

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

THE
PROGRESSIVE
REVELATION
OF GOD

WITNESS LEE

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

THE
PROGRESSIVE
REVELATION
OF GOD

WITNESS LEE

Living Stream Ministry

Anaheim, CA • www.lsm.org

THE PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD

GOD REVEALED IN ROMANS

We have seen that God is revealed progressively throughout the book of Romans. God is revealed in twelve situations in Romans.

First of all, Romans shows us God in His creation ([1:19-20](#)). God is invisible; yet the invisible things of God, such as His eternal power and divine nature, are clearly seen, being apprehended by means of the things created by Him.

Secondly, Romans unveils to us God in condemnation ([Rom. 2](#)). After being created, man fell and became sinful. This brought in God's condemnation.

After this, Romans presents to us God in redemption ([Rom. 3](#)). God's condemnation reveals man's need of salvation, but for the righteous God to save sinful man, redemption is needed.

After redemption, God is revealed in justification ([Rom. 3 and 4](#)). God is righteous, and He cannot be unrighteous. The redeeming death of Christ has fulfilled and satisfied God's righteous

requirements for us sinners. Hence, the redemption of Christ not only affords God the righteous ground upon which to justify those who believe in Christ's redemption, but also God Himself is bound by His righteousness to do so.

Following this, God is seen in reconciliation ([Rom. 5](#)). We were not only sinners, but also enemies of God. God's justification is based upon Christ's redemption and issues in His reconciliation. Here we joy in God and enjoy God in all that He is to us.

More than this, God is realized by us in our identification with Christ ([Rom. 6](#)). God has not only reconciled us to Himself, but has also identified us with Christ. We were born in Adam, but God has transferred us from Adam into Christ. In [Romans 6](#) God has become the God in identification, having accomplished a great work in order to make us one with Himself. God has identified us with Himself in Christ.

Romans also shows that God is experienced by us in sanctification ([Rom. 6 through 8](#)). He has made us one with Christ so that we may be sanctified not only positionally, but also dispositionally. Identification thus issues in sanctification. In sanctification, He is the God in our spirit. The very God who created us, redeemed

us, and justified us is now in us! He is no longer merely objective to us, but He is very subjective. He is no longer just in the heavens, far away from us; He is now right within us, in “our spirit” (8:16).

Romans also reveals that God is enjoyed by us in glorification (Rom. 8). He has foreknown us, predestinated us, called us, and justified us. He is now sanctifying us, and He will glorify us (8:29-30).

Moreover, God is further revealed to us in His love that secures our destiny (8:31-39). In justification He has made us partakers of His righteousness, in sanctification He is working His holiness into our being, and in glorification He will bring us into His glory. His love is the security of all these things.

God is also seen in His selection (Rom. 9 through 11). It is not that we have selected Him, but rather that He has selected us. His selection is our destiny. In His selection we have been destined to have a share, a portion, in Him.

Eventually, God is glorified in the Body of Christ (Rom. 12). In chapter twelve God is in the Body. He is not only God in the spirits of the believers, but God in a corporate collective entity.

Finally, Romans unfolds to us that God is expressed in the church life ([Rom. 16](#)). The Body of Christ is spiritual and universal. It has to be expressed practically in various localities as churches. God is expressed in Christ, Christ is expressed in His Body, and the Body of Christ is expressed in the churches. As we come to [Romans 16](#), we discover that God is in the local churches. On the one hand God is in our spirit; on the other hand He is in all the local churches.

THE CONSUMMATION OF GOD’S WORK

In [Romans 1](#) we find the word “creation”; in [Romans 16](#) we find the word “churches.” It is quite easy to say how God created: He spoke the word, and creation came into being. However, it is difficult to say how He produced the churches. God had to perform a work in various stages as part of a lengthy process which included redemption, justification, reconciliation, regeneration, sanctification, transformation, conformation, and glorification. As a result of this lengthy process, God has made the churches. The churches are the peak, the consummation, of God’s work and building. He cannot go any higher. Therefore, the book of Romans ends with

chapter sixteen. In Romans 16 the Lord's work has reached its summit. When I read Romans 16, I am satisfied because He is satisfied. We must tell God, "Lord, You cannot go any further. You have reached the peak." With the establishing of the churches in Romans 16, the eternal God has attained the peak of His work and is satisfied.

Most of the Christian teachers say, "Look ahead. Look to the future. This world is evil, and the age is dark. There is nothing good on earth. Look forward to the future." However, this was not Paul's attitude in the book of Romans. If we had written Romans, we would have added another chapter saying, "Dear brothers, look at the poor situation. We must look ahead to the future when we will all be raptured. Then we will be in heaven." Paul, however, did not speak this way in Romans, and there must have been a reason why he did not. Although Christians like to dream of the future in heaven, Paul knew that the Lord desires to have the churches on earth. We look to the future, but the Lord wants us firstly to have the church life at the present time. Paul understood that the Lord is satisfied to have local churches on the earth.

If you study all the books in the New Testament, you will find that, other than Romans, not

one of them ends with such a melody as we find in the last three verses of [chapter sixteen](#). Although some people have called these verses a doxology and a benediction, I prefer to call them a melody. When Paul wrote these words, he was excited, happy, and satisfied. Not even the book of Revelation concludes with such a melody. In [Romans 16](#) we have the local churches, and when we have the local churches, it is sufficient for us to be excited, happy, and satisfied. Once you have the local churches, what else do you need? After Paul unveiled the local church life, including many of the virtues and attributes of the dear saints, he was very happy and concluded his letter with a melody of praise.

In his concluding praise, Paul said, “Now to Him Who is of power to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in times eternal” ([16:25](#)). We need nothing further. We simply need to acknowledge that God has given us everything and then keep what we already have. Paul said that God was of power to establish us according to his gospel, not according to the gospel of Mark or Luke. What is the difference between the gospels of Mark and Luke and the gospel of Paul? In

Mark and Luke we have salvation, but in neither of them do we find the churches. However, Paul's gospel includes the churches and presents a portrait of the local church life, mentioning people such as Phoebe who served the church and Prisca and Aquila who risked their necks for the churches. Never forget that Paul's gospel has sixteen chapters, not eight or twelve.

Once again I say that Paul was excited and satisfied at the end of Romans. God had started from creation and had reached His peak in the local churches. Therefore, Romans is an extract or an abstract of the whole Bible. The Bible begins in Genesis with God's creation and concludes in Revelation with the New Jerusalem, the totality of all the local churches and the consummation of God's building. Romans consummates with the local churches, and the Bible as a whole consummates with the New Jerusalem as the totality of all the local churches. This is the view from God's side.

A PRACTICAL VIEW

Now we must consider the view from our side. In [chapter one](#) we saw that we were sinners and that neither culture nor religion could help us. Regardless of the kind of people we were, we

were all under God's condemnation. Our problems began to be solved in [chapter three](#) with God's redemption. Then came justification, reconciliation, identification, sanctification, conformation, and glorification. Following this, we come to [chapter twelve](#) where we find ourselves, being transformed, in the Body. We have become members of the Body. Many Christians are satisfied with the experience of [Romans 8](#). As long as they are holy and spiritual, they are content. However, others proceed further and talk about the Body revealed in [Romans 12](#). Nevertheless, if you inquire of them, you will find that many of them are disappointed and say, "We know that there is such a thing as the Body, but we have no way to practice it. Where is the Body? How can we have it and practice it?" Some Christians use the terms "Body life" and "Body ministry," but by Body ministry they mean a few persons ministering instead of one pastor. That is their concept of Body ministry. Therefore, I must ask you, Where is the Body? Many seeking Christians can not find it and have no way of realizing it.

Most of those who talk about the Body in [Romans 12](#) have neglected the practice of [Romans 14](#). However, it is impossible to have the

reality of [chapter twelve](#) without the proper practice of [chapter fourteen](#). Without [Romans 14](#), we cannot have the Body, because without the practice of receiving the believers revealed in this chapter, Christians will remain divided over doctrinal concepts. Doctrine divides; life unites. Christian history has fully proved that no doctrine builds up; every doctrine is divisive. Whether or not a doctrine is scriptural or unscriptural, right or wrong, it still divides. Christianity has been cut into thousands of pieces by all the different doctrines. Without exception every doctrine has produced a sect or division. There is no need to say that cultic doctrines divide; even the proper, sound, fundamental, scriptural, spiritual doctrines can divide. Therefore, we should not devote our attention to doctrine. Instead we should pray, “Lord, rescue us from all doctrinal concepts. Lord, bring us into Yourself. You are our unique concept. Our concept is Christ.” Christ is one; doctrines are many. Christ must be our unique concept.

This was Paul’s meaning when he told us “to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus” ([15:5](#)). The Jewish believers in the ancient times held many doctrinal tenets. Also, a number of the Gentile believers held certain

philosophical concepts. We learn from church history that during the time of the Apostle Paul the religious background of the Jews and the cultural background of the Gentiles created problems in the church life. Although the Jews and the Gentiles were genuine believers in the Lord Jesus, they brought with them into the church life their concepts from their backgrounds—the Jews bringing their religious beliefs and the Gentiles their philosophical concepts. Some so-called Gentile believers considered that their philosophy corresponded to much of biblical teaching. As a result, the saints found it difficult to be one. Thus, Paul told them to drop their doctrinal concepts for the sake of unity. Paul told the Jewish and the Gentile believers alike to come to Christ and take Christ as their life and concept. Thus, Paul told the believers that Christ is for both the circumcision and for the nations. Christ is the root of Jesse, the source of supply for all the Jews, and He is the One who rises to rule over the nations. Christ's rule over the nations is sweet, gracious, and full of healing. Christ embraces both Jews and Gentiles together as one Body. Thus, we must forget our Jewish or Gentile background, our religious or philosophical background, and keep Christ as our unique concept. We must have

nothing but Christ. If someone should ask you about philosophy, you should reply, “I don’t know any philosophy. What I know is only Christ.” If someone asks you a question about religion, you should respond, “I have no religion. Christ is my life and my everything. I only have Christ.” Christ is the root of Jesse, and Christ is the One who will rule over the nations.

In the book of Romans we see that the Apostle Paul was absolutely for the local churches. In [16:1](#) he recommended Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea. Paul’s first recommendation was of a sister serving in a particular local church. Do not recommend any believer who does not have a local church. Do not say, “I commend to you Sister So-and-So who belongs to the Body of Christ and who is traveling around the world.” I have no doubt that such a sister belongs to the Body of Christ, but where is her church? Once I know her church, I would then like to know what kind of sister she is in that church. Does she attend meetings only on Sunday mornings to receive teachings? Is she a sister who serves the church? How does she serve the church? The church is practical. It should not be just a term or a theory. So, we have to be practical in the church life, participating in some

definite function in the local church like Sister Phoebe did in the local church at Cenchrea. We were sinners under God's condemnation in [chapter one](#). Through the process in [chapters three through fifteen](#), in [chapter sixteen](#), we are the saints composing the local churches. Praise God for His redeeming, sanctifying, transforming, and building work! This is the masterpiece of His work.

THE STATIONS IN ROMANS

In the book of Romans we see several stations. Many Christians have stopped at the station of justification in [Romans 4](#). Some have gone further to the station of sanctification in [Romans 8](#). Other seeking Christians have gone as far as [chapter twelve](#) and talk about the Body, although they lack the genuine experience of the Body. Thus, [Romans 12](#) becomes a station, which we may describe as the station of the Body talkers. If you are content to remain in [Romans 12](#), you will not have the Body actually and practically, because the Body is fully realized in the local churches. If you are not in a local church, you cannot touch the Body. The word "Body" will simply remain an empty term as far as you are concerned. If you want to be in the Body, you

must be in a local church. Hence, our station is in [chapter sixteen](#), the last station in the book of Romans. Where are you? We have passed through the station of justification, sanctification, and the stage of talking about the Body. Praise the Lord that we are abiding in the last station, in the local churches, where we realize the genuine Body life. When you are resting in this station, you can join Paul in his concluding melody of praise.

THE WARNING CONCERNING DIVISION

Nevertheless, in [Romans 16](#), a chapter which unveils the ultimate consummation of God's work, Paul speaks of something negative because God's enemy, Satan, is still working here. "Now I beg you, brothers, keep a watchful eye on those who make divisions and causes of falling contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them. For such men do not serve as slaves our Lord Christ, but their own appetites; and by smooth and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" ([vv. 17-18](#)). While we are enjoying the local church life, we must be watchful for those who cause divisions. In [verse 17](#) Paul refers to "the teaching." What teaching is this? It is the teaching of the Apostle, such as in the book

of Romans. Any discussion or dissension contrary to the Apostle's teaching is divisive, and we must keep a watchful, discerning eye over it. According to [verse 17](#), we must turn away from those who make divisions and causes of falling contrary to this teaching. Even in Paul's time there was the problem of division caused by the dissenting ones. Therefore, we also must be on the alert. Otherwise, our church life may be damaged by the "smooth and flattering speech" of the dissenters who are out to deceive the simple. Most "churching" people are simple. We must be simple in order to be in the church life. However, some may come to you with smooth, flattering, eloquent talk, seeking to divide the church and to cause you to fall. Do not think that you cannot be deceived. Be on the alert.

How can we discern the talk of those who come to us with flattering words? There is just one way. We must ask: Does it cause division? Do not accept any talk that causes division, regardless of how smooth and flattering the words may be. We must reject any talk that is contrary to the teaching of the book of Romans. We must renounce it strongly. Furthermore, we must turn away from those who speak in such a way. If Paul faced that kind of difficulty in his time, surely it

will also occur in our time because of the subtlety of the enemy. Thus, while we are happy, excited, and praising the Lord for the church life, we must keep a watchful eye over those who cause divisions. We should not be deceived by men's smooth words, but should ask ourselves the question: Is this talk contrary to the Apostle's teaching, and is it divisive? We must heed the warning given to us by Paul in the last chapter of Romans.

This booklet is compiled from
Life-study of Romans
© 1984 Living Stream Ministry

Please feel free to share this eBooklet with others.

See more titles in this series at
www.lsm.org/booklets.

SEE LINKS TO PURCHASE
Life-study of Romans

AUDIOBOOK • EBOOK • PRINT

Purchase *Life-study of Romans*

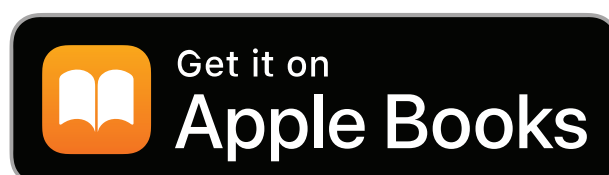
*Click on the badge for the format
you wish to purchase.*

Audiobook

available at



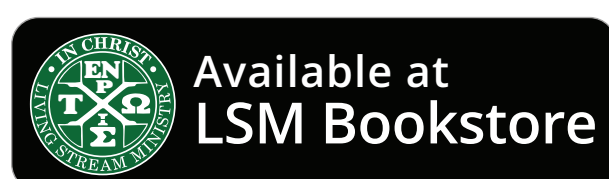
eBook



available at



Print



www.lsm.org/life-study-romans