TELLING THE GOOD NEWS · STUDY NOTES

# Study 2: The message we share

For personal study or groups

Your name

biblehelp.net

**How to use these notes.** Watch each part's video on biblehelp.net, or read the text below. Look up each passage in your own Bible and write the answer on the lines. The verses are printed at the back if you need them. At the end there are questions to think about on your own or to discuss in a group.

PART 1

# God, and our rebellion against Him

## The bad news before the good news (Romans 1:18–25; 3:9–20)

The gospel is news, and news has to be explained. If we say "Believe!", people need to know what to believe; if we say "Repent!", they need to know what they are to repent of. So before Paul explains the good news, he explains why we need it. And he begins, not with us and our problems, but with God.

**1. God's wrath, and the truth we push down (1:18–20).** God's wrath is not bad temper. It is His settled, holy opposition to evil, pure and steady, unlike our anger. "Godlessness and wickedness" are sin against God and sin against people: the opposite of the two great commandments. People "suppress the truth", pushing it down like a ball held under water. Creation speaks of its Creator, so no one will be able to say, "I had no idea there was a God."

1 **Read Romans 1:18–20**

**What truth do people push down, and how has God made it plain to them?**

**Speaking to a conscience**

Unbelief is not the natural starting point. People already know that God is there. When we speak about God, we speak to a conscience that God Himself has made.

**2. The root of our rebellion (1:21–23).** The first sin Paul names is not murder or theft, but failing to glorify God as God and to thank Him. We take His gifts and do not honour the Giver. And when people push God out, they do not stop worshipping: they exchange Him for things He made. Money, health, comfort, a hobby, even our family can take His place. A simple test: whatever you cannot live without, whatever you live for, that is your god.

**2** **Read Romans 1:21–23**

**What are the things people around you put in God's place? And you?**

**3. God gave them over (1:24–25).** God lets people have what they have chosen. Sin at its heart is an exchange: "the truth of God for a lie". Yet even here Paul praises the Creator, "who is forever worthy of praise". That is what makes our sin so serious.

**3** **Read Romans 1:24–25**

**Why does Paul stop to praise God in the middle of these verses?**

**4. Sin is first a wrong relationship with God.** Not giving Him His place, not thanking Him, and putting other things in His place. The sins Paul lists later in the chapter are the fruit; the root is rebellion against God. That is why better behaviour, good as it is, never reaches the real problem. Jesus often went straight to the thing that had taken God's place in a person's life (Mark 10:21; John 4:16–18).

**5. No one righteous (3:9–18).** "Are we any better? Not at all." Paul puts himself among the guilty, Jew and Greek alike "under sin", as under a ruler or a sentence. Left to ourselves we do not seek God. There is kindness in people, but God's standard is complete goodness, from the heart: we are not as bad as we could be, but we are not as good as we must be. Sin has spread into every part of us, our words especially.

**4** **Read Romans 3:9–12**

**Why does Paul say "we", and not "they"?**

**6. Every mouth silenced (3:19–20).** Romans 1–3 is like a courtroom, where every excuse is answered and "every mouth may be silenced". Turning over a new leaf will not reduce the sentence. The law is like a mirror: it shows us the dirt on our face, but it cannot wash it off.

**5** **Read Romans 3:19–20**

**What can the law do, and what can it not do?**

**7. Why this matters for evangelism.** Without the bad news, the good news makes no sense: no one wants a Saviour until they know they are lost. We speak as sinners, not as judges. And we do not stop here: because all have sinned, the worst sinner has the same hope as the most respectable. Paul is heading for two words: "But now" (3:21).

PART 2

# What God has done in Christ

## Righteousness from God (Romans 3:21–28; 4:4–5)

**1. "But now" (3:21–24).** Romans 1–3 is full of people's "buts": their excuses. Here Paul's "But" is good news. God has provided a righteousness Himself, "apart from the law": a gift, not a wage. It was not new: Abraham "believed the LORD, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

**6** **Read Romans 3:21–24**

**Where does this righteousness come from, and who receives it?**

*See also: Genesis 15:6.*

**2. Faith saves because of what it trusts.** Two people jump from an aeroplane, each confident in a backpack; one holds a parachute, the other sandwiches. Faith in our own goodness is faith in sandwiches. Faith in Christ, however weak and trembling, is faith in a parachute that will not fail. You do not need a strong faith. You need a strong Saviour.

**3. Four words in verse 24.** *Justified*: declared in the right, a verdict in court. *Freely*: as a gift, free to us but costly to the Saviour. *By His grace*: God's kindness to people who deserve the opposite. *Through the redemption*: set free by a price paid, as a slave was set free. And the ones justified are those who "have sinned and fall short".

**7** **Read Romans 3:24**

**Could you explain the word "justified" to a child?**

**4. The atoning sacrifice (3:25–26).** An atoning sacrifice turns away God's just anger against sin by bearing it. Paul's word recalls the mercy seat, the lid of the ark: the place where God met His people, and a covering over the broken law, sprinkled with blood (Exodus 25:22). Christ is both. God "presented" Him: He set Him out in full view, on a cross outside a city.

**8** **Read Romans 3:25–26**

**How can God be both "just" and the one who "justifies"?**

*See also: Exodus 25:22.*

**The cross and God's love**

Christ did not die to make the Father start loving us. Christ's death satisfied God's justice, so that His love could flow out to sinners without any injustice.

**5. The cup drunk dry.** At the cross, God punished sin completely, in Christ. He drank the cup of God's anger against sin, from Gethsemane to the cross, until it was finished, so that not one drop is left for His people. If God has punished Christ in my place, it would be unjust to punish me as well. And God showed His greatest love in the darkest place on earth: if God is not a God of love, why did Jesus die like that?

**6. Him who justifies the ungodly (4:4–5).** Wages are owed; salvation is a gift. It is for "the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly". That frees the person who thinks they are too bad, and warns the person who thinks they are good enough. No sin of yours will ruin you if you believe; but no righteousness of yours will save you if you will not believe.

**9** **Read Romans 4:4–5**

**What would you say to someone who thinks they are too bad to be saved? And to someone who thinks they are good enough?**

**7. Boasting excluded (3:27–28; 1 Timothy 1:15).** Faith only receives, so no one in heaven will boast. We do not invite people into a club of better people: the door is open to sinners, and we came in the same way. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst."

**10** **Read 1 Timothy 1:15**

**Why is this a good sentence to learn by heart?**

*See also: Romans 3:27–28.*

**8. The gospel in four words.** *God*: our Creator, holy and good. *Sin*: we have not given Him His place, and we cannot put ourselves right. *Christ*: God's Son died for sinners as an atoning sacrifice, and rose again. *Response*: turn from sin and trust in Christ. Not a formula to recite, but four things to know well.

PART 3

# The call: repent and believe

### The response the gospel calls for (Mark 1:14–15; Acts 17:30–31; 20:20–24)

**1. The first words of Jesus' preaching (Mark 1:14–15).** "The time is fulfilled… Repent and believe in the gospel!" "Gospel" was the word for news that changed the world. Like John the Baptist, we point away from ourselves to the King. Jesus called religious people to repent too: of trusting in their own merit.

**11** **Read Mark 1:14–15**

**Why did religious, Bible-reading people need to repent?**

**2. An invitation and a command.** Jesus invites with great tenderness: "Come to Me..." (Matthew 11:28). But "repent and believe" is also God's command. That is kind: if God commands you to believe, then you may. And it is solemn: to refuse it is to disobey God. So we invite warmly, and we say plainly that God commands everyone to repent and believe.

**3. All people everywhere (Acts 17:30–31).** God "commands all people everywhere to repent", because He has set a day of judgement, and the Judge is the risen Christ. Repentance is a change of direction: stepping down from the throne of your own life and handing it to the King.

**12** **Read Acts 17:30–31**

**Who is commanded to repent, and why is it urgent?**

**4. What repentance is not.** Being sorry only because I was found out; sorry only for the results; or only afraid of punishment. These can be a beginning, but none of them is turning to God. Nor is the command unreasonable: it is right to admit a wrong to someone who is ready to forgive, and right for a creature to trust its Creator. The problem is our hearts.

**5. Repentance to God, faith in Christ (Acts 20:20–24).** Paul "did not shrink back", though the call to repent was unpopular, then as now. Repentance is turning towards God, sorry for the sin itself. Faith is trust: resting the whole weight of my salvation on Christ, as we rest our weight on a chair. Repentance and faith belong together, like a door and its doorpost.

**13** **Read Acts 20:20–21 and 24**

**Why might Paul have been tempted to "shrink back"?**

**6. Deeds worthy of repentance (Acts 26:20).** Repentance does not earn salvation, but real repentance shows itself, as fruit shows the tree. So we never say, "Just believe, and carry on as you like", and never, "Clean up your life first." God works repentance and faith in us together, and repentance is His gift. Yet it is everyone's duty, so we call people to repent, and pray that God will give it. And "my sins are too great to be forgiven" is not repentance, but a lie about what Christ's blood can do.

**14** **Read Acts 26:20**

**What did Paul tell people to do, and what should their lives show? Does our repentance earn salvation?**

**7. Honest about the cost (Luke 14:27; John 16:33).** We must not promise health, wealth or an easy life. Jesus called His followers to carry a cross, and told them they would have trouble. But He does promise forgiveness, peace with God, and Himself with us in every trouble. It will cost you everything, and give you far more than it costs.

**15** **Read Luke 14:27 and John 16:33**

**What does Jesus not promise, and what does He promise?**

**8. Now (2 Corinthians 6:2).** The gospel always says "today". And repentance and faith are not only for the first day: every day we turn from sin again, and trust Christ again.

**16** **Read 2 Corinthians 6:2**

**Why must the call to repent and believe always be for "now"?**

THINK IT THROUGH

## Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Have you ever told someone "just believe", and left out repentance? Or "clean up first", and left out grace?

2. What would you say to someone who says, "My sins are too great to be forgiven"?

3. Try explaining the gospel to a Christian friend this week in four words: God, sin, Christ, response.

HIDE IT IN YOUR HEART

# Memory verse for study 2

Learn this verse by heart this week. Cut out the card and keep it where you will see it.

TELLING THE GOOD NEWS · STUDY 2 · MEMORY VERSE

*“This is a trustworthy saying, worthy of full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.”*

**1 Timothy 1:15**

Berean Standard Bible · biblehelp.net

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11, BSB)

AT THE BACK

# The Bible passages (BSB)

1 **Romans 1:18–20** *18The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. 19For what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from His workmanship, so that men are without excuse.*

2 **Romans 1:21–23** *21For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and darkened in their foolish hearts. 22Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools, 23and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

3 **Romans 1:24–25** *24Therefore God gave them over in the desires of their hearts to impurity for the dishonoring of their bodies with one another. 25They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is forever worthy of praise! Amen.*

4 **Romans 3:9–12** *9What then? Are we any better? Not at all. For we have already made the charge that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin. 10As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one. 11There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

5 **Romans 3:19–20** *19Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20Therefore no one will be justified in His sight by works of the law. For the law merely brings awareness of sin.*

6 **Romans 3:21–24** *21But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, as attested by the Law and the Prophets. 22And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction, 23for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

7 **Romans 3:24** *and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

8 **Romans 3:25–26** *25God presented Him as an atoning sacrifice in His blood through faith, in order to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had passed over the sins committed beforehand. 26He did this to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and to justify the one who has faith in Jesus.*

9 **Romans 4:4–5** *4Now the wages of the worker are not credited as a gift, but as an obligation. 5However, to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

10 **1 Timothy 1:15** *This is a trustworthy saying, worthy of full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.*

11 **Mark 1:14–15** *14After the arrest of John, Jesus went into Galilee and proclaimed the gospel of God. 15"The time is fulfilled," He said, "and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the gospel!"*

12 **Acts 17:30–31** *30Although God overlooked the ignorance of earlier times, He now commands all people everywhere to repent. 31For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead."*

13 **Acts 20:20–21 + Acts 20:24** *1I did not shrink back from declaring anything that was helpful to you as I taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews and Greeks alike about repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. … 2But I consider my life of no value to me, if only I may finish my course and complete the ministry I have received from the Lord Jesus—the ministry of testifying to the good news of God's grace.*

14 **Acts 26:20** *First to those in Damascus and Jerusalem, then to everyone in the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I declared that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds worthy of their repentance.*

15 **Luke 14:27 + John 16:33** *1And whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple. … 2I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world!"*

16 **2 Corinthians 6:2** *For He says: "In the time of favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." Behold, now is the time of favor; now is the day of salvation!*

Scripture: Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain. Quotations keep its American spelling. Like many English Bibles, it often says 'man', 'he' or 'brothers' where it means people in general, men and women alike.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

# Study 2: The message we share

> **Memory verse:** “This is a trustworthy saying, worthy of full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.” (1 Timothy 1:15). Say it together at the end, and ask who can say it without looking.

## Aims

- See from Romans 1:18–25 and 3:9–20 the bad news that makes the good news make sense: God is our Creator, and we have not given Him His place.
- See from Romans 3:21–28 and 4:4–5 what God has done in Christ: a righteousness from God, received by faith, through Christ's atoning sacrifice.
- See from Mark 1:14–15 and Acts 17 and 20 the response the gospel calls for: repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, now.

## Suggested timing (about 90 minutes)

- **5 min** Welcome and short prayer.
- **25 min** Part 1 video (14 min); Romans 1:18–20, 21–23, 24–25; 3:9–12, 19–20.
- **25 min** Part 2 video (12 min); Romans 3:21–24, 24, 25–26; 4:4–5; 1 Timothy 1:15.
- **25 min** Part 3 video (12 min); Mark 1:14–15; Acts 17:30–31; 20:20–24; 26:20; Luke 14:27 and John 16:33; 2 Corinthians 6:2.
- **10 min** Reflection questions, and practise the four words together. Close in prayer.

For a shorter meeting, take one part each week.

## Tips

- Keep the order of the study: God, sin, Christ, response. The four words are a help for remembering, not a formula to recite. Give everyone a few minutes to try them aloud with a partner.
- Speak about sin as Paul does, with "we", not "they" (3:9). If the group starts to talk about "people out there", gently bring the question back to our own hearts.
- On idols (1:21–23), help the group to be specific and honest, but do not ask anyone to share what is private. The test "whatever you cannot live without" is enough to start the conversation.
- On Romans 1:24–25, keep to the passage's main point: God lets people have what they have chosen. There is no need to open the questions of verses 26–27 in this study.
- On "atoning sacrifice" (3:25), make sure the group sees that the Father did not need to be talked round: Christ died because God loved us, and His death satisfied God's justice.
- Some will feel too bad to be saved, and some will feel good enough. Romans 4:5 speaks to both: "Him who justifies the ungodly."
- On repentance, watch for two errors: "just believe, and carry on as you like", and "clean up first". The door and the doorpost help: repentance and faith belong together.
- Repentance is God's gift, and it is everyone's duty. If the group finds that hard, keep to what we are told to do: call people to repent and believe, and pray that God will give them repentance. Study 4 looks at this more closely.

## Answers to watch for

- **Romans 1:18–20:** the truth about God Himself, His eternal power and divine nature; He has made it plain through what He has made, so that people are without excuse.
- **Romans 1:21–23:** money, success, comfort, health, a hobby, a team, a career, even family; good gifts that take God's place. The second question is personal: allow silence.
- **Romans 1:24–25:** the God we have turned from is still worthy of all praise; that is what makes our sin so serious.
- **Romans 3:9–12:** Paul puts himself among the guilty: "we" are no better. We speak as sinners, not as judges.
- **Romans 3:19–20:** the law shows us our sin (awareness of sin), like a mirror; it cannot make us right with God or wash us clean.
- **Romans 3:21–24:** it comes from God, "apart from the law"; it is received through faith in Jesus Christ, by all who believe, with no distinction.
- **Romans 3:24:** God, the Judge, says: "You are in the right with Me", not because we are good, but because of what Jesus has done. Like a verdict in court.
- **Romans 3:25–26:** sin is not ignored: it is punished, in Christ; so God is just, and He can justify the one who trusts in Jesus.
- **Romans 4:4–5:** to the first: God "justifies the ungodly", not the good. To the second: as long as we try to earn it, we have not received it.
- **1 Timothy 1:15:** it is "trustworthy", it is the gospel in one sentence, and if God saved Paul, "the worst", He can save anyone who comes.
- **Mark 1:14–15:** they trusted in their own merit and keeping of the law; respectable people need to turn too, from trusting in themselves.
- **Acts 17:30–31:** "all people everywhere"; God has set a day of judgement, and the Judge is the risen Christ.
- **Acts 20:20–21, 24:** the call to repent was unpopular and costly; Paul counted his life as nothing compared with finishing his work.
- **Acts 26:20:** repentance does not earn salvation; it shows itself in a changed life, as fruit shows the tree.
- **Luke 14:27, John 16:33:** not an easy life (a cross, trouble); but peace in Him, His presence, and a world He has overcome.
- **2 Corinthians 6:2:** a call to repent "tomorrow" would give permission to go on sinning today; God says "now".