

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 26 OF 104

Choose Life

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Deuteronomy 26-34
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 30
Gospels	Matthew 25:31-26:25
General New Testament	Romans 1:1-2:11

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to put a decision in front of the class and keep it there. Moses does it in Deuteronomy 30, Jesus does it with sheep and goats, Agur does it in a prayer, and Paul does it by removing every excuse a moral person has. None of these passages is interested in the class agreeing. All four are interested in the class choosing. Plan to end both sessions with a specific decision named out loud rather than a summary.

Doctrinally, three things are at stake. First, the Old Covenant of Deuteronomy is fulfilled and taken away in Christ, so its blessings and curses instruct us without binding us, and its land promise is already declared fulfilled. Second, Matthew 25 and Romans 2 together say that God will judge according to what we have actually done, which cannot be turned into salvation by merit and must not be softened into faith only. Third, Romans 1 is a description of chosen rebellion and God's withdrawal, not of divine determinism or inherited guilt. Guard all three carefully.

Formationally, watch the size of the deciding moments. Nobody in these readings falls in a single dramatic hour. Israel drifts by forgetting where its bread came from, Agur fears a full stomach more than an empty one, Judas begins with a hand in the money box, and Romans 1 starts with a refusal to say thank you. Ask your class this: what is the smallest thing you are currently permitting in your life that you would not want your children to inherit?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Romans 1:1-2:11 first. It sets the frame for the next six weeks of reading and lets you settle early, before the hard chapters arrive, what Paul means by faith, judgment, and the gospel as God's power. Save enough time to reach chapter 2, or the lesson will land wrong.

Second session: Take up Matthew 25:31-26:25. The sheep and the goats give you the most practical ten minutes of the week, and the anointing at Bethany gives you its most beautiful. End the hour at 26:22 and let the class say, "Lord, is it I?"

The other two readings: Deuteronomy 26-34 and Proverbs 30 carry the extended questions well. Read Deuteronomy 34 aloud at the close of one session, just the death of Moses, with no comment afterward. Mention Proverbs 30:8 as a household prayer worth praying at supper this week.

The Last Words of Moses

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These nine chapters are the closing of the Pentateuch, and they read like a man putting his house in order. Moses has led this people for forty years, buried a whole generation in the wilderness, and argued with God on their behalf more than once. Now he arranges the ceremony they will hold when they cross over, he writes the law down, he hands leadership to Joshua, he teaches them a song, and he blesses them. Everything a faithful leader can do before he dies, Moses does.

The heart of the reading is Deuteronomy 30. After chapter 28 has stacked up blessings and then curses in terrifying detail, chapter 30 refuses to leave Israel paralyzed. The command, Moses says, is not hidden in heaven or across the sea. It is in your mouth and in your heart. Then comes the sentence that gives this week its shape: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life.” Covenant is not fate. It is a decision made daily by people who know what God has said.

Chapter 34 is one of the quietest and most moving passages in Scripture. Moses climbs alone, sees the land from Gilead to the Western Sea, and dies there at the word of the Lord. God buries him, and no man knows the place. Israel weeps thirty days. Let your class sit in that silence for a moment before you move on. Faithful service does not always end with the thing we most wanted, and God is still good.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Deuteronomy means “second law,” and the book is Moses’ farewell preaching to the generation that will actually enter Canaan, delivered on the plains of Moab east of the Jordan.
- The blessing and cursing ceremony at Gerizim and Ebal (chapter 27) is carried out in Joshua 8:30–35, which your class will read next week.
- The covenant here is the Old Covenant, made with national Israel, and it is fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:6–13). Its principles instruct us (Romans 15:4); its statutes do not bind us.
- The Song of Moses in chapter 32 is a covenant lawsuit in poetry, given so that when the curses came, Israel would have God’s own explanation already memorized (31:19–21).
- The land promise made to Abraham is declared fulfilled in Joshua 21:43–45. Do not treat Deuteronomy’s land language as unfinished business awaiting a modern political settlement.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In Deuteronomy 26:1–11 the worshiper carries a basket to the altar and recites his whole family history before he sets it down. Why does God tie giving so tightly to remembering, and what would that change about the way you give?*

The firstfruits ceremony is a sermon in a basket. Before the Israelite hands over a single fig he says out loud, “A Syrian ready to perish was my father,” and walks through the descent into Egypt, the affliction, the crying out, the mighty hand, and the land. Only then does he set down the basket and worship. God is not collecting produce. He is protecting the memory of a people who are about to become comfortable, because comfortable people forget where their bread came from.

Press this into the class’s actual practice. Most of us give the way we pay a utility bill, distracted and automatic. Ask what it would look like to name three specific mercies of God before the plate reaches you, or to say them out loud in the car on the way to the assembly. Giving that has stopped remembering quickly becomes giving that resents.

Question 2. *Deuteronomy 30:11–20 sets life and death, blessing and cursing, in front of the nation. Walk through what Moses says the choice actually involves, and discuss why he insists the word is not far off but very near.*

Moses defines the choice concretely: loving the Lord, walking in His ways, keeping His commandments, holding fast to Him. Life is not an abstraction and neither is death. One road ends with a people planted in a land and the other with a people scattered. Verse 14 is the hinge, and Paul quotes it in Romans 10:6–10 to describe the nearness of the gospel word. Israel could not plead ignorance, and neither can anyone sitting in your class.

Ask the class where they are tempted to treat obedience as impossible. People hide behind complexity because vagueness is comfortable. Moses will not allow it. The word is near you. Have someone name the one command of Christ they know perfectly well and have not obeyed, and let the room feel how close that word actually is.

Question 3. *Moses is shown the whole land from Nebo and told he will not enter it. What does that scene teach us about the holiness of God, and about serving Him faithfully for years and still hearing no?*

Numbers 20:7–12 records why Moses is kept out: at Meribah he struck the rock twice and spoke rashly, and God said he had failed to hallow Him before the people. It seems a small thing to us, which is precisely the point. The greater the privilege of standing near God, the more seriously He takes the misrepresenting of Him. Moses pleaded to go over (Deuteronomy 3:23–27) and God told him to stop asking.

Then handle the pastoral side gently, because someone in your class is living it. There are faithful people who prayed for a marriage that ended, a child who left, a healing that did not come. Moses shows us a man who obeys to the end anyway, blesses the people who will receive what he will not, and dies in the favor of God. Note also where Moses finally stands in the land: on the mount of transfiguration, with Christ (Matthew 17:3). God kept better than He withheld.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Count the verses given to blessing in Deuteronomy 28:1–14 and then the verses given to cursing in 28:15–68. What is the sheer weight of that chapter meant to press on a reader?*

Fourteen verses of blessing and fifty four verses of cursing. The disproportion is deliberate. Moses knows this people, and he is loading the warning side of the scale so heavily that no one can later claim surprise. Note for the class that these are covenant sanctions on the nation of Israel, not a formula predicting the health and income of individual Christians.

2. *Read Deuteronomy 29:29 slowly and write in your own words the line it draws between what God has kept to Himself and what He has handed to us and to our children.*

Secret things belong to God; revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do them. The verse draws a fence around speculation and a spotlight on obedience. What God has not told us is His business; what He has told us is our assignment. Many arguments in churches concern the left side of that verse while the right side goes undone.

3. *Moses calls heaven and earth as witnesses against Israel (30:19; 31:28). Trace what he is doing, then compare Joshua 24:22 and Isaiah 1:2.*

In a covenant treaty, witnesses were called who would outlive both parties. Since God is one party and Israel the other, Moses summons creation itself. Joshua does something similar at Shechem when he tells the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves.” Isaiah opens his book by calling the same witnesses back to the stand. The point is that no one will be able to say the terms were unclear.

4. *Deuteronomy 32 is a song, and songs work by images. Find every picture Moses uses for God in verses 1–18, from the Rock to the eagle, and note which one you least expected.*

Moses calls God the Rock (32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31), a God of truth without iniquity, a Father who bought and made them (32:6), and an eagle stirring up her nest and bearing her young on her wings (32:11). Most readers are surprised by the tenderness of the eagle image in a song so full of judgment, and by verse 18, which speaks of the God who fathered them and the God who gave them birth.

5. Deuteronomy 34:10–12 says no prophet has arisen like Moses. Read Acts 3:22–23 and Hebrews 3:1–6, then name one specific instruction from the Prophet greater than Moses that you have been putting off, and obey it this week.

Answers will vary. Peter applies Deuteronomy 18:15–19 directly to Jesus in Acts 3:22–23, and the warning there is severe: everyone who will not hear that Prophet will be cut off. Listen for a specific command, not a general intention to be better. Hebrews 3:1–6 sets Moses as a faithful servant in the house and Christ as a Son over it, so the obedience owed is greater, not smaller.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Deuteronomy 28 is covenant law for national Israel. Do not preach it as a promise that faithful Christians will be prosperous and healthy. The New Testament plainly expects the opposite at times (2 Timothy 3:12; Acts 14:22).
- The land promise is declared fulfilled in Joshua 21:43–45 and is taken up spiritually in Hebrews 4:8–11. Avoid any suggestion that these chapters predict a future earthly political kingdom in Palestine.
- Moses' exclusion from Canaan can breed a picture of a petty God. Keep it anchored in Numbers 20:12 and in the greater accountability of those who speak for God (James 3:1), and end with Matthew 17:3.
- Deuteronomy 29:29 is your friend when a class wants to argue about what God has not revealed. Say the verse, name the boundary kindly, and return to the text.

Agur's Honest Prayer

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 30 changes voices. Solomon steps aside and Agur, son of Jakeh, speaks. We know nothing else about him, and that is part of the effect. A stranger walks into the book, sits down, and says in effect, "Before I tell you anything, understand that I am not the wise one here." His opening lines are not false modesty. They are the posture that makes learning possible, and they sound a great deal like Job 42:1–6 and 1 Corinthians 8:2.

From that confession the chapter moves to its center in verses 5 and 6: every word of God is pure, He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him, do not add to His words. Having admitted he cannot climb up to heaven and bring wisdom down, Agur points to the word God has already spoken. That is the whole logic of revelation in two verses, and it makes a natural bridge to Deuteronomy 29:29 in this week's first reading.

The rest of the chapter teaches by numbered lists, a standard Hebrew wisdom form. The lists are not riddles to be decoded. They are trained observation: a man watching leeches, locusts, lizards, and lions long enough to learn something about greed, about mystery, about how weakness plus wisdom can beat strength plus stupidity. Teach your class to look at the world that way and you have given them a habit that will outlast the class.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Proverbs is a collection, and the closing chapters preserve the words of two men outside Solomon's line, Agur (chapter 30) and King Lemuel (chapter 31). Their inclusion is part of the inspired book.
- Numerical sayings of the form "three things, yes four" are a common Hebrew device; the final item in the list usually carries the weight (compare Amos 1 and 2).
- The oracle form and the questions of verse 4 echo God's questions to Job in Job 38, where the point is the enormous distance between the Creator and the creature.
- Verse 5 quotes Psalm 18:30 almost word for word, and verse 6 echoes Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32.
- Remember the genre rule your class learned in week one: proverbs are general principles about how life normally goes under God's order, not absolute promises.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Agur opens by saying he is weary, that he is more brutish than any man, and that he has not learned wisdom (30:1–3). Why would God place a wise man's confession of ignorance inside a book about wisdom?*

Wisdom in Scripture never starts with a person impressed by himself. The book opened at the fear of the Lord (1:7), which is a posture before God, and here near the end a wise man models what that posture sounds like out loud. Agur is not saying he knows nothing. He is saying that measured against the Holy One, his understanding is nothing, and that a man who has not seen that yet is unteachable no matter how much he has memorized.

Turn this toward the class directly but kindly. Long time members can reach a point where they have heard every lesson and stopped expecting to be changed by any of them. Ask what it would look like this quarter to come to a familiar text expecting to be corrected. The person most in danger in a Bible class is not the visitor who knows nothing; it is the member who thinks there is nothing left to learn.

Question 2. *Proverbs 30:7–9 is the only recorded prayer in the book, and Agur fears riches every bit as much as poverty. Talk through the two dangers he names, and be honest about which one your own household is actually facing.*

Agur names two ditches. Wealth tempts a man to say, "Who is the Lord?" because he no longer feels any need. Poverty tempts a man to steal and so to profane God's name. Both are spiritual dangers, and most of us can only see one of them. Notice that Agur does not ask to be rich so he can give more, or poor so he can be humble. He

asks for what is sufficient, which is exactly the prayer Jesus taught in Matthew 6:11 and the contentment Paul describes in Philippians 4:11–13 and 1 Timothy 6:6–10.

Do not let this become a discussion about other people's money. Ask the class what number in their own life is "enough," and whether that number has moved in the last ten years. Most of us have a moving line and a settled conviction that we are not the rich people the Bible warns about. Agur was afraid of becoming exactly that man, and his fear is the healthiest thing in the chapter.

Question 3. *Verses 5 and 6 warn against adding to God's words. How does that warning reach into how we worship and organize the Lord's church, and how do sincere people add without ever intending to?*

"Do not add to His words" assumes the words are sufficient. God's word is described here as pure, refined, and a shield, which means the danger is never that Scripture left something out, but that we would improve on it. Deuteronomy 4:2 said it to Israel, Revelation 22:18–19 says it at the close of the canon, Galatians 1:8–9 says it about the gospel itself, and 2 John 9 warns the one who goes beyond the doctrine of Christ.

Apply it plainly and without heat. Nobody adds on purpose; additions arrive as good ideas that solve a problem. The safeguard is the habit of asking, before we act as a congregation, where the New Testament authorizes it, whether by direct statement, apostolic example, or necessary inference. That question is not a straitjacket. It is the shield of verse 5 held in place. Teach it as a matter of loving the same word we claim to obey, and expect it to be tested in practice more often than in theory.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the five questions of Proverbs 30:4, then read John 3:13 and Ephesians 4:9–10. Who alone can answer them, and what is Agur driving his reader toward?*

Who has ascended into heaven or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name? Every answer is God, and John 3:13 and Ephesians 4:9–10 identify the One who did descend and ascend. Agur is driving his reader off his own resources and onto revelation.

2. *List the four things in 30:15–16 that never say "enough." What do they share, and where do you recognize that same appetite in your own week?*

The grave, the barren womb, the earth that is never filled with water, and the fire that never says "enough." Each one swallows without ever being satisfied, which is precisely how appetite works when it is not governed. Answers about personal application will vary; listen for honesty about screens, food, money, and ambition rather than vague admissions.

3. *Proverbs 30:11–14 sketches a generation in four strokes. Name each trait, then decide which of the four our own culture would most indignantly deny.*

A generation that curses its father and does not bless its mother, that is pure in its own eyes but not washed from its filthiness, that is lofty eyed, and whose teeth are like swords to devour the poor. The trait most indignantly denied is the second, self declared purity, because a culture that has redefined the standard genuinely believes it is clean.

4. *The four small creatures of 30:24–28 are called exceedingly wise. Identify the particular wisdom of each one, and say which of the four you most need this year.*

Ants have no leader yet prepare in summer, which is foresight. Rock badgers are feeble yet build in the rock, which is knowing where to take refuge. Locusts have no king yet advance in ranks, which is order without coercion. The lizard is caught in the hand yet lives in palaces, which is persistence that ends up where strength alone could not go. Answers on personal need will vary.

5. *Notice the order of Agur's prayer: he asks God to remove falsehood from him before he asks for bread. Name one exaggeration, convenient omission, or half truth you routinely tell, and stop telling it this week.*

Answers will vary. The point to draw out is the order of the requests. Agur treats truthfulness as more urgent than provision, and he treats lying as something God must remove rather than something he will simply stop. Listen for specifics: inflated numbers at work, a story that grows in the telling, the "fine" we say when we are not.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Verse 6 will invite a debate about worship practice. Teach the principle clearly and let the applications be made without sarcasm or personalities. Firmness and kindness are not in competition.
- Agur's prayer is not a vow of poverty and not a rebuke of everyone with savings. It is a prayer for a heart that neither despises God in plenty nor dishonors Him in want.
- Do not turn the numerical sayings into hidden codes or prophecies. They are trained observation about how life works, and they are meant to be enjoyed.

Sheep, Goats, and Silver

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Matthew 25:31–46 is the last picture in the last sermon, and it is a courtroom. The Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, all nations are gathered, and the division happens with the ease of a shepherd sorting a mixed flock at evening. Nothing in the scene is negotiated. What has been done has been done. Note carefully that the deeds named are not heroic; they are food, water, welcome, clothing, visits. The King has been hiding in plain sight among the least of His brethren, and neither group knew it.

Then Matthew pivots, and the pivot is deliberate. Having just described the throne, he shows us the King two days before He is nailed to a cross. The plot is hatched in the palace of Caiaphas, and in the same breath Matthew puts us in a house in Bethany where a woman does the only beautiful thing anyone does for Jesus in the whole passion narrative. She pours out what she has. Jesus says the story will be told wherever the gospel is preached, and here you are, telling it.

Between those two scenes runs the tragedy of Judas. He has seen everything the others have seen. He has preached and watched the sick healed. And he asks, “What are you willing to give me?” Thirty pieces of silver was the compensation for a gored slave (Exodus 21:32) and the contemptuous wage of Zechariah 11:12–13. A man can be near Jesus for three years and still be pricing Him.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This closes the fifth and final discourse in Matthew (chapters 24 and 25), after which Matthew moves without pause into the passion.
- The judgment scene is universal: “all the nations” are gathered before one throne. It matches John 5:28–29, Acts 17:31, 2 Corinthians 5:10, and 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10.
- Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew enormous crowds to Jerusalem, which is exactly why the priests wanted to act quietly (26:5).
- Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem; Matthew places the anointing at the house of Simon the leper, and John identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus.
- Thirty pieces of silver appears in Exodus 21:32 as the price of a slave and in Zechariah 11:12–13 as a sum thrown to the potter, which Matthew will pick up in 27:9–10.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In Matthew 25:31–46 both groups are genuinely surprised by the verdict. Why are the sheep as astonished as the goats, and what does that tell you about the kind of life Jesus is describing?*

The surprise of the sheep is the most instructive detail in the passage. They do not answer, “Yes, Lord, we kept records.” They say, “When did we see You?” Their mercy had become so ordinary that they were not tracking it, which is the difference between a life shaped by love and a life performing for a grade. The goats are equally sincere in their surprise, and their defense amounts to saying they would certainly have helped if they had known it mattered.

Guard two ditches here. This is not salvation earned by charity; the kingdom is called an inheritance prepared from the foundation of the world, and inheritance is not wages. Neither is it faith only, since the verdict turns entirely on what was and was not done. Put it the way the New Testament does: faith that does not work is dead (James 2:14–17), and the faith that saves is the faith that obeys (Galatians 5:6). Ask the class which of the six acts has quietly disappeared from their congregation’s habits.

Question 2. *A woman pours out ointment worth nearly a year's wages and is criticized for waste (26:6–13). When is extravagance toward Christ exactly right, and how do we tell worship and waste apart?*

The objection sounds responsible. That ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor, and the number John supplies, three hundred denarii, is close to a year's wages for a laborer. Jesus answers that she has done a good work, that the poor will always be there, and that she has anointed Him for burial. In other words, there is a moment for calculation and there is a moment for pouring, and wisdom is knowing which moment you are standing in.

Let the class feel the sting of John 12:6, where the loudest voice for the poor belongs to the man who was stealing from the bag. Concern for good causes can be a mask. Then turn it warm: ask each person to name something extravagant they have done for the Lord in the last year, something that cost them enough to notice. If nobody can answer, the room has learned something important about itself.

Question 3. *Judas asks the priests what they are willing to give him, and at the table every disciple asks, "Lord, is it I?" Talk about how a man drifts from following to selling, and where that drift usually begins.*

Nothing in the text says Judas woke up that morning intending to sell Jesus. John 12:4–6 shows a long habit of small theft, and Matthew places the bargain immediately after a rebuke. Drift starts with a private appetite that is never confessed, then finds a grievance to justify itself, then waits for opportunity. By the time the price is named, the real transaction happened months earlier. That is why Jesus can say "one of you" and eleven men look at themselves before they look around the room.

"Lord, is it I?" is the healthiest sentence in the chapter, and it should be the class's sentence too. Do not permit the hour to become an autopsy of Judas. Ask instead what small, unconfessed thing each person is currently managing rather than repenting of. Then note that Judas had every opportunity to repent, right up to the kiss. His ruin was not decreed; it was chosen, one silent compromise at a time.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the six acts of mercy named in Matthew 25:35–36, and mark the ones that cannot be done at a distance or with a check.*

Hungry and fed, thirsty and given drink, a stranger and taken in, naked and clothed, sick and visited, in prison and come to. The last two in particular cannot be delegated or mailed. They require a body in a room, which is exactly why they are the first to fall off a busy Christian's list.

2. *Read 25:34 and 25:41 side by side and notice for whom the kingdom was prepared and for whom the fire was prepared. What difference does that careful wording make?*

The kingdom was "prepared for you from the foundation of the world"; the fire was "prepared for the devil and his angels." God built a home for people and a prison for rebel powers. No one is created for destruction. People who go there go where they were never intended to go, which is why 2 Peter 3:9 says God is not willing that any should perish.

3. *Compare Matthew 26:6–13 with John 12:1–8. What additional detail does John supply about the objection, and how does it change the way you hear it?*

John adds that the objection came from Judas and that he said it not because he cared for the poor but because he was a thief who carried the money box. The objection is not less reasonable in Matthew; John simply shows us that noble language can be a cover, and that is worth hearing before we trust our own reasoning about money.

4. *Follow the money through this reading: the ointment, the poor, and the thirty pieces of silver. Trace what each use of money reveals about the heart behind it, and compare Zechariah 11:12–13.*

The ointment is a heart pouring out everything; the poor are the ongoing, unglamorous obligation Jesus assumes will continue; the thirty pieces are a heart pricing the Son of God at the value of a slave. Zechariah 11:12–13 is the insult behind the figure: it was what men weighed out for a shepherd they did not want. Money never stays neutral in this passage.

5. *Jesus ties the verdict to how His brethren were treated. Name one member of your congregation who is sick, homebound, grieving, or forgotten, and write down the day and hour this week that you will go to them.*

Answers will vary, and the assignment is deliberately specific because good intentions here are famously durable and famously useless. Listen for a name, a day, and an hour. Follow up next week. This is the single most easily measured application in the whole quarter.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Matthew 25:31–46 must not be preached as salvation by works of merit, nor allowed to be softened into faith only. Keep the words “inherit” and “prepared for you” in view alongside the works that are actually judged.
- This is the general judgment of all nations at Christ’s coming, not an earthly judgment introducing a thousand year reign. Christ reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13), and His coming brings the end (1 Corinthians 15:23–26).
- “The least of these My brethren” has a primary reference to Christ’s own people, but the duty of mercy is not limited to them (Galatians 6:10). Say both, and do not let the narrower reading be used to excuse hardness.
- Handle Judas without caricature. He was not a puppet. Scripture foretold the betrayal without forcing the betrayer, and the same table was offered to him that was offered to John.

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Romans is Paul's fullest statement of the gospel, written to a church he did not plant and hoped to visit on the way to Spain. The greeting is one enormous sentence, and it is worth slowing down over: the gospel was promised beforehand in the prophets, concerns God's Son who was born of the seed of David and declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection, and its goal is obedience to the faith among all nations. Everything the letter will argue is already packed into verses 1 through 5.

Verses 16 and 17 are the thesis. The gospel is not advice and it is not a philosophy; it is power, God's own power, applied to the rescue of anyone who believes, Jew first and also Greek. In it the righteousness of God is revealed. Paul is announcing that God has acted to put people right with Himself, and the rest of the letter unpacks how, on what terms, and with what consequences for daily living.

Then comes a paragraph that is harder to read aloud than any other in Paul. Paul is not describing a distant pagan world with contempt; he is diagnosing humanity. The movement is not from ignorance to sin but from knowledge to suppression: they knew God, did not glorify Him as God, were not thankful, and exchanged the truth for a lie. Three times God gives them over to what they had already chosen. And just when a religious reader has decided this is about somebody else, chapter 2 turns the lamp around.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Paul wrote Romans around A.D. 57, probably from Corinth near the end of the third preaching trip, before carrying the contribution to Jerusalem (15:25–28).
- The church at Rome was mixed, Jewish and Gentile, and much of the letter addresses how both stand on exactly the same ground before God (1:16; 2:9–11; 3:9).
- "The righteousness of God" in 1:17 means God's way of making people right with Himself, revealed in the gospel and received on God's terms.
- Habakkuk 2:4, quoted in 1:17, is also quoted in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38, where the very next verses warn against drawing back. Faith in Scripture is a living, obeying trust.
- Chapter divisions came later. Romans 1:18–32 and 2:1–11 are one argument, and reading them apart is what produces self righteousness in a Bible class.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God to salvation (1:16). Where do Christians today go quietly silent, and what would actually change if we believed that verse on a Tuesday at work?*

Shame is the reason most Christians never open their mouths. Paul is writing to believers in the capital of the empire, a city impressed by power, rhetoric, and status, and the message he carries is about an executed Galilean. He says he is not ashamed of it, and the reason he gives is not that it is respectable but that it works. It is dynamite in God's hand for the saving of everyone who believes, with no ethnic or social qualifier attached.

Get specific with the class about where the silence happens: the break room, the family group text, the conversation with grown children who have left. Then ask what believing verse 16 would change. Usually it changes not the volume but the expectation. People who think the gospel is merely their preference speak apologetically; people who think it is God's power speak plainly and leave the results to Him.

Question 2. *Three times Paul says God “gave them up” or “gave them over” (1:24, 26, 28). Discuss what that kind of judgment is, and why it is more frightening than fire from heaven.*

This is judgment by withdrawal. God does not push anyone into sin; He stops restraining people who have made it clear what they want, and lets the thing they wanted have them. Each “gave them over” follows an exchange: they exchanged God’s glory for images, the truth for a lie, the natural for the unnatural. It is terrifying precisely because nothing dramatic happens. There is no thunder. A person simply gets what he insisted on, and the getting is the sentence.

Two guardrails as you teach it. First, this is not God predetermining anyone’s ruin; verse 21 says they knew God, and verse 32 says they know the judgment of God and do it anyway, which is the language of responsible choice. Second, do not stop at verse 32. First Corinthians 6:9–11 lists sins of the same kind and then says, “And such were some of you. But you were washed.” Paul describes a pit and then tells you people have been lifted out of it.

Question 3. *Romans 2:1–11 turns suddenly on the reader who has been nodding along through chapter 1. How does Paul spring the trap, and what does he say the goodness of God is meant to produce?*

The trap is beautifully set. Chapter 1 ends with a list of sins that a decent religious reader can applaud the condemnation of, and 2:1 says, “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judges.” The sin of chapter 2 is not immorality but the assumption that agreeing with God’s verdict is the same as being right with God. Paul says the judge does the same things and presumes on God’s patience, mistaking delay for approval.

Verse 4 names what that patience is for: the goodness of God leads you to repentance. This is where the class should land. Ask what God has been kind about for years, a marriage He has preserved, health He has given, children He has kept safe, and whether that kindness has ever produced repentance about anything specific. Verses 6 through 11 then remove every hiding place: God renders to each according to his deeds, and there is no partiality with Him.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the descent in Romans 1:21–32 one step at a time, beginning with a refusal to glorify God and give thanks. At which step does the slide become visible to other people, and at which step did it actually begin?*

The steps are knowing God, refusing to glorify Him as God, refusing to be thankful, becoming futile in thought, having the heart darkened, professing wisdom while becoming foolish, exchanging God’s glory for images, and then being given over three times. The slide becomes visible to other people only at the level of behavior near the end, but it began with two failures nobody could see: not glorifying and not thanking.

2. *Romans 1:5 and 16:26 both speak of “obedience to the faith.” Read the two verses together and write out what that phrase says about the relationship between believing and obeying.*

The phrase joins the two words the New Testament refuses to separate. Paul’s stated goal as an apostle is obedience among the nations that arises from faith and belongs to the faith. Romans opens and closes with it, which frames everything between. Whatever Romans means by justification by faith, it cannot mean a faith that never obeys, since the letter’s own purpose statement says otherwise (compare Romans 6:17; 10:16).

3. *According to Romans 1:19–20, what has God made plain to every human being, and on what ground does Paul say men are without excuse? Compare Psalm 19:1–4 and Acts 14:17.*

God has made plain His invisible attributes, His eternal power and Godhead, through the things that are made, so that men are without excuse. Psalm 19 says the heavens declare it day after day without speech, and Acts 14:17 says God left Himself a witness in rain and fruitful seasons and glad hearts. The evidence is universal, continuous, and public.

4. *List what Romans 2:6–11 says God will render and on what basis He will render it. Then set it beside 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Galatians 6:7–8 and note how consistent the New Testament is on this.*

He will render eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, and indignation and wrath to the self seeking who do not obey the truth. Tribulation and anguish to every soul who does

evil, glory and peace to everyone who works what is good, Jew first and also Greek, for there is no partiality with God. Second Corinthians 5:10 and Galatians 6:7-8 say the same thing in different words.

5. *Romans 2:4 says the goodness of God is leading you to repentance. Name one kindness of God you have been enjoying for years while leaving one sin untouched, and take the first concrete step toward repentance this week.*

Answers will vary. Watch for the difference between feeling grateful and repenting. Paul's point is that God's kindness has a purpose and a time limit, and that treating patience as permission is the most common sin of religious people. Listen for one named sin and one first step, such as a confession, a phone call, a blocked account, or a resignation.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Romans 1:17 is where faith only is usually read into the letter. Say now what Paul says in 1:5 and 16:26, that the gospel aims at obedience to the faith, and keep saying it through the coming weeks. Faith that saves believes, repents, confesses, and is baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27).
- Romans 1:26-27 speaks plainly about homosexual practice. Teach exactly what the text says, without heat and without apology, hold up God's design of marriage as one man and one woman for life (Matthew 19:4-6), and finish at 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 so that the class hears the hope as clearly as the verdict.
- "God gave them over" is judicial withdrawal, not divine causation and not unconditional reprobation. Nothing in the passage teaches that anyone was created for destruction.
- Do not let 2:6-11 be explained away because of what chapter 3 will say. Paul wrote both. God's grace is not earned, and God's judgment genuinely takes our deeds into account.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Joshua 1-8 · Proverbs 31 · Matthew 26:26-56 · Romans 2:12-3:20

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com