



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." John 1:4

Romans, Part 1

ROMANS 1–7

LEADERS GUIDE

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership team and discussion leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 51.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 53**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;

- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's

study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). They will follow the same schedule. The discussion leader will obtain the leaflets from the director. The congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for Romans

The Lutheran Study Bible, English Standard Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. Over 26,500 uniquely Lutheran study notes; over 80,000 cross-references; 120 full or half-page maps, charts, and diagrams; 220-plus articles and introductions to Biblical books and topics; 31,000 concordance entries.

Grunewald, R. J. *Reading Romans with Luther.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017. This book by a Detroit area LCMS pastor offers highlights from Luther's commentary on Romans which explain significant themes and explains how they are relevant to our lives today.

Middendorf, Michael P. *Concordia Commentary: Romans 1–8, Volume 1.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013. Middendorf, Michael P. *Concordia Commentary: Romans 9–16, Volume 2.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016. These commentaries by the professor of theology in Christ College at Concordia University Irvine articulates the meaning of the Greek text of Romans. The purpose of this letter of St. Paul is to bestow the righteousness of God, which comes through faith alone.

Franzmann, Martin H. *Concordia Commentary: Romans.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968. This narrative commentary by the late New Testament professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, is directed to those "who are looking for something less technical and more devotional than customary studies of the New Testament." Presented in a readable, nontechnical style. 288 pages.

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.* Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945. This older volume is a reliable, comprehensive, confessionally sound commentary by a Lutheran theologian.

Luther, Martin. Lectures on Romans. *Luther's Works.* Edited by Hilton C. Oswald. Vol. 25. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972. Notes written for Luther's own use in the lecture hall.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

Paul, Apostle of the Lord

Romans 1:1–17

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

The purpose of Romans 1:1–17 is to establish Paul as an apostle of the Lord and the author of the Letter to the Romans. He is called to witness to his own people, the Jews, and especially to the Gentiles. His message focuses on the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus, descendant of David and “declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead” (1:4).

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit’s help, will be led to

1. recognize and appreciate that Christ called apostles (Paul and the Twelve) to be witnesses of the resurrection and His forgiving love (the Gospel) to the early church, and that Christ calls pastors to preach that same Gospel to people today;
2. discover how mightily the power of the Gospel was working among God’s saints in first-century Rome;
3. discern how the same Gospel is active among God’s saints today.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 53.

For the Lecture Leader

Especially for this first session, and perhaps also for the next several sessions, locate several large maps or overhead transparencies of the ancient Mediterranean world. Specific maps that would be helpful would show the three missionary journeys of Paul and perhaps an enlarged map of ancient Rome.

By addressing his Letter to all those “who are loved by God and called to be saints” (1:7), Paul identifies the Christians in the church at Rome as those whom God has chosen and called to be His own people. They are saints, declared to be so by God Himself, on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The reason for their sainthood is not found in them, but in the grace of God in Christ. The announcement of this fact is the primary reason for Paul’s Letter (1:16–17). He is not ashamed to witness to them about the Gospel of Jesus, because it is the power that brings salvation to all who believe in Christ.

To bring the Roman Christians to a fuller realization of what God has done for them in Christ, Paul develops the imagery of a great courtroom scene. God is the Judge, and all humankind—both Jew and Gentile—is on trial. The verdict: guilty! Not only are the defendants guilty of serious offenses against the Law of God, but also of transgression against the person of the Judge Himself. During the first part of this Letter, Paul brings the full force of the Law to bear against all—including those who claim innocence or the power to make things right.

What a devastating picture! Yet, it is necessary that this verdict be pronounced for the sake of the wonderful message that God has transferred the punishment we deserved because of our sins to His own Son, Jesus Christ, so we might be declared innocent. Paul develops this presentation in a beautiful and moving way in his Letter to the Romans.

And here is where you come in as the Lecture Leader. It will be your task to help LifeLight participants see how the Holy Spirit has addressed this Letter to them too.

Because of our sins we, too, are under the guilty verdict. The punishment of our sins has been transferred to Christ and we, too, stand innocent before God because of Christ. What Good News you have to share!

Session Plan

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Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* (refer to hymnal index).

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Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Christians have always valued St. Paul's Letter to the Romans. It presents the Gospel of salvation of sinners by grace on account of Jesus Christ through faith with simple yet profound clarity. Nowhere else in Scripture do we find a fuller and clearer presentation of God's great love for us in Christ.

Dostoyevsky once wrote: "The ant knows the formula for the anthill. The bee knows the formula for the beehive. They do not know the formulae in a human way, but in their own way. Only man does not know his formula." The Book of Romans gives us God's formula for salvation and life, so that we might indeed know it, confess it, and live it.

1 The Gospel (1:1–6, 16–17)

An English bishop once said, "Everywhere Paul went there was a revolution. Everywhere I go they serve tea." The bishop expresses how powerless we all feel over life and its circumstances. Certainly when it comes to being and acting like Christ's saints we fall short and recognize our unworthiness.

As Paul might suggest, "Yes! What a great place to begin!" (1:16–17) The theme verses of Romans call us to not be "ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. ... For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed." That is why we spend the first part of this

lesson rehearsing what the Gospel is and means. It is the starting point for all that follows.

A. God's Gospel (1:1–5)

Paul was "set apart" to preach the Gospel, the Good News. This Good News is the basic message of the entire Letter. It is not just any good news. This is God's Gospel, (v. 3) the Gospel "regarding His Son." Sometimes we tend to think of the Gospel as being any good thing that happens to us.

Of course, we are right in thinking that all good things are blessings from God. But the Gospel that saves is the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Note the significance of the way God has revealed this message:

Verse 2—He promised it through the prophets.

Verse 3—Jesus is true man, "a descendant of David."

Verse 4—Jesus is true God, "declared with power to be the Son of God."

Verse 4—Jesus Christ is Lord by His resurrection.

Verse 5—Through Jesus we receive grace.

B. God's Power (1:16)

That is why Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel, nor should we ever make any excuse for it. Just the opposite is true. As Paul gloried in it and considered giving his whole life in its service a high honor, so we receive it for what it is—the "power of God."

The Greek word used in verse 16 is *dynamis*, from which we get our English word *dynamite*. We need dynamite to blow away our old way of thinking, our ingrained self-righteousness. We need dynamite to get us thinking the way of grace and faith. That same dynamite overcomes sin and blows away death and the devil for us.

Rev. Donald Matzat writes in his book *Christ Esteem*:

The personal identity of the apostle Paul was completely immersed in the person of Jesus Christ, reigning at the right hand of the Father. As far as Paul was concerned, God provided a singular answer to all human problems: the person and work of Jesus Christ. The identity and life of the apostle Paul on this earth was the result of his relationship with Jesus. He said, "For me to live is Christ!"

Don Matzat, *Christ Esteem*
(Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), p. 28

2 The Gospel Calls Us to Be Saints (1:1, 6–7)

The Romans, too, are called to belong to Christ. In fact, (v. 7) they are called to be saints. The basic idea of the Greek for this word is “holiness.” All Christians are saints in that they have been declared holy (righteous) by God and are being made increasingly “holy” by the Holy Spirit.

Do you consider yourself called? Are you a saint? These may be new concepts for many of us. They certainly suggest a status of which we are unworthy but have been given as a gift by our gracious Lord. It is much easier to echo the words of the historian G. K. Chesterton, who answered a reporter’s question of “What’s wrong with the world today?” by saying, “Dear Sir, I am.”

Yes, we are sinners. The next two chapters of Romans will make that quite clear. But we are also saints, washed in the blood of the Lamb, freed by Christ’s death and resurrection to be His servants. The Gospel makes us saints. Part of our response this week will be regularly to confirm that we are saints, people whom God Himself declares to be holy—not because of our own goodness, but because of the righteousness won for us by His Son.

3 God’s Apostle—God’s Ministers Today (1:5, 8–15)

In verse 5 Paul succinctly summarizes what his apostolic call from God entails: “to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.” What excitement Paul must have felt as he approached these new Christians and the rest of the world that awaited his missionary presence.

The Roman church was most likely a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Their childlike faith needed pastoral and prayer support. They must have their doctrine and priorities straight. In particular, Paul wrote this Letter to encourage them and to combat the false teaching of the Judaizers, who taught that adherence to the Old Testament ceremonial laws (especially circumcision) was necessary in addition to faith in Jesus.

It is interesting to note that Paul prays that God may provide them with (v. 11) “some spiritual gift” to strengthen them. This may be one of the miraculous gifts which, being bestowed by the apostle, would confirm him as an apostle with all the miraculous abilities

inherent in the office. The purpose of the gift: “to make [them] strong” in their spiritual life.

Verse 12—Ministers today enjoy the comfort and encouragement that the apostle Paul looked forward to with such desire, and it is the sweeter because of the mutuality it involves. Paul’s personal goal becomes that of all the saints—(v. 13) “that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.” He terms it an obligation in verse 14, because he is (v. 15) “eager to preach the gospel.” Paul’s hunger to share his love for Jesus never wanes. He models love for people and commitment to the Gospel, which faithful ministers also display today.

And God’s people respond in prayer for their pastor:

*You, O Lord, Yourself have called him
For Your precious lambs to care;
But to prosper in his calling,
He the Spirit’s gifts must share.
Give him wisdom from above,
Fill his heart with holy love;
In his weakness, Lord, be near him,
In his prayers, Good Shepherd, hear him.
Boundless blessings, Lord, bestow
On his faithful toil below
Till by grace to him be given
His reward, the crown of heaven.*

Conclusion (Our Response)

1. Daily confess and acknowledge your status as a forgiven saint; praise God for it!
2. Daily pray for your pastor (and any other called servants of your congregation), asking God to bless him in his ministry, keep him from discouragement, and strengthen him by the Gospel even as he shares that Gospel with others.
3. Frequently speak words of encouragement and thanks to your pastor. Consider sending him a card, thanking him in your own words for specific spiritual blessings you’ve received from God through his ministry.

Concluding Activities

Invite the group to turn to Romans 1:16–17 and read these verses aloud, loudly, together. Or have women read verse 16 and men read verse 17. (Using various

translations will not mar the activity's effectiveness.) Remind the participants to check the enrichment magazine for materials that will, indeed, enrich their daily study. Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 2.

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Notes

Guilty as Charged

Romans 1:18–2:24

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Throughout this Letter Paul's primary purpose is to communicate in the clearest terms possible the incomparable riches given through faith in Jesus Christ. He cannot do this, however, without first clearly indicating that from which we have been saved and the reason we needed saving. So Paul begins the formal part of his Letter with a devastating description of the state of affairs in the world and of God's equally devastating reaction. Paul presents God as bringing a charge, a heavenly lawsuit, against His wayward people. God's wrath against godlessness and wickedness is awesome. Were it not for His love for the world, which He demonstrated in the cross of Christ, He would turn us over to the destruction of our own ways. The charges are most serious, and we must answer them. Thanks be to God that He Himself intervenes by sending His Son to fulfill the Law perfectly in our stead!

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. learn from Scripture that apart from Christ we stand accused of serious crimes against the world, against humanity, and even against ourselves—but especially against God;
2. confess that we are guilty and unable to defend ourselves;
3. flee to God's great mercy in Christ;
4. rejoice that God's Son has paid the penalty of our crimes.

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 56.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and prayer printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* (refer to hymnal index).

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

(1:17) The Gospel reveals the "righteousness from God ... that is by faith." The Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection marks us as saints and witnesses of God's love and mercy. How wonderful that news is for all of us burdened down by the weight of our sin. How true the poster that says, "Smile! God loves you!" After all you've put Him through, that's something!

Verse 18—Paul takes time in this next session to prop up the righteousness of God against the "wrath of God." Our need for salvation does not become fully apparent until Paul first demonstrates what is wrong with us and why it is urgently necessary for us to become reconciled with God.

We may have a vague sense that something is wrong. As Martin Luther suggests, "If you doubt your sinful nature, just pinch yourself." Yet the bloodshed and misery that we read about daily or watch graphically portrayed on television seem reserved for other people. The brutal and inhumane way we deal with one another is definitely someone else's problem.

If the Gospel is to make its full impact in our lives, the Law must first confront us with ourselves. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, say the Scriptures. It is also true that such deceptive thinking cons us into believing that there is no need for the Gospel. Only as we are stripped of all pretense and self-righteous claims is Christ given His full glory for what He has done for us.

It's more fun and uplifting to talk about sainthood. But we pray that God will bless our confrontation with (1:18–32) idolatry; (2:1–11) judging; (2:12–16) lawlessness; and

(2:17–24) hypocrisy. Yes, we are guilty as charged. We throw ourselves on the mercy of the court.

1 Idolatry (1:18–32)

In the next chapters Paul will show that the entire human race is under God's just wrath and is deserving of His punishment because of sin. Paul does this so he may in due time demonstrate that God's righteousness is available to all through Jesus Christ. In the meantime, however, Paul systematically eliminates all who may think they have a claim on God or are exempt from God's Law.

He begins with those who, in the opinion of most, stand under God's wrath: the pagans and crass idolaters. Verses 18–20—They "suppress the truth" by refusing to acknowledge the true God and the truth He has plainly revealed about Himself through the things He has made. All people, even if they have never had the opportunity to read or hear Scripture, are able to learn something about God's nature, power, and deity through creation. According to Paul, they are without excuse.

In Paul's day, people worshiped images (1:23) "made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." Today, of course, people in the U.S. and Canada are too sophisticated to engage in such gross and obvious idolatry. People do not usually spend their weekends constructing shrines to the gods in their backyards. On the contrary, this internal disease of the spirit has them so enslaved to their passions and lusts that they are unable to extricate themselves. The pleasures of and for self are so consuming that backyard Buddha-building would certainly not be worth the time and effort.

This modern-day idolatry could also be termed the "empty-cup syndrome." William Law has written a novel entitled *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. The main character, Flatus, turns rapidly from one enthusiasm to another: fine clothes, gambling, society, drinking, hunting, dog breeding, travel, exercise. These are the empty cups from which he tries to satisfy himself.

In Romans 1, Paul zeroes in on another empty cup, the sin of homosexuality. (Leviticus 18:22) The big city (Rome) had become a haven for this unnatural lust, even though, along with adultery, it was a known sin in

the Old Testament. There it is called detestable.

No matter how much gay-rights groups and others continue to "suppress the truth" under the guise of freedom, the sad and ironic conclusion of this ongoing sin is that it brings anything but freedom. God is not pleased. Families and marriages are fractured. And still people deny the truth in order to satisfy misguided and sinful pleasures.

Verse 28—If the attitude of our minds becomes depraved, it will no doubt lead to improper conduct. God even allows us to dig our own holes and fall into them. This does not apply merely to sexual sins.

The list in Romans 1:29–32 expands the arena of idolatrous sin to other relationships distorted by envy, deceit, gossip, slander, disobedience to parents, and the like. Why make such a big deal about this section of Scripture? Is it merely the way things have been and will continue to be?

The answer to those questions is important to Christians concerned about their relationship with the Lord and the effect of the Gospel in their lives. We all must ask ourselves: Are any of these sins mentioned in Romans 1 under the category of idolatry getting in the way of my relationship with my Father in heaven, who offers me His righteousness and salvation? This is a good point to pause and reflect on ...

2 Judging (2:1–11)

After reading Romans 1:18–32 we are probably in the same position the disciples and crowds were, listening to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. When He spoke to them of murder and adultery, they no doubt smugly eyeballed others who might be the guilty parties. It wasn't until He started talking about anger, hatred, and lust that finger-pointing reverted back to the self-righteous.

Such is the case here. But then we must go on to chapter 2. In these verses Paul may have been addressing the philosophers of ancient Greece and their admirers (who looked down on the common, uneducated people), or he may have had the Jews in mind. It doesn't really matter.

To want to judge others seems natural. We always blame others. It's like the bumper sticker that reads, "Humpty Dumpty Was Pushed!" We compare our own guilt or

innocence to that of others, and we are convinced that we are not as bad.

Verse 1—As Romans reminds us, however, in passing judgment we condemn ourselves.

Verse 4—God has not led us to repentance so that we may sit in judgment over others. Judgment should be left to Him. Here again we return to Matthew 7:1–5 and the words of Jesus discouraging our judgment of others, in order that we spend our energy getting the log out of our own eye instead of the tedious task of finding specks in our neighbor’s eye.

Verses 9–11—Since God shows no partiality, why do we spend so much time in a fruitless exercise of judgment? God had the same “trouble and distress” in store for all sinners. For all who put their faith in Jesus Christ, there is “glory, honor and peace.”

Perhaps it is good to pause and reflect again. Is this a problem area for us? Is it a personal stumbling block for us over which we frequently trip? Think about it ...

3 Lawlessness (2:12–16)

Maybe it is best to ignore the whole subject. Enough of this bad news. There are some of us who would rather live like the man who woke up hungry in the middle of the night. He reached for a date, examined it under the light, but found a worm in it and threw it away. He reached for a second one, but this one also had a worm. Finally, he turned off the lamp and proceeded to consume the entire container of dates in the darkness.

In the light or in the dark, the man was taking a chance and probably became ill. So it is with living with an awareness of the Law or being completely “in the dark.” God’s Law, written on our hearts at our creation and written on tablets of stone at Mount Sinai tells us how we are to live. Verse 15—Not having the written Law does not excuse a person from adherence or payment, for all people have the Law written on their hearts or conscience, telling them they have done right or wrong.

Are you tempted to live in the dark? Are you hiding behind the mask of your “religion,” when, in fact, there are issues to be dealt with? Fortunately, according to Romans 1:16, believers in Christ will be judged on the basis of His work for us (compare 3:21–28). But perhaps it is again time to reflect for a moment in the

silence of our hearts that those sins of which we are or are not aware might be brought to the surface, confessed, and forgiven.

4 Hypocrisy (2:17–24)

Two women in the front pew at church nudged each other self-confidently and in an approving manner when the preacher offered his Sunday message against drinking. However, when they returned the following Sunday and listened to him speak on the topic of gossip, one was overheard to say, “Now he’s meddlin’!”

There is a certain amount of arrogance and self-righteousness in all of us (at least in all of you!). This section is addressed specifically to the Jews within the Roman congregation. (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5) They had been given a great advantage in having received the Law of God through the covenant at Mount Sinai. As a gift God gave His people His Ten Commandments, whereby they would know His will and how they were to respond to His grace and favor.

That is why it was so reprehensible when the Jews did not practice what they preached and sat in judgment over others. Verse 17—They bragged about their relationship to God. The most familiar story that Jesus told in that regard was of the Pharisee and the tax collector, when the former commented in the temple, “Thank You, Lord, that I’m not like that miserable tax collector.”

Verses 21–24—Paul cites stealing, adultery, and idolatry as ways people knowledgeable of the Law blatantly abused it. In not practicing what they preached, their actions reflected negatively on God, who had given the Law. When they boasted in the Law and yet broke it, they dishonored God, making a false and damaging testimony about Him before others.

There is a chance that this too has hit home. Reflect in prayer on your own hypocrisy ...

Conclusion (Our Response)

Sometimes I feel like George Bernard Shaw, who told his nurse as he lay dying, “Dear, when the doctor comes in and says that I’m dead, would you ask for a second opinion?” As thrilling as session 1 was, this lesson has been depressing. However, I could get 100 “positive” opinions regarding my spirituality, and I still (Eph-

sians 2:1) would be dead in my trespasses and sins.

God has every right to be angry and withhold His forgiveness. Whether it is gross idolatry or the subtlety of our judging and hypocrisy, we have broken His covenant. We stand accused. The Lord has a case. The charges are clear; the evidence is airtight. We have been caught in the act with no alibi. We are guilty as charged!

How startling and comforting, then, the announcement that God has executed His judgment against His own beloved, innocent Son, our substitute! What a thrilling, joyful outcome! God be praised forever!

And so we daily confess our sins:

1. Knowing we are forgiven, we daily plead guilty before God of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer (Psalm 19:12; 1 John 1:8-9).
2. We are encouraged (not forced) to confess privately before our pastor or confessor those sins which we know and feel in our hearts, especially those that trouble us (2 Samuel 12:13; James 5:16).
3. The second part of confession is that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness of sins (Isaiah 1:18).
4. We should regard the absolution (forgiveness) spoken by the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven. (Matthew 18:18; Luke 10:16; John 20:23.)
5. In private, as well as corporate, confession and absolution, God Himself through the pastor forgives each individual the sins that are confessed (2 Samuel 12:13; Matthew 9:2).

Notes

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with a prayer of confession. Ask God's forgiveness for sins of idolatry, of judging others, of failures to keep God's Law, and of not practicing what we preach to others. You may make it a responsive prayer by repeating at various points, "For these sins," asking participants to respond by saying, "Forgive us, Lord." Then make any necessary announcements and distribute study leaflet 3.