek God, have turned away, have become useless, and do not do what is good—not even one of them.
4. When discussing matters of faith, our appeal should not be to our intellect or to our feelings; primarily our appeal should rest on the foundation of Scripture.

Romans 3:19-20

19 Now we know that whatever the law says speaks to those who are subject to the law, so that every mouth may be shut and the whole world may become subject to God’s judgment. **20** For no one will be justified in His sight by the works of the law, because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.

We Are All Under God’s Judgment. In verses 9-12, Paul established that all people are sinners. In verses 19-20, Paul built on that truth and described the purpose of the law; as a result of the law, we’re all under God’s judgment. John Murray summarized this truth when he wrote: “Having quoted these testimonies from the Old Testament to support what he had established in the earlier part of the epistle that all, both Jews and Greeks, were under sin, the apostle in verses 19, 20 draws his conclusions from the witness of Scripture to the effect that all without exception lie under the judgment of God.”⁴

Paul began verse 19 with **Now we know** (“Obviously,” NLT). The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write these words based on the quotations from the Old Testament he cited in verses 10-18. These quotations formed the basis for Paul’s statements in verses 19-20.

The next few words, **that whatever the law says**, need explanation. **Whatever** is all inclusive; it refers to the entire **law**. Just as we use the word *bank* in different ways (trust, turn an airplane, side of a river, financial institution), the word **law** was used in at least six ways in the Old Testament as well as by both Jews and Christians of Paul’s day. (1) The word **law** sometimes referred to God’s revealed will. (2) **Law** also referred to a body of legal regulations. (3) **Law**

sometimes referred to the Ten Commandments. (4) **Law** also referred to the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, which often collectively are called the Pentateuch or the five rolls). (5) **Law** also referred to the first part of Hebrew Scripture, the other parts were the *Prophets* (Former and Latter) and the *Writings* (primarily Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and several others). (6) Finally, **law** also referred to the Old Testament as a whole. On the basis of Paul quoting the Psalms and Isaiah in verses 10-18, his likely use of the word **law** in verse 19 was to the entire Old Testament.

The meaning of Paul's next words in verse 19 (**speaks to those who are subject to the law**) are debated by scholars. Do these words refer to Jews (to whom the law was given)? Certainly, some of Romans 1 was devoted to Jews; additionally, much of chapters 2 and 3 were devoted to the Jews. However, other scholars argue that these words refer to both Jews and Gentiles (all the world's people). Since Scripture is the best interpreter of itself, all we need to do is to look at the remainder of verse 19. The phrases **every mouth** and **the whole world** lead us to conclude that **those who are subject to the law** refers to all people. Paul's argument in the first three chapters of Romans reinforces this interpretation.

The remainder of verse 19, **so that every mouth may be shut and the whole world may become subject to God's judgment**, emphasizes the law's purpose. This purpose is to remove any excuse that any group of people (Jews or Gentiles) might suggest to avoid **God's judgment**. Barclay Newman and Eugene Nida wrote: "Paul reminds the Jews among his readers that the Law applies (literally 'speaks') to those who live under the Law, that is, to the Jews; and so this means that the Jews themselves are guilty of the sins

described in the previous verses. It has already been concluded that the Gentiles stand under God's judgment, and now the Jews also are shown to be guilty in God's sight, so the purpose of the Law is clearly to stop all human excuses and bring the whole world under God's judgment."⁵

Verse 19 emphasized the law's purpose, to reveal the reason for God's judgment on all people; whereas, verse 20 indicates the result, as reflected in the Greek word translated **for** ("Therefore," KJV). This Greek conjunction (*dioti*) is translated "because" half of the 23 times it is used in the New Testament; the word *because* may help us to better understand the first part of verse 20.

Paul's next words in verse 20 are **no one will be justified in His sight**. The phrase **no one** in Greek is literally "all flesh." This includes all people—even the Jews who claimed to be God's people. (John 3:18 presents this truth more fully.)

The legal term **justified** ("made right with God," NLT) or *justify* is used 39 times in the New Testament, 15 times in Romans, and 6 times in Romans 3. The word **justified** means approving someone or declaring (announcing or pronouncing) them to be righteous (in right standing with God). Faith is the means of justification (Rom. 3:22,25,26,28). Justification is God's gift (Eph. 2:8) and comes only through His grace.

Paul wrote that this justification will be **in His** [God's] **sight**. Since justification is God's gift, God is the only one who can justify a person. Paul also wrote that no person could be justified **by the works of the law**. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write these words because faith, not **works**, is the means of justification (Rom. 3:22,25,26,28; Eph. 2:8-10). Why? Paul's answer was, **because the knowledge of sin comes through the law**. The law can't save us because that

was and is not its intended purpose. What the **law** was designed to do was to lead us to **the knowledge of sin**, specifically our sin—as evidenced in our lives. That is, we can most clearly see our rebellion against God (**sin**) by the bad things we do, say, and think (sins). Without the **law**, we would not be able to determine our **sin**, but the law leads us to **the knowledge of sin** (Rom. 7:7).

We care about our neighbors and their temporal problems—cancer, family issues, job loss—but we don't often show the same care about their eternal judgment. We often don't think about our neighbors who are living under judgment. This Bible study teaches us that every person is under God's judgment (Rom. 3:9-10,19). Why, then, would we not want to show that we care about our neighbors and point them to the truth about their sin? If we show we care about their temporary problems (sickness, family issues, jobs, and so forth), then why would we not show we care about their eternal problems and their eternal destiny?

What are some lasting truths from Romans 3:19-20?

1. Every person in the world is subject to God's judgment.
2. The function of the law was and is to bring us to the knowledge of sin.
3. Faith in God is made possible through Jesus, not through works of the law; such faith leads to our being justified before God.
4. Since we care about temporary problems, we should also care about eternal problems and share the eternal solution (Jesus) with all those around us.

Romans 3:23

²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

We All Fall Short of God's Glory. Paul began his first sentence in this section with verses 21-22. His basic point was that God's righteousness does not come through the law but comes to believers through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul's second sentence in the Greek text encompasses verses 23-26; the major focus of these verses was to reveal more about God's righteousness.

The verse divisions found in our modern Bibles were added to the Greek New Testament in A.D. 1551 by a French printer and classical scholar, Robert Estienne (also known as Stephanus or Stephens), to aid readers. Scholars have pointed out a number of places where these verse divisions appear to be awkwardly placed. The division between Romans 3:22-23 in the Greek New Testament is one of those places. There probably should not have been any punctuation between verses 22 and 23, and Paul's sentence probably should have ended in the middle of verse 22. Thus the words "since there is no distinction" would fit naturally with verse 23: **For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** The word **for** can also be translated "because" and provides the connection between the words "no distinction" (v. 22) and **all** (v. 23).

Paul previously had pointed out this lack of distinction or difference between Jews and Gentiles (vv. 9,10,12). Verse 23 again points out that lack of distinction: **all have sinned.**

Verse 23 contains three major concepts: first, **sinned**; second, **fall short**; and third, **the glory of God.**

First, the words **all have sinned** reveal the universal condition of all people. The Greek tense of the verb (aorist) describes a past action, a fact. **Sinned** means "missing the mark," "missing the target"; it refers to missing what God had created people to be and to do: to obey and glorify Him.

Sin means to think, speak, and act in ways that oppose God or His character as revealed in His Word.

Second, **fall short** links people's actions in the past, **sinned**, with their results in the present, **fall short** (of God's glory). The verb **fall short** comes from athletic vocabulary. *To fall short* refers to a runner who is behind or to a boxer who nearly wins. **Fall short** refers to all who sin (that is, everyone). Unlike the previous verb, **have sinned** (which refers to actions in the past), the verb **fall short** refers to the present condition and continual state resulting from those previous actions. This falling short reveals that our greatest need is forgiveness. Peter told Mark about an event in Jesus' life when Jesus healed a man who was paralyzed (Mark 2:1-12). As soon as Jesus forgave the man, he was healed (spiritually and physically) and was able to walk. When Jesus forgives us, He forgives our sin (and sins) and stops our falling short of God's glory.

Third, Paul identified what we **fall short of: the glory of God**. Grammatically, we understand that **God** is both the source of this glory and the object of this glory. Bible students point out that the phrase **the glory of God** is used in various contexts in the Bible. Perhaps Paul referred to failing to give God glory (Luke 17:17; Acts 12:23; Rom. 4:20; Rev. 4:9, and others). Paul may have referred to our failing to receive the glory that God gives (John 5:44; Rom. 2:10; Heb. 3:3, and others). Paul also could have referred to our failure to reflect the glory we received by being created in His image and likeness (1 Cor. 11:7; 2 Cor. 8:23, and others). Perhaps Paul referred to our failure to live in ways that reflect the glory God will give to believers at Jesus' return (Rom. 5:2; Col. 3:4; and others). Finally, Paul may have referred to the glory believers reflect because of their union with Christ (John 17:22; 2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:27, and others).

In any case, God created us to share in His glory; all of us responded by sinning and falling short of that glory.

In our previous study we learned we were created to bring God glory. In this study, we have seen why we can't do that on our own—that our greatest problem is sin. Our sinning causes us to fall short of the glory of God. The law can only point us to the recognition of the truth that we have sinned. We can't earn salvation through the law, because we can never fulfill the demands of God's law. Although without Christ we are condemned forever, there is hope for us. In our next study we will discover the reason for our hope: Jesus Christ.

What are some lasting truths from Romans 3:23?

1. All people—despite any racial or religious distinctions—have sinned.
2. Our sin (and sins) caused the result that we have fallen short of what God intended for us to be and to do.
3. Our sin has caused us to miss God's glory, the glory He created us to be a part of.
4. Although our sin causes us to miss living in God's glory, God already has provided hope for us—in Jesus Christ.

LIVE IT OUT

As you reflect on this Bible study, respond to the following.

What, if any, is the advantage in being raised a Jew or growing up in a Christian home? _____

How is the Mosaic law related to sin? _____

What is the purpose of God's law in your life? _____

Why don't we as Bible-believing Christians act as if we believe that eternal matters are more important than temporary ones? _____

What impact does your falling short of God's glory through your sin have on your life? _____

Since we have all sinned, what hope do any of us have to experience God's glory? _____

¹ Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, *Romans*, vol. 6 in the *Holman New Testament Commentary* [Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2000], 12.

² William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1938], 80-82, slightly altered based on the different translation used.

³ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980], 103.

⁴ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 105.

⁵ Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*, in *Helps for Translators* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1973], 62.

SESSION 4

ONE GREAT SAVIOR

THE PASSAGE

Romans 5:6-11

THE POINT

God offers us hope and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Bill had noticed that Maria was avoiding him. Finally, on Friday, Maria came to the teacher's lounge for lunch. She approached Bill and asked if she could share his table. Bill told her that he'd be happy for her to join him. Maria sat down, took out her lunch, and looked at Bill. Maria told Bill she had been avoiding him because she was mad. She told Bill that their last Bible study session had upset her. She thought she would go to heaven because she was a good person. She told him that now she knew she was guilty before God and being good was not enough. Maria also told Bill that the last study hinted at a hope, but she needed more explanation. Bill told Maria that what she needed to be able to get into heaven was Jesus. He also said that their next Bible study on Sunday would explain that. With some relief, Maria told Bill that she'd see him on Sunday.

THE SETTING

In our last Bible study, we examined our one great problem—that without Christ, we are condemned forever. We can't earn salvation by our good works or by belonging to any group (racial, religious, economic, social, or otherwise). We are all guilty before God. Despite our hopeless situation, this Bible study offers us hope through Jesus Christ, the one great Savior. Stated another way, God offers us hope and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Romans 5 begins a new section of the letter—it deals with the results of being made righteous (5:1–8:39). Romans 5:1-11 describes the results of justification—peace with God. Leon Morris explained: “The justified person has peace and joy, and Paul exults in this. In the process he further emphasizes the importance of the death of the righteous Christ for sinful people. The love of God is behind all this. Paul does not think of God as remote and indifferent but as full of love, and it is from His love that our salvation proceeds.”¹ Whereas Romans 5:1-5 focuses on the benefits of salvation, verses 6-11 describe the reconciliation (bringing together of two or more) of salvation. Our focus for this study is (1) Jesus died for us (vv. 6-8); (2) Jesus saves us (v. 9); and (3) Jesus reconciles us to God (vv. 10-11).

For further background, see “To Be Reconciled” in the current, Fall 2016, issue of *The Biblical Illustrator*.

STUDY THE BIBLE***Romans 5:6-8***

⁶ For while we were still helpless, at the appointed moment, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. ⁸ But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!

Jesus Died for Us. Whereas Romans 5:1-5 focused on the benefits of salvation, in verses 6-8, Paul focused on the source of salvation: Jesus who died for us.

In Romans 5:6, the connective word translated **for** (“when,” NLT) joins verse 5 (“this hope will not disappoint us”) to verse 6: **while we were still helpless** (“yet without strength,” KJV; “utterly helpless,” NLT).

Why did the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to say we were **helpless**? Previously, Paul had established this by his arguments in Romans 1:18–2:29, where he pointed out that without Christ all of us are condemned forever. Paul also pointed out that “both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin” (3:9). We are helpless because we can’t earn our way into heaven. We are helpless because we don’t have a sacrifice appropriate for our sin (and sins).

Yet, **while we were still helpless ... Christ died for the ungodly** (for us). Why? First, because God’s love for us is evidenced by His sending Jesus (Matt. 1:21,23). Next, because Jesus’ obedience is evidenced by His sacrificial death, even death on a cross (Luke 19:10; Phil. 2:8). Our salvation was not an accident or afterthought. This was God’s plan all along as evidenced by the first mention of salva-

tion in the Bible—Genesis 3:15—right after sin entered the world (Gen. 3:1-7).

When did Jesus die for the ungodly? Paul gave us the answer in verse 6: **at the appointed moment** (“in due time,” KJV; “at just the right time,” NLT). Just a few years prior to writing to the Romans, Paul had written to the Galatian Christians, “When the time came to completion, God sent His son” (Gal. 4:4). God always acts in the most appropriate time, with the most appropriate actions, securing the most appropriate results. What might happen if we acted in this way?

The main part of Romans 5:6 is **Christ died for the ungodly**. The conjunction **for** in verse 7 connects the main idea of verse 6 with further explanation in verse 7: **For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person** (“a righteous man,” KJV; “an upright person,” NLT) **perhaps someone might even dare to die**. Most people can easily understand why a good person might sacrifice his or her life for another (a husband for a wife; a mom for a baby or child; a soldier for fellow soldiers or for country; police or firefighters for those they protect). However, for Jesus—the only completely innocent person who ever lived—to sacrifice His life for **the ungodly** is difficult to understand.

The depth of love that resulted in Jesus’ sacrifice is too much for us to fully comprehend with our lack of spiritual understanding. Several years after Paul wrote Romans, he penned these words as part of a magnificent prayer: “I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God’s love, and to know the Messiah’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17b-19).

In Romans 5:8, Paul concluded his thought: **But God proves** (“commendeth,” KJV; “showed,” NLT) **His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us!** The apostle Peter echoed this truth when he wrote: “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm” (1 Pet. 3:18).

Christ did not wait until we performed enough good deeds, until we were sinless, until we were righteous (an impossibility without Jesus living in us) to die **for us**. He died **for us** when we were at our worst—**while we were still sinners**. That’s the ultimate way God showed **His own love for us**. Out of your gratitude to God for sending Jesus to die for you, how will you show your love for God this week? With whom and when will you share your story of faith in Christ?

What we must understand is that the cross is the ultimate proof of God’s love. What is the ultimate proof of our love for God? Perhaps the best way we can show what the four-letter word LOVE means is by another four-letter word: OBEY (John 14:15,23). If God judged our love for Him by the way we obey Him, what would be the outcome for you?

What are some lasting truths from Romans 5:6-8?

1. We are helpless and hopeless to secure salvation based on our own actions; Jesus—and only Jesus—did that for all who will believe in Him.
2. God sent Jesus to die “at the appropriate time.”
3. God did not wait until we became good enough (which we could never do); He sent Jesus to die for us “while we were still sinners.”
4. The cross is the ultimate proof of God’s love.

Romans 5:9

⁹ Much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by His blood, we will be saved through Him from wrath.

Jesus Saves Us. Our focus in the previous three verses was on the marvelous truth that Jesus died for us. What difference in our lives does that make for us? Verse 9 shows the result: Jesus saves us from God's wrath. Barclay Newman and Eugene Nida wrote: "In verses 6-8 Paul has established the fact of God's love for the sinner. He now reminds the Romans of what this has meant for them in the past (it has put them into a right relation with God) and calls their attention to what it will mean for them in the future (it will save them from God's wrath on the final day of judgment)."²

The words **much more then** connect either verse 8 with verse 9 or they connect the truths of the two clauses in verse 9: **since we have now been declared righteous by His blood** with **we will be saved through Him from wrath**. In either case, the meaning is similar. In essence, these two main clauses present a before-after picture (a present possession and a future reality). Another way of looking at this verse is since-then structure (**since we have now been declared righteous, then we will be saved through Him**). The pronoun **we** in both clauses refers to believers, specifically, to the Christians in Rome.

Let's look more carefully at the words **have now been declared righteous by His blood**. The verb form **have been declared righteous** is one word in Greek; the tense of the verb indicates that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to focus on the kind of the action (certainty; factuality) rather than on the time of the action as we normally do in English.

The words **declared righteous** (“justified,” KJV; “have been made right in God’s sight,” NLT) are a legal term that indicates the standing all Christians have been given before God (see also 5:1). How can we be awarded that standing? Paul previously had made clear the impossibility of achieving that goal through our own efforts (3:10,19-20). Paul explained exactly how we were declared righteous: **by His [Christ’s] blood**. That is, Jesus substituted His life for our lives (one’s life is in the blood, Lev. 17:11). When a Jew presented an animal sacrifice, he placed his hands on the animal, symbolizing that his life was being represented by the animal that was to be sacrificed (Lev. 1:4; 4:4,15,24,33). **By His blood**, by giving His life, Jesus’ action resulted in our being **declared righteous**.

The more difficult action was for God to justify—to declare righteous—sinful people who believe in Jesus. The easier (and resultant) action is that **we will be saved**. In the New Testament, salvation has past, present, and future actions involved. In the past, we were saved from our sin(s) (usually called *justification*). In the present, we are being saved, called to do good works (Eph. 2:10), being transformed into people like Christ (usually called *sanctification*). In the future, we will be saved from the coming judgment of all people and made perfectly into God’s image (usually called *glorification*).

Paul used the future tense in seven of the eight occurrences of the words we **will be saved** in his letter to the Romans. To the question, “What is the means for our salvation?” Paul answered **through Him**. These words refer (1) to Christ’s coming into the world to be “God with us” (Emmanuel; Matt. 1:23), (2) to His teaching us about God and how we should live, (3) to Jesus’ living a life of perfect obedience, (4) to His crucifixion, and (5) finally culminat-

ing in Jesus' resurrection. All of this was done because of God's great love for us.

Paul previously had stated that the answer to God's **wrath** is the gospel (Rom. 1:16-18). The Greek term translated **wrath** is used 36 times in the New Testament—12 in Romans—with most of them referring to God's wrath. One way to define God's wrath is His settled opposition to sin. God expresses His wrath because people do things that reveal they stand opposed to God; people don't live in the ways God intended. Rather than a temporary outburst of anger, God's wrath is His settled response to our sin, to our rebellion against Him.

God desires us to live in ways that bring honor to Him and enable us to reach the potential for our lives. Paul wrote: "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9). God's nature is to respond to sin not only with wrath but also with love (and the ultimate expression of His love—sending Jesus to bring us salvation). Christians will not experience God's wrath at the end time because we, who were once enemies of God, have been transformed into God's friends (Rom. 5:10).

What are some lasting truths from Romans 5:9?

1. God declares all believers to be righteous (justified by faith in Christ) in the present.
2. God declares believers to be righteous because of Jesus' blood that was shed for all who believe in Him.
3. The salvation God offers affects believers' past, present, and future.
4. God's salvation of believers will result in our being saved from God's wrath, His response based on His opposition to sin.

Romans 5:10-11

¹⁰ For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life! ¹¹ And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have now received this reconciliation through Him.

Jesus Reconciles Us to God. In our first set of verses in this study (Rom. 5:6-8), we focused on the truth that Jesus died for us. In verse 9, we focused on the truth that Jesus saves us. In our last set of verses (vv. 10-11), we'll focus on the truth that Jesus reconciles us to God. Taken together, the point of these verses (vv. 6-11) is that God offers us hope and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus is our one great Savior.

Verses 9-10 have several parallels; that is, a line in verse 9 is mirrored or expanded by a similar line in verse 10. This comparison is best presented by the following chart.

Romans 5:9	Romans 5:10
Much more than	Then how much more
We have now been declared righteous	We were reconciled to God
By His blood	Through the death of His Son
We will be saved through Him	We will be saved by His life

The words translated **For if** (“And since,” NLT) refer to the time **while** (“when,” KJV) **we** (now believers) were without Christ. The truth that sinners are **enemies** of God occurs repeatedly in the New Testament (Rom. 11:28; Eph. 2:15-16;

Phil. 3:18; Col. 1:21; Jas. 4:4). Some people are *active* enemies of God because they oppose God and what He stands for; many others are *passive* enemies of God because they refuse or neglect to follow His ways. Although some people may not view God as an enemy, God views all people without faith in Christ as His enemies because they choose to live in sin and rebellion against Him; enemies reject or ignore what God has done in Jesus Christ.

Concerning being **reconciled to God**, Leon Morris wrote: “Reconciliation is a vivid word, pointing to the making of peace after a quarrel. It is a concept Paul uses a number of times to bring out the significance of the cross (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20-22). From this point of view the cross meant doing away with sin, breaking down the barrier that kept God and people apart, and thus the restoration of good relations.”³

Paul is the only New Testament writer who used this particular term for **reconciliation** (and only in Rom. 5:11; 11:15; and 2 Cor. 5:18,19). That believers **were reconciled to God** refers to believers’ conversion, as the tense of this Greek verb indicates, a past completed action. In other words, all the work of salvation has been done by Christ—**through the death of His [God’s] Son**.

The startling truth is that **while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God** [justified, “declared righteous,” v. 9]. How? Paul answered: **we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son** (or “by His blood,” v. 9). **While we were enemies**, God provided the initiative (by sending His Son, not by anything we did), and God provided the means or instrument, **through the death of His Son**. We can do nothing to merit or earn salvation because God already has provided all we need—and all **while we were enemies!** What an awesome expression of how much God

loves us! What an amazing example of His grace! What an astounding demonstration of doing for us what we could never do for ourselves!

Since God **reconciled** us while we were still His **enemies** by **the death of His Son**, how much easier it is for Him to save us **by His** [Jesus'] **life**? When the New Testament speaks of Jesus' life, it usually refers to Christ's birth, teaching, healings, crucifixion, and resurrection as a whole. However, many scholars view Paul's use of the words **His life** in this context to refer specifically to Jesus' resurrection **life**—the **life** that not only proves who Jesus is, but the kind of life that believers will enjoy following death. The truth we will **be saved** refers to the future aspect of salvation we frequently call glorification, the life we anticipate "when He appears" and when "we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

In addition to this glorious revelation that we will **be saved**, Paul revealed an action believers (should) take: **we also rejoice in God** ("we also joy in God," KJV). The present tense of this verb indicates how we should rejoice in God—repeatedly and continuously. What would our lives be like if we repeatedly and continuously rejoiced in God? How would that impact our lives, our families and friends, our co-workers, our churches, our communities, our nation? Our faithfulness to God, our obedience to His commands, our sharing of the gospel, can be done properly only **through our Lord Jesus Christ**. Paul expanded this reason for our rejoicing by writing: **We have now received this reconciliation through Him**.

Jesus died for us; Jesus saves us; and Jesus reconciles us to God. God offers us hope and forgiveness only through Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus is the one great Savior. In our next Bible study on Romans 10:1-3,8b-13, we will focus more

on our response to God’s great offer, the one great commitment we must make to receive the blessings God has waiting for us to experience, enjoy, and exult in—eternally.

What are some lasting truths from Romans 5:10-11?

1. Before we trusted God, we were His enemies because of our behavior and our failure to live by His standards.
2. At that time, when we were still God’s enemies, God took the initiative and made us His friends through the death of Jesus, His Son.
3. When we trusted God, we were declared righteous by God through Jesus’ death and resurrection.
4. Because we as believers have accepted God’s offer of salvation, we should rejoice continuously.

LIVE IT OUT

As you reflect on this Bible study, respond to the following.

How would you describe the peace you have with God?

What difference does that peace make in the way you will live this next week? _____

Why are all people helpless when it comes to trying to secure their own salvation? _____

What is your response to the fact that God proves His love for you by sending Jesus to die for you? _____

How do you respond to the truth that God declares believers to be righteous and saves us? _____

Why would God make provisions for our salvation while we were still His enemies? _____

How do we know that all the work of salvation has been done by Christ and that we can't do anything to earn it?

What will you do this week to show that you rejoice in God saving you through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son? _____

¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988], 217.

² Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*, in *Helps for Translators* [New York: United Bible Societies, 1973], 99.

³ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 225.

SESSION 5

ONE GREAT COMMITMENT

THE PASSAGE

Romans 10:1-3,8b-13

THE POINT

To be saved, I must trust in Christ.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

During the week of testing their students, Maria and Bill were busy and did not see each other until Friday. As Bill was beginning to eat his lunch, Maria came into the teachers' lounge and joined Bill. She told Bill that she understood that God offers us hope and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. She asked him if there was something she should do. Bill told Maria that there was something she should do—to be saved, she must trust Christ. Bill and Maria talked for a few minutes. He also told her they would be discussing this matter in their Bible study group on Sunday. Maria told Bill that she was looking forward to getting some answers and that she again would meet him there.

THE SETTING

Some New Testament Bible students believe that Paul concluded his major discussion of the doctrine of salvation at the end of Romans 1–8 and then moved on to discuss the relationship of Jews and Gentiles in the church at Rome in Romans 9–11. Indeed, chapters 9–11 explore the relationship of Israel to God after Jesus was born, taught, healed, was crucified and raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven. Other scholars believe that Paul’s explanation of the doctrine of salvation opened the door for him to discuss the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church at Rome.

In either case, there is a key distinction between Romans 1–8 and Romans 9–11. (Most scholars also consider Rom. 12–15 to focus on application of the truths in Rom. 1–11, and Rom. 16 to focus on final greetings.) In 9:1-29, Paul wrote about Israel’s relationship with God after Jesus’ ascension into heaven.

Leon Morris summed up Paul’s discussion in this way: “The thrust of Paul’s argument is that the Old Testament, on which those who taught the eternal security of all Israel relied, in fact bears clear witness to the truth that God’s purpose is concerned only with the remnant of the nation. God fulfills His promise by saving the remnant together with some from the Gentiles. The promise has not failed, even if it was fulfilled in a way that many of the nation did not expect.”¹

Paul then wrote about the responsibility all people have before God (Rom. 9:30–10:21).

This is the **Evangelism Session** for this quarter.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Romans 10:1-3

¹ **Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation!** ² **I can testify about them that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.** ³ **Because they disregarded the righteousness from God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to God’s righteousness.**

Christ Is the Only Way of Salvation—A Salvation We Could Never Earn. In Romans 9, 10, and 11, Paul began each chapter by expressing concern about the Jewish error of disregarding Christ as the only way to salvation—a salvation we could never earn.

Paul opened verse 1 by addressing his audience: **Brothers** (“Brethren,” KJV; “brothers and sisters,” NIV, NLT), a term used to refer to fellow Christians. Paul used the term **brothers** 97 times, 13 in Romans. The word revealed a contrast between those who understood God’s righteousness and the word **them** used later in the verse referring to Jews who failed to understand God’s righteousness. By his use of the term **brothers**, Paul invited all Christians of his day to join in his prayer for his fellow Jews to be saved.

What would happen today if believers expressed an intense desire that all those around us—even those who previously had rejected Christ—be saved? How do your actions express that intense desire? If your actions don’t express that desire, why not?

Paul continued verse 1 by expressing his **heart’s desire**. The Greek word here rendered **desire** (“longing,” NLT) is

used nine times in the New Testament—six times by Paul—and refers to what is longed for. This Greek word can also be translated as “good purpose,” “good will,” “delight,” and “purpose.” Paul intensified his use of the word **desire** by modifying it with the words **my heart’s**. These words reveal Paul’s deepest and strongest feelings and thoughts.

Paul did not merely express his **desire**, his feelings or thoughts, he linked them to action: **prayer to God**. If we really desired the salvation of those around us, why would we not spend time praying to God? For Paul to pray that God would save them indicated that he did not believe their eternal destiny was finalized yet. Paul’s prayer was not simply a wish; it was a call for God—the only one who had the power to save His people, the unbelieving Jews—to do so. Paul not only believed in evangelism, he also prayed for it and worked for it.

Paul’s **prayer** was directed to **God**, and it was **concerning them**. Some English translations provide the noun antecedent for **them** (“Israel,” KJV; “the Israelites,” NIV; “the people of Israel,” NLT). These translations are based on the fact that some Greek New Testament manuscripts have the word *Israel* in Romans 10:1 while other manuscripts have the word **them** at that point. Context certainly confirms that Israel (the subject for Rom. 9) is the referent for **them** in 10:1.

Finally, the purpose of Paul’s prayer was **for their salvation**. Paul intensely desired that his fellow Jews be saved. Paul was related to unbelieving Jews by race and by history. At one time he was such a strong believer in the Jewish way of thinking that he persecuted Christians. However, following his experience of seeing the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), Paul realized that way was wrong and that only through Christ could anyone have the righteousness God demanded of His people.

Paul began verse 2 by noting his authority to speak: he had been an unbelieving Jew. He continued by complimenting the Jews because of their **zeal for God**. The word **zeal** (“enthusiasm,” NLT; “are zealous for,” NIV) literally means “heat.” In the positive sense, it refers to passion for defending, embracing, or pursuing God. In the negative sense, it refers to jealousy. Although the Jews had **zeal**, Paul said, they had it **not according to knowledge** (“it is misdirected zeal,” NLT). The form of the Greek word translated **knowledge** refers to a deep understanding, a practice of correctly grasping the purpose of God’s revelation of Himself through Christ. The Jews understood God’s law in the judicial sense, but they failed to understand its purpose (which Paul explained in Gal. 2:16; 3:24).

In Romans 10:3, Paul described the three-fold reason for their failure. (1) The unbelieving Jews **disregarded the righteousness from God**. This **righteousness from God** was Christ—the only way for salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). (2) The unbelieving Jews **attempted to establish their own righteousness**. They viewed the law, not the lawgiver, as supreme. Many Jews, especially the Pharisees, lived their lives attempting to follow their most minute interpretations of the law. They failed to see that the goal of the law was to point out their inability to keep it and for it to lead them to Christ (Rom. 10:4). (3) The unbelieving Jews had **not submitted themselves to God’s righteousness**. Whereas the law called for submission to God, unbelieving Jews submitted their actions to the law rather than to its author.

How have you submitted yourself to God’s righteousness? What actions will you change this week to more fully submit yourself to God? God’s righteousness, Jesus, is the only way we can be made right with God (Rom. 5:1,10). We must

communicate that truth to those around us. One indication that we really have submitted to God (and to His commands) is that we willingly share His message of Jesus being the only way to salvation. In studying these verses, our focus has been two-fold: first, we can't earn our salvation (Eph. 2:8-10), and second, Christ is the only way to salvation (John 14:6). How will you respond to these emphases?

What are some lasting truths from Romans 10:1-3?

1. When we are saved, we will pray and work for the salvation of others, particularly those to whom we are close (such as family and friends).
2. Our giving to mission causes indicates that we desire all people, no matter who or where they are, to be saved.
3. Genuine enthusiasm for God exhibits itself in seeking to evangelize others.
4. Submitting ourselves to God means sharing His message of salvation with all people, especially with those around us.

Romans 10:8b-10

^{8b} The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. This is the message of faith that we proclaim: ⁹ If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation.

We Are Saved When We Confess and Believe Jesus is Lord. In the first 3 verses of Romans 10, we focused our study on the *who* of salvation—that Christ is the only way of salvation and that we cannot earn our salvation. In verses

8b-10 we will focus on the *how* of salvation—we are saved when we confess and believe that Jesus is Lord.

Verse 8 begins with words that introduce a quotation from Scripture: “What does it say?” The Old Testament quotation (**The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart**) is from Deuteronomy 30:14. Likely, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use it because of Paul’s previous citing of Old Testament passages in Romans 10:5-7.

Instead of God’s **message** being far away (vv. 6-7), Paul stated, **the message is near you**. The word **message** (“word,” KJV) refers to God’s revelation both *about* and *in* Jesus Christ—in other words, God’s revelation of Himself. Paul then explained to his readers why **the message is near you**: it is **in your mouth and in your heart**. These two prepositional phrases indicate that Paul was writing to Christians who both talked about Jesus and believed in Him.

Paul further described **the message** by stating that it was **the message of faith that we proclaim** (“preach,” KJV, NLT). The word **faith** refers to belief or trust leading to salvation. In this case, Paul trusted what God had said (the Old Testament) and done (that He had come to us in the form of a person, Jesus Christ). Following Paul’s salvation, he immediately began to **proclaim** Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead. The word **we** indicated that Paul was joined by other believers in his evangelism and sharing the gospel message (Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and others). The punctuation between verses 8-9 (a colon) indicates that verse 9 explains **the message** of verse 8 more fully.

The structure of verses 9-10 indicates that these two verses should be studied together. For example, the confession with the mouth in verse 9a is repeated in verse 10b; the belief in your heart in verse 9b is repeated in verse 10a; the salvation in verse 9c is repeated in the salvation in verse 10c.

Paul began verse 9 by writing, **If you confess with your mouth. Confess** literally translated is “say the same thing” or “agree with.” The Greek word is used 24 times in the New Testament. This word refers to declaring something as true, professing acceptance of something, and speaking out freely. The **mouth** is the typical agent or instrument through which confession is made.

Paul next listed the words that are confessed: **Jesus is Lord**. The Roman government required people to burn incense and say “Caesar is Lord” (thus the persecution of Christians who would not say it). Likely, the earliest Christian confession, **Jesus is Lord**, did not result as a reaction to the Roman government. Rather, it was a summary of Christian faith. The confession **Jesus is Lord** links the Old Testament word **Lord** with the New Testament **Jesus** (a name that means “God is salvation”). This linking of Jesus with God enabled Jews to see how Jesus’ words and actions reflected His Father. This confession refers to an action—speaking the truth from the heart.

What this confession means is further explained by the words **believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead**. To **believe in your heart** refers to an action that is at the center of a person’s being. The tense of both the verbs **confess** and **believe** point out the factual nature of these actions and refer to an on-going mindset.

Unfortunately, many people today have relegated **believe in your heart** to an “easy believism” of merely agreeing with a fact. This is not biblical believing. The content of believing is **that God raised Him [Jesus] from the dead**. The center of Christianity rests on this truth. God took the worst the Devil could do (having Jesus crucified) and turned it into the best for human beings (Jesus’ resurrection and our salvation).

The result of this confession and this belief is that **you will be saved**. As with most of Paul's repeated uses of **will be saved**, this one is future tense. Likely, Paul had in mind the future aspect of salvation that will occur when Jesus returns for us (individually or when God brings history to a close). Believers will never be subject to God's wrath (Rom. 3:23-25).

As a continuation of Romans 10:9, verse 10 repeats and adds to the truths of verse 9. When any person (Jew or Gentile) **believes with the heart**, this results in **righteousness** (being rightly related to God). Likewise, when any person **confesses with the mouth**, this results in **salvation** (being delivered from God's wrath, Rom. 2:5; 5:9). Note Paul's use of the words **righteousness** and **salvation** to describe the result of belief and confession. Both **righteousness** and **salvation** refer to God's action on our behalf.

What are some lasting truths from Romans 10:8b-10?

1. Jesus is God's revelation of Himself.
2. The message we should be preaching is that Jesus has been raised from the dead.
3. To believe and confess as Jesus required takes a deep-seated inner conviction; merely to acknowledge truths is not believing and confessing.
4. The result of believing and confessing in the biblical sense is righteousness and salvation.

Romans 10:11-13

¹¹ Now the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame, ¹² for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, since the same Lord of all is rich to all who call on Him. ¹³ For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Salvation Is Available to All Who Call on Jesus. In verses 1-3, we focused on the truth that Christ is the only way to salvation and that we can't earn our salvation. In verses 8b-10, we focused on the truth that we are saved when we confess and believe Jesus is Lord. In verses 11-13, we will focus on the truth that salvation is available to all who call on Jesus.

Throughout our studies in Romans, we have seen that Paul quoted the Old Testament numerous times. Many scholars number Paul's Old Testament quotations at 93, but that number includes only direct quotations. Paul quoted from 16 of our Old Testament books—the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) 33 times, Isaiah 25 times, the Psalms 19 times, and other Old Testament books fewer times. A primary factor in these quotations was referring to God the Son (Jesus Christ) rather than God the Father.²

Paul began Romans 10:11 by quoting Isaiah 28:16 (which he also quoted in 9:33): **Everyone who believes on Him will not be put to shame.** Paul again emphasized three things: (1) the universality of access to the gospel message (**everyone**, see also v. 13); (2) that the gospel can be accepted only by faith in the crucified and resurrected Son of God, and (3) the gospel's power to remove the penalty of sin, including **shame** before God.

In Romans 10:12-13, Paul used the Greek word translated **for** (*gar*) three times to explain further the gospel message. First, Paul wrote: **for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.** Paul previously had acknowledged this truth at least 10 times (1:16; 3:9,19,22,23,29,30; 4:11,12; 9:24). In these verses Paul had pointed out the universal need for salvation and the universal way to salvation (to be saved one must trust in Christ). Paul also pointed out the univer-

sal result of salvation (being saved from the power of sin, the penalty of sin, and the presence of sin).

Second, Paul wrote, **since** [“for,” Greek, *gar*] **the same Lord of all is rich to all who call on Him. God is rich.** God created everything, so He can give us everything we need. But what did Paul mean by **to all who call on Him**? Yes, we can and should direct our requests to God in prayer. But behind that action must be a trust: faith that God exists, that He wants to help us, and that He has the power to do what He says (which is further explained in v. 13). Standing behind the action to **call on Him** is the truth that confession (“Jesus is Lord”) and faith (“believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead”) result in salvation (“you will be saved”).

Third, Paul quoted Joel 2:32: **For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.** Peter had previously quoted this passage (Acts 2:21) in his sermon on Pentecost when about 3,000 were saved (v. 41). Again, Paul emphasized the universality of the gospel message—it was, is, and forever will be **for everyone.**

Paul also emphasized the importance of confession in writing **calls on the name of the Lord.** In the Bible, **the name** was much more than a designation by which a person was called. **The name** represented the character of a person. So, when a person **calls on the name of the Lord**, that person is trusting in the character of God (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit).

What is the result of calling on God? Paul answered that question by writing that every person who trusts God **will be saved.** The New Testament frequently uses the future tense for all of salvation: justification (the past; being made righteous in God’s eyes, Rom. 5:1; 6:22), sanctification (the present; being made more holy as we imitate God,

Eph. 5:1-2), and glorification (the future; being made like Him because we see Him as He truly is, 1 John 3:2).

What are some lasting truths from Romans 10:11-13?

1. The gospel applies to all people: Jews, Greeks, and Gentiles.
2. To be saved, everyone must call on God’s name—that is, everyone must confess and believe in the crucified and risen Christ.
3. Salvation includes the past (believers were saved), the present (believers are being saved and being made holy), and the future (believers will be saved to do good works, to become imitators of Christ, and to join Him in heaven).
4. Everyone—Jews and all others—needs salvation, has access to that same salvation, and must be saved in the same way (repent, then believe and confess in Christ).

LIVE IT OUT

As you reflect on this Bible study, respond to the following.

How much time will you spend in prayer this week for the salvation of all people? _____ Why? _____

What does your personal evangelism reveal about your submission to God? _____

What does your deepest passion reveal about your relationship with God? _____

What does your lifestyle indicate about your belief in Jesus?

How will you believe and confess Jesus this week?

What difference do racial or ethnic distinctions make to God? What difference should they make to us?

How will you explain to others what it means to **call on the name of the Lord**? _____

Since everyone needs salvation and Christ died for all people, what is the responsibility that all believers have to share the gospel? How are you fulfilling your responsibility?

¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988], 373.

² “Paul’s Use of the Old Testament from the Book by E. Earle Ellis,” summarized by Keith Hunt. On the Internet at <http://www.keithhunt.com/Paul.html>. Accessed February 4, 2016.

SESSION 6

ONE GREAT TASK

THE PASSAGE

2 Timothy 2:1-10

THE POINT

Each of us must share the gospel.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Maria met Bill in the teacher's lounge on Monday. She told Bill that she understood some things about Christianity, but she didn't understand others. Bill asked what Maria what she understood. Maria said that she understood that God created us and He knows each of us. She understood that we were created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. She also understood that God offers us hope and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Additionally, Maria said she understood that without Christ we are condemned forever. Finally, she said that she had known for several weeks that she needed a relationship with God. After yesterday's Bible study on Romans 10, Maria knew it was time. The pastor had even preached from the same passage during the morning worship service. When the invitation came, Maria responded by confessing Jesus as Lord and by believing in her heart that God had raised Him from the dead. She was saved and now wanted to be baptized.

Bill told Maria that this was something he had been praying for during the last six weeks. She told him she was so excited about starting her life with Christ. Maria was anxious to share this good news with her family and friends but not sure how to do it. This was one of the things she did not understand. After they talked for a while, Bill reminded her that their Bible study this coming Sunday would help her understand how to talk about her faith. Maria promised to be there.

THE SETTING

First Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus are called the Pastoral Epistles. They were written by an older pastor (Paul) to two younger pastors (Timothy and Titus) regarding information and encouragement they would need to confront false teachings in the churches to which they gave pastoral leadership. Acts ends with Paul being in Rome under house arrest for two whole years (A.D. 60-62) “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with full boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31).

Many Bible students believe the Pastoral Epistles were not written before the end of Acts. However, early church leaders at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second A.D. quoted from them. Many conservative New Testament scholars believe that Paul was released from Roman imprisonment around A.D. 62, that he did further missionary work in Spain and around the Mediterranean area, returned to Rome about A.D. 64-65, and was martyred in A.D. 66 (or soon thereafter). During the years A.D. 62-64, they believe, Paul also wrote the Pastoral Epistles.

In typical Pauline style, Paul opened 2 Timothy 1 with an introduction. He followed this with thanksgiving

and encouragement to Timothy, his son in the ministry (see Phil. 2:19-22).

For further background, see “Paul’s Use of Metaphors” in the current, Fall 2016, issue of *The Biblical Illustrator*.

STUDY THE BIBLE

2 Timothy 2:1-2

¹ You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Share the Message of Christ with Others. Most English translations of the New Testament have the word **therefore** (or something similar) near the beginning of 2 Timothy 2:1. This points readers back to chapter 1, in which Paul contrasted the false teachers with true teachers of the gospel (Paul and Onesiphorus [ahn-ih-SIF-oh-ruhs], 1:16-18). By beginning 2:1 with the word **you**, Paul linked Timothy with the true teachers of the one true gospel.

According to Acts 16:1, Paul met Timothy, who was the son of Eunice (a Jewish woman who was a believer—Timothy’s father was Greek, and probably an unbeliever). Timothy was the grandson of Lois, (another Jewish woman who was a believer). Eunice and Lois had taught Timothy the true faith since he was a child (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). The Greek word for *Timothy* appears 25 times in the New Testament. Paul called him a “coworker” (Rom. 16:21), “dearly loved and faithful son in the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:17), “slaves of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:1), “our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ” (1 Thess. 3:2), and **my son** (2 Tim. 2:1).

The command in verse 1 was for Timothy to **be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus**. The present tense of the verb **be strong** indicates it was to be an ongoing action. Although frequently used in the Old Testament, Paul used this word for **strong** a total of six times in his writings. It is found only one additional time in the New Testament. **Grace** refers to God's gift, not only in connection with salvation, but also in connection with how believers are to live. Such grace is in **Christ Jesus**.

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul referred to Timothy's faith and to his goal. First, Paul referred to what Timothy had **heard from [Paul] in the presence of many witnesses**. What Timothy had heard from Paul was the message (the gospel) that Timothy knew was genuine because of Paul's position as an apostle. The words **in the presence of many witnesses** likely refers to Timothy's ordination (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6) and other occasions as he worked with Paul. We get our English word *martyrs* from the Greek word translated **witnesses**. **Many witnesses** have become martyrs because of their firm belief in God's gospel message.

With those words as the subject, Paul moved on to his main idea, the verb in verse 2: **commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also**. The word translated **commit** has also been translated "teach" (NLT) and refers to entrusting others with the message (for example, Luke 12:48; Acts 20:32; 1 Pet. 4:19).

Paul commanded Timothy to **commit his words to faithful men** (women in that society were not considered to be reliable witnesses). Here the likely meaning of **faithful** is "dependable" or "trustworthy" (since they were already believers and witnesses). Not only was Timothy to teach these men, he was also to equip them to **be able to teach others also**. Knute Larson wrote: "Timothy must also seek

those who evidenced a knowledge and ability to teach others. Paul wanted to establish people of godly character who possessed the aptitude for relating divine truth to everyday life, for clarifying ideas, and for maintaining purity in their instruction.”¹ This certainly supports our focus—share the message of Christ with others—for these verses. The duty of every Christian is to share Christ’s message with others. What can you do this week to become more effective in sharing Christ’s message with others?

What are some lasting truths from 2 Timothy 2:1-2?

1. Relationships are important because they strengthen and challenge us to do what we should do.
2. Our duty as believers is to share the gospel message and to seek to teach others who would also do the same.
3. The Bible is the primary source for the doctrines of the Christian faith and its teachings.

2 Timothy 2:3-7

³ Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the recruiter. ⁵ Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops. ⁷ Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Persevere in Sharing the Message of Christ. The point of this Bible study is that each of us must share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others. The focus of verses 3-7 is that we should persevere in sharing the message of Christ.

To support his point, Paul used three different examples that focus on persevering, but each example added something to that focus.

How does Paul's message to Timothy relate to us? Knute Larson answered that question in this way: "God has called each of us to ministry. The long haul between our enthusiastic beginning and our anticipated glory requires a great deal of hard work. Each person committed to the life of faith will deal with difficult circumstances, issues of temptation and sin, spiritual struggles, adverse opinions, misunderstandings, exhaustion, and an array of pests which can ruin personal and ministry growth. ... Then it will work itself out in enduring service."²

George W. Knight summarized verses 3-7 in this way: "This section ... drives home the need for suffering hardship as a good soldier of Christ with the imagery of the soldier (v. 4) being supplemented with that of an athlete (v. 5) and a farmer (v. 6). Paul concludes with an appeal for reflection, understanding, and application (v. 7)."³

In verse 3, Paul reinforced a truth he had written about earlier in 1:8: **share in suffering** ("join with me in suffering," NIV; "endure hardness," KJV; "endure suffering," NLT). Verse 3 is also related to 2 Timothy 2:1, in which Paul commanded Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." The word **as** indicates a comparison, in this case between **a good soldier** and Timothy. The words **a good soldier** reflect a military image Paul used in other New Testament letters (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-17; Philem. 2). The person who enlisted and commanded Timothy ultimately was **Christ Jesus**. However, Paul also enlisted Timothy and commanded him to **share in suffering**.

In verse 4, Paul described the discipline needed for a good soldier by using two verbs, **gets entangled** and **seeks to**

please. The background behind the verb **gets entangled** may refer to a soldier who can't use his weapons because they get caught in his robe. However, Paul made it clear in this context that he was speaking of **the concerns of civilian life**, that is, not focusing on fighting as a soldier. The words translated **no one** make this a general principle applying to all believers. How often today do we get caught up in the things of this life while ignoring our duty to Christ to share His message? We must persevere in following Christ's commands. Paul elaborated on this perseverance when he wrote that **a good soldier ... seeks to please the recruiter** (or commanding officer).

In verse 5, Paul used the example of **an athlete** to illustrate perseverance. First, **according to the rules**, among other qualifying factors, an athlete had to train for at least 10 months to be qualified to participate in the games. The word **also** indicates that this example is connected to the previous one (they both reinforce perseverance in sharing the message of Christ). Second, the phrase **according to the rules** also indicates the absolute necessity of following the specific rules of the games.

We certainly can apply that principle today to Christians who have lost their credibility and influence because they failed to follow the rules for Christian living that God has set forth in the Bible. The people who compete **according to the rules** will receive a crown. For the athlete in Paul's day, that usually meant a laurel wreath would be placed on his head. For Christians today, it means that at the end of their contest (life), they will receive the crown—eternal life—life as it was meant to be, life in fellowship with God in heaven.

In verse 6, Paul emphasized the perseverance of the **farmer**. He first described the farmer as **hardworking**. Those

who have tried to grow flowers, vegetables, or fruit can begin to understand how hard a full-time farmer works. Farmers suffer because they work hard in planting, maintaining, and harvesting their crops. Farmers also suffer because they have no control over the wind, rain, sun, and other elements necessary for the crops to grow. They suffer because they have little control over pests and crop diseases. Farmers are **hardworking**; they persist in doing what they must do to produce a good harvest. What would happen if Christians focused not on suffering but on their perseverance in sharing the gospel message? What will you do this month to produce a good harvest for God?

We need to learn from the soldier how to please God through focused service, through obedience, through sacrifice, and through loyalty resulting in final victory. From the athlete, we need to learn discipline to obey God's rules that result in a reward. Finally, from the farmer, we need to learn perseverance in sharing the gospel of Christ Jesus, which results in a harvest of righteousness (2 Cor. 9:10).

In verse 7, Paul commanded Timothy to **consider what** he had said. The verb **consider** meant that Timothy should continue to contemplate, to learn from the examples Paul had presented (**what I say**) in the previous verses. The significance of the Greek present tense of the verb rendered **consider** is that Timothy should make a habit of continuing to focus on what he had learned from these examples.

In the last part of verse 7, Paul provided the reason or purpose **for** Timothy to continually reflect on what Paul had said: **the Lord will give you understanding in everything**. As we consider the meaning of the words **the Lord**, we must be careful to emphasize the tri-unity (trinity) of God as opposed to tri-theism (three different gods). Indeed, a hallmark of early Christianity was to apply what

was said about God in the Old Testament to God the Son in the New Testament. As a result, sometimes we find it difficult to affirm absolutely the antecedent of the title the **Lord**. However, Paul likely was referring to God the Father in verse 7.

Paul used the word **understanding** 15 times. It refers to the ability to use knowledge in a practical way—in the way that applied to spiritual matters. God’s ability to give **understanding** was (and is) unlimited; therefore, Paul used the words **in everything**.

God the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write these words specifically to his son in the ministry, Timothy. A study of Paul’s writings in other New Testament books demonstrates that these words also apply to believers today. When we **share in suffering** (v. 3) and receive from the Lord **understanding in everything** (v. 7), we will persevere in sharing the message of Christ.

What are some lasting truths from 2 Timothy 2:3-7?

1. Based on what the enemies of Christ did to him during Paul’s time, as we live for Christ and share His message, we should expect suffering today also.
2. We need to focus on what Christian spiritual leaders teach us.
3. When we share in suffering for the Lord, God will give us understanding.

2 Timothy 2:8-10

⁸ **Keep your attention on Jesus Christ as risen from the dead and descended from David. This is according to my gospel.** ⁹ **I suffer for it to the point of being bound like a criminal, but God’s message is not bound.** ¹⁰ **This is why I endure all things for the elect:**

so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Keep Your Focus on the Message of Christ. The point of this Bible study is that each of us should share the gospel. Our focus in 2 Timothy 2:1-2 was that we should share the message of Christ with others. Our focus in verses 3-7 was that we should persevere in sharing the message of Christ. Our focus in this final section (vv. 8-10) is that we need to keep our focus on the message of Christ. Paul gave three examples of how to suffer hardship: (1) Christ (v. 8), (2) Paul himself (v. 9), and (3) all believers (v. 12).

First, Paul commanded Timothy to **keep your attention on** (“remember,” KJV) **Jesus Christ**. The order of these words (**Jesus** preceding **Christ**) is rarely used in the Pastoral Epistles (only 6 times) and this is the only time this word order is used in 2 Timothy. What would happen in our lives if we kept our **attention on Jesus Christ**? How would that impact our sharing the gospel with family, friends, or others around us? What can you as an individual—and as a group—do to share Jesus Christ this month? The present tense form of the words **keep your attention on** expresses a continuous action, not a one-time experience.

In verse 8, Paul listed three things to focus on about Christ: (1) His being **risen from the dead**, (2) His being **descended from David**, and (3) His **gospel** message.

Looking at these in more detail, (1) many times in the New Testament, the presentation of the gospel message included Jesus’ birth, crucifixion, and resurrection. Jesus’ resurrection validated His claims and asserted God’s power—power even over death. (2) Jesus was **descended from David**, a truth made clear in the genealogies of both Matthew and Luke. This also links the promised Messiah

of the Old Testament with the Messiah (Jesus Christ) as fulfilled in the New Testament. God promised David a descendant to rule over Israel forever; in Christ, God fulfilled that promise. (3) The phrase **my gospel** (used in Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8) refers to the gospel about Christ, the focus of Paul's ministry. In reality, Paul's focus on the gospel was so intense that he called it **my gospel**.

Second, in verse 9, Paul elaborated on his own suffering for the gospel. Paul made clear that he was **bound like a common criminal**. The word **criminal** likely refers to Paul's assumed second imprisonment in Rome, which ended in his martyrdom under Nero just a year or two after writing 2 Timothy. However, Paul quickly pointed out that although he was bound, **God's message is not bound**. The perfect tense of the Greek verb translated **is not bound** refers to a past completed action with the focus on a continuing result. In essence, Paul rejoiced in the fact that although *God's messenger* could be bound, **God's message** could not be bound. Many in our world today try to bind God's message. Unfortunately, even some Christians attempt to bind God's message by their lack of interest in sharing God's gospel message.

In verse 10, Paul explained why he would **endure** his suffering: **for the elect**. The Greek word for **elect** is used 23 times in the New Testament and means "the one who is chosen." Who are **the elect**? Knute Larson wrote: "The elect are those who trust Christ Jesus; they are the ones who invest themselves in Christ's saving grace and kingdom. These followers of Jesus affirm God's call upon their life by responding in faith."⁴

Paul endured **all things for the elect so that they also may obtain salvation**. The word **salvation** is used 45 times in the New Testament. The salvation that Paul referred to is always connected to Jesus (whose name means

“salvation”). Paul elaborated on Christ being the only way to salvation by adding **which is in Christ Jesus** (see also John 14:6). Even today, when some suggest that people can come to God in other ways, Jesus continues to remain the only way by whom we can come to God, the only way we can have our sins forgiven, the only way we can become righteous before God. There is no other way—nor can there ever be because Jesus is God’s only Son (1 John 4:9)!

Paul’s use of the word **salvation** indicated he was speaking of the current aspect of **salvation: conversion**. However, at the end of verse 10, Paul used the words **with eternal glory** to refer to the future aspect of **salvation: glorification**, becoming like Jesus (1 John 3:2).

What are some lasting truths from 2 Timothy 2:8-10?

1. We must keep our attention focused on Jesus Christ.
2. We should focus our sharing about Jesus Christ on His birth, death, and resurrection.
3. We should be willing to suffer so others may hear and believe the gospel message.
4. We can look forward to glory with God in heaven.

LIVE IT OUT

As you reflect on this Bible study, respond to the following:

How do your relationships with others help you become a better witness? _____

Given God’s commands for all believers to share the gospel, what actions will you take this week to do so through the grace God has given you? _____

How do you experience suffering as you persevere in sharing the message about Christ? _____

What did you learn about the discipline and perseverance of sharing the message about Christ from the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer? _____

What will you do this week to keep your attention focused on Jesus Christ? _____

What are you willing to suffer so others can hear God's message? _____

¹ Knute Larson, *I&II Thessalonians, I&II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, in the *Holman New Testament Commentary* [Nashville, B&H Publishing Group, 2000], 281.

² Larson, *I&II Thessalonians, I&II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 283.

³ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992], 392.

⁴ Larson, *I&II Thessalonians, I&II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 284.