

RELIGION

NOT A

READING PLAN

How to Use the Not a Religion Reading Guide

In the past, we have provided a reading guide for the section of Scripture that we would be going through in the current sermon series. But for the four-week Not a Religion series, which is only going through four verses (Titus 2:11-14), we have selected three different passages: (1) Romans 3:21-26, (2) Colossians 1:3-14, and (3) John 17:16-18. These passages will show the same themes that we will be covering in the series: the gospel saves, grows, gathers, and sends. Below are some steps for how to use this guide:

01 Pray for Wisdom

Paul says that only the Spirit can know the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11), and James says that it is God who gives wisdom (James 1:5). So, praying to God for wisdom in studying his word is essential to Bible reading.

02 Read the Passage/Commentary

Read the verses selected, and try to interpret them on your own. Then, after you have thought about them, read the commentary for the day to see if there were some things that you missed.

03 Pray the Bible

Were there things that the passage told you about God that you can praise and thank him for? Were there things taught about the Christian life that you struggle to obey? Pray for the desire and the strength to obey those things.

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Read Romans 3:21

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it —

We can summarize all that has come before in Paul's letter to the Roman Christians in this way: (1) Gentiles who do not have the Law of Moses are under God's wrath because of sin, (2) Jews who have the law of Moses are also under God's wrath because they have broken the Law, and (3) salvation will not be found through the Law because it only serves to show the sins of those who do not follow it. In verse 21, Paul says that, at this time, God's righteousness has been revealed. Paul means here that we have now seen how God intended to fulfill all of his promises to save his people, and it has nothing to do with the Law except that the Old Testament prophesied how God was going to ultimately do it. If you are looking for God's salvation, it has arrived.

Read Romans 3:22

22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:

Yesterday's verse left us with a cliff hanger of sorts. What is this way of God's salvation that has been revealed? How do we receive it? Paul is clear: if you want to be a recipient of all of God's promises of salvation and renewal, then you must believe that God has won salvation for you through Jesus' faithfulness in life, death, and resurrection. And this is the only way of salvation for both Gentiles and Jews.

A P R I L 2 4

Read Romans 3:23

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Trying to earn our salvation by works is futile because we have all fallen short of perfection. All of humanity (Jews and Gentiles) was made in the image of God to worship and display God's glory over the whole earth with our whole lives. We have all failed to do this. No one can earn their way to perfection once they have failed.

A P R I L 2 5

Read Romans 3:24

24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus

Even though we've all fallen short of perfection, God as judge has ruled in our favor. Being "justified" is the language of the law court. Theologian Michael Bird puts it well: "justification is God's declaration [as judge] that a person is forgiven, acquitted, and in a right relationship with God based on Jesus' death and resurrection." And this declaration of our forgiveness and status with God is given as a gift. But if God granted us forgiveness without punishment for our sin, that would be unjust. Any judge who would let off a murderer without penalty, in the face of overwhelming evidence to his guilt, would be unjust. No, God is just because he redeemed us from sin and eternal death by ordering the punishment our sins deserve to come upon his perfect Son, which we'll see tomorrow.

Read Romans 3:25

25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Like we saw yesterday, our redemption was achieved through Jesus Christ taking our punishment on our behalf. Paul describes how this works: God “put forward” Jesus as a propitiation by his blood. In more understandable terms, this means that God planned for the shedding of the blood of his Son as a sacrifice to cleanse sinners from their sin and, therefore, remove God’s wrath from them. And as Paul says, this redemption bought by God is received through faith. The gospel saves! The crucifixion showed God’s righteousness—that is his uprightness and justice in both condemning sin and providing his promised salvation. God’s righteousness had been called into question since God had not yet executed final judgment on sins nor provided salvation for his people but was waiting with divine patience.

Read Romans 3:26

26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Why did God wait to judge sinners and provide salvation? Because he was waiting to send Christ. Because, in the crucifixion of Christ, God shows that he is righteous and just by 1) judging sin by sacrificing his Son and 2) providing salvation to people who have faith in Jesus by justifying them by his blood.

A P R I L 2 8

Read Colossians 1:3

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you

Paul opens his letter to the church at Colossae by letting them know that he's praying for them and thanking God for them. The gospel gathers believers together into the family of God. Paul shows this here by telling these Christians that they are an intimate part of his prayer life.

A P R I L 2 9

Read Colossians 1:4

4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

Paul's prayers for the church at Colossae started as soon as he heard that they had come to faith in Jesus Christ, and he knew that their faith was genuine because they loved each other and the other Christians around the world. A Christians love for the family of God is one sign that they have a genuine faith (John 13:35).

A P R I L 3 0

Read Colossians 1:5

5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

Their faith and love for one another was rooted in the message that they would have eternal life in heaven together. Each Christian shares the same inheritance and hope, and we will be a family forever. This hope gathered the community together in love. They learned about this eternal hope in the gospel message that was preached to them.

M A Y 0 1

Read Colossians 1:6

6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,

The gospel had come to the Colossians through the faithfulness of gospel messengers (Rom. 10:14-15). But it not only comes to them; it is moving throughout the world. Paul almost paints the gospel here as a person. The gospel is itself out persuading people to believe its message. It is “bearing fruit,” which probably means that the gospel was growing the church in both number and holiness. People were coming to faith and learning to be obedient to Jesus. Paul says that this gospel is a message about the “grace of God.” We saw this particularly in our study of Romans 3:21-26.

M A Y 0 2

Read Colossians 1:7

7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf

Paul here names the one who brought the gospel to the Colossians. Epaphras was a servant of the message. Apparently, as we’ll see tomorrow, the Colossians had sent Ephaphras to update Paul on how the church was getting along. This is why Paul calls him a faithful minister “on your behalf.” He was the representative of the churches at Colossae.

M A Y 0 3

Read Colossians 1:8

8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Very simply, Epaphras had given Paul the joyous report that the Colossians were full of love for each other, which was being produced by the same Holy Spirit who indwelled each of them.

M A Y 0 4

Read Colossians 1:9

9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Everything that we have heard so far has been Paul explaining why he remembers to pray for the Colossians. He rehearsed what the gospel had done among them in bringing them to faith and love. Now, he returns to the topic of prayer but goes on to talk about what he has been praying for them and what he continues to pray for them. The rest of the verses we'll be studying in Colossians are an excellent prayer to pray for ourselves and others. The first thing that Paul prays for is that the Colossians will know God's will, not only just know it, but be able to know it with wisdom and understanding. This is Paul asking that not only will they know God's will, but they will know how to apply it and obey it.

M A Y 0 5

Read Colossians 1:10

10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Like we saw yesterday, the reason Paul is praying for them to know God's will with wisdom and understanding is so that they will know how to be obedient—living a life that is worthy of Jesus and fully pleasing to him. We may understand that it is impossible for us to live a completely holy life, but this didn't stop Paul from praying for it. Paul wanted the people in his churches to desire pleasing God like a child who loves their father wants to please him through behaving in a pleasing way. A life that is properly aligned with God's will and is pleasing to him bears the fruit of good works and increases the believer in the knowledge of God.

M A Y 0 6

Read Colossians 1:11

11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

Paul knows that a life that is pleasing to God can only be accomplished through the strength that God provides. But Paul prays big here. He asks God to supply strength to the Colossians from his glorious might. Paul isn't asking for a small allotment of strength but divine power to live a life of holiness and endurance. It takes divine strength in order to be patient with joy through the persecution and suffering that are found in this life.

M A Y 0 7

Read Colossians 1:12

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

As the Colossians endure and are patient through trial, Paul asks that they would be thankful to God because, ultimately, through the work of the gospel, they are now qualified to share in the inheritance of heaven. This is surely worth having an attitude of constant thankfulness.

M A Y 0 8

Read Colossians 1:13

13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

This world is full of suffering and evil, but God has transferred our citizenship into the kingdom of Jesus. We are simply passers-by here, sharing the message of the kingdom while we wait for it to come.

M A Y 0 9

Read Colossians 1:14

14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The kingdom belongs to Jesus, and it is in him that we have been redeemed from our bondage to sin and to death. Because of his sacrifice, we have had our sins forgiven.

M A Y 1 0

Read John 17:16

16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Jesus, in the gospel of John, is repeatedly referred to as the one from above or the one from heaven. Jesus came to earth and took on humanity, but he wasn't of the world's system of evil, wickedness, and darkness. In the gospel, we have been born again by his Spirit, and we no longer are of the world but, as we saw two days ago, are people of Jesus' kingdom, which comes from above.

M A Y 1 1

Read John 17:17

17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

The word sanctify means to set apart for a special, holy purpose. Jesus here prays to the Father that his disciples would be set apart from the world through the word of truth. The word of truth is the gospel. Christians are set apart for a purpose, and what sets them apart is the gospel message.

M A Y 1 2

Read John 17:18

18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Yesterday, we saw that we are set apart from the world for a specific purpose, and it is the gospel which sets us apart. Jesus here says that the purpose for which Christians are set apart is the purpose of going into the world and sharing the gospel message with others so that people might be saved and become kingdom people. The gospel sends.

¹ Michael Bird, The Story of God Bible Commentary: Romans pg. 115