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THE SEE SERIES

# ROMANS

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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

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CHRIS TIEGREEN

See God's  
purposes with  
new eyes



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*Romans: A Devotional Commentary: See God's Purposes with New Eyes*

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Published in association with the literary agency of Mark Sweeney and Associates, Carol Stream, Illinois.

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ISBN 978-1-4964-8545-8

Printed in India

31	30	29	28	27	26	25
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

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# The See Series

Human beings live by vision. We're directed by the images in our minds. We pursue goals when we can *see* them; we grow according to examples we've observed more than the knowledge we've learned; and we embrace hope, despair, and numerous other perspectives based on what we see happening around us. Even people who don't think of themselves as visionary tend to have some mental picture of where they are headed and why. It's the way we're wired.

Most of us have a big vision—a sense of ultimate meaning and destiny, or even just a dream or a goal for our lives. We want to live with purpose. We orient our lives by what we can picture.

We also have smaller visions—what's on the agenda for today, this week, this year, or even the next couple of decades—that shape our short-term decisions.

If our little visions and big vision don't align with each other, we feel frustrated and compromised, as if our lives are going nowhere and our desires may never be fulfilled. But if we can align these visions and see clearly, we grow steadily, even dramatically, into our purpose and calling.

## SEE, BE, LIVE

Christian teaching hasn't always recognized our visionary nature. Much instruction over the years has been based on a know-it-then-do-it approach to Scripture—as if life change were simply a matter of learning the truth and applying it. But such an approach bypasses heart transformation and can easily become legalistic and frustrating.

Though knowing and doing are both very important, following Jesus is more than a matter of knowledge and willpower. We can never *will* ourselves to be who we need to be. We are not called simply to *do*; we are called to *be*. When we put knowing and doing before being, we end up in the same condition that many of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' time found themselves in—as pious people aiming to live godly lives without the necessary inner transformation.

Let me explain what I mean by *knowing*—an unfortunately imprecise word in English. We might read the Bible and *know* the commandments, instructions, encouragement, and truth it conveys. We receive that information and even agree with it. And if we want to be obedient, we will act on what we know. In that sense, our approach is both cognitive and behavioral—our thoughts affect our actions. But knowledge alone won't change our hearts, motives, desires, impulses, and everything else in us that needs to be transformed.

We see this phenomenon in the multitudes of people who memorize Jesus' words about faith but still lie awake all night with worry; who love Psalm 23 but still believe they are pursued by misfortune, not goodness and mercy; who agree that Jesus is Lord but don't live as though he is. Knowledge and action alone aren't comprehensive and compelling enough to reshape us.

In addition to our intellectual or informational knowledge, we also live from a particular worldview that shapes everything about us. This, too, is *knowing*, but it's a radically different kind of knowledge, isn't it? It's how we see the world, which is why I prefer words such as *seeing* and *vision* to capture it. This kind of knowledge goes well beyond information and instructions. It reflects not only *what* we know but also *how* we know and how we *respond* (perhaps even unconsciously) to what we know. It forms our sense of identity and becomes the filter for every piece of information we receive. Whereas the first kind of knowing may shape our *thoughts* to a degree, this kind shapes our *thought processes* (and therefore our thoughts) to a greater degree.

For example, if I dive into a lake or ocean and swim around for an hour or two, I experience something of marine life. I can practice different strokes, get used to holding my breath for longer periods, and work on distances and techniques. I *know* swimming. I might even start to think I swim like a fish. But if I'm a fish, moving around in the water is my nature. I don't even have to think about strokes or breath or what it takes to live in the water. I just do it. I know swimming without even knowing that I know it. It's part of who I am.

God has given us a new nature and called us to live from it. It's a radical transformation—so radical that we aren't quite sure how to do it. Many of us turn back to old paradigms, trying to live out our new life by reforming our old nature. We try to make the new ways “natural,” often by disciplining ourselves to conform to what we believe is true. In other words, we *know* and *do* by receiving information and acting on it.

But what if we really saw ourselves as new creations and gave no thought to any other possibility? What if it never even occurred to us that God might not be working in all the circumstances of our lives? What if love and worship were the default settings of our lives and we were shocked by anything else that came out of our hearts? What if our new nature was . . . well, natural?

There is no flip of a switch that gets us there, but some ways are better than others. I've experienced the futility of self-discipline born of knowing and doing (which, again, though insufficient, are still important). But I've also experienced the transformation that comes from that second kind of knowing—the radical reorientation of a worldview that shapes everything about us.

I call this radical reorientation *seeing* because we often express this deeper, more comprehensive knowledge in visual terms.

“I know you told me this would work, but I didn't *see* how.”

“I knew she cared, but now I *see* how much.”

“You can argue with me all you want, but the way I *see* it . . .”

We instinctively know there's a seeing that goes deeper than informational knowledge, and this seeing transforms vital elements of our personality—our hopes and dreams; our gut feelings; our deeply rooted attitudes, instincts, and motives. Knowing information and responding to it may or may not change our heart. A radically new perspective does.

Embracing a new worldview may be catapulted forward by visual or sensory knowledge, or by seeing in a new way. They say a picture is worth a thousand words—a *million* seems closer to the mark—and is far more memorable. That’s why the Bible is full of stories, parables, and experiences; why God inspired prophets to see visions and illustrate truth in tangible ways; and why he eventually clothed himself in human flesh to live among us. From beginning to end, God gives us images—highly visual and symbolic representations of who he is and what he does. We don’t just read his instructions; we see what living out the truth looks like. We don’t just read that he is a deliverer; we see numerous examples of dramatic deliverance. He doesn’t just tell us he cares for us; he inspires a king to portray him as a shepherd and his Son to dramatize sacrificial, unconditional love in eternally indelible ways. Those pictures and portrayals are life changing.

If how we live flows out of who we are, being must come before doing. And if *seeing* so profoundly shapes *being*, then having this life-changing vision is vital. It is the key to the transformation we long for—that is, we become what we behold. The Holy Spirit works powerfully on the screens of our minds. We are drawn to whatever we focus on and emulate what we admire. Discipleship that begins with vision flows much more naturally into being and doing. Vision stirs us to be who we’re called to be and to live as we’re called to live.

The significance of our vision is the premise behind this devotional commentary series. The goal is to embrace a holistic, visual mode of learning. This series assumes that because we, as human beings, live from our identity and follow whatever vision we have, transformation happens by seeing in new ways. Instead of encouraging us simply to *know* and then *do*, the aim of these commentaries is to cast a vision for us to *see*, then *be*, then *live*. Like Jesus, who incorporated visual language into all his teaching, this series aims to refocus our inner eye. If we can see what the biblical writers saw and live according to that vision, we can be transformed.

## THE ART OF ENVISIONING

We must train our brains to see and think in new ways. It doesn’t just happen. The biblical mandate to renew our minds implies a conscious reorientation of

our thought life. Old thought patterns are stubborn; those established neural pathways actively resist new pathways as intruders (which is why New Year’s resolutions, exercise and diet plans, and quitting a bad habit can be so difficult). In most areas of life, this neurological dynamic—tapping into our established neural pathways—is helpful; we don’t have to relearn everything each day. But when we’ve been called to reorient the way we think, we have to be relentless about it.

At a practical level, we can greatly amplify this process by (1) recognizing the vision behind biblical texts; (2) immersing ourselves in that vision (declaring the truths of Scripture out loud can help with this, as our brain is very responsive to the sound of our own voice, even if, at first, we don’t think we sound convincing); and (3) practicing the art of envisioning.

This latter practice has been somewhat disparaged over the past couple of centuries because we’ve associated it with “imagination”—as in, “that’s *only* your imagination,” or “that’s just a figment of your imagination,” as if our internal vision is no reflection of reality. This would be news to biblical prophets, psalmists, storytellers, and teachers of parables, who all used highly visual language to express truth. Our imagination *can* be used to disengage us from reality—in fact, that’s what many people do with it—but it is also our primary means of envisioning truth, which is exactly why God gave us so many stories and images and illustrations. He *wants* us to see his Kingdom—to picture his nature, his purposes, and his work in our lives. It’s impossible to read Jesus’ parables, study the stories in Acts or in the Old Testament historical books, or read the Psalms and Prophets without developing certain images in our minds. Our lives change when we immerse ourselves in those images.

In envisioning the Kingdom of God and all God’s ways, we aren’t trying to convince ourselves of something that *isn’t* true—simply a figment of our imagination. We’re training ourselves in what *is*. Sanctified imagination is not a flight from reality; it’s a flight directly into it. We insist that our natural minds, long steeped in limited vision and distorted ways of thinking, must now conform to reality as God defines it.

That’s when transformation occurs. When we see God, ourselves, our world, and his Kingdom as he does, we rarely have to discipline ourselves to live differently. We just do it.

## IN THIS COMMENTARY

Because this is a *devotional commentary*, you will find material here that fits both descriptors: commentary on the text, and devotional or inspirational thoughts that apply the text to your life, specifically in the ways you see, become transformed, and live out that transformation. In this commentary, you will find

- an introduction to the biblical book
- an introduction for each subsection of the book, explaining its place and purpose in the text, the context or background of that section, and how it fits into the big-picture vision of biblical truth
- a series of devotionals on the text that
  - further explain context, background, meaning, and purpose
  - offer suggestions for practical application
  - inspire and challenge you to *re-envision*—to learn to see in new ways
- a discussion guide in the back to help you further reflect on the Scripture passages and talk about them with others to expand your spiritual vision even more

As you read, practice the art of envisioning. Pray for Holy Spirit-inspired perspectives. Notice what and how the biblical writers see, and immerse your heart and mind in those visions. Adopt them as your own. More and more, you will enter into the heights and depths of God's Kingdom and live in his ways.

## INTRODUCTION TO ROMANS

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Paul had spent years evangelizing the eastern Mediterranean—Asia Minor and the Aegean rim—and now he turned his eyes further west. Fully embracing his identity as “apostle to the Gentiles” (11:13), he wanted to go to Rome and then on to Spain (15:24). Generally he wrote letters to churches he had founded and nurtured, but the church at Rome was different. It was at the hub of the empire, the seat of influence, an irresistible pull for someone like Paul. Though he hadn’t yet been to Rome, he knew people there, and those connections were the only open door he needed.

The timing and occasion of many of Paul’s letters make for interesting debate among New Testament scholars, but this one seems pretty straightforward. It was likely written from Corinth in the spring of AD 57, before Paul delivered a collected offering to Jerusalem (15:23-28; Acts 20:2-3). It was also about three years into the reign of Nero, before his persecution of Christians began. The letter was apparently delivered by Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2; Cenchræe was Corinth’s nearby port) and mentions at least two known residents of Corinth (Gaius and Erastus, 16:23). Though Corinth was a Greek city, the Corinthians prided themselves on their Roman-ness. It was an appropriate setting for writing this letter to the Romans.

Estimates of the number of Jews in Rome at the time range from ten thousand to fifty thousand, but they were still a small minority among the population of up to a million people. Just as there were several synagogues in the city, there were probably several house churches as well. Paul seems aware of at least four (16:5, 10-11, 15), and his letter is addressed to all of them (1:7).

Romans is widely considered Paul's most majestic, comprehensive letter, something resembling a systematic theology (or as close as Scripture ever comes to one), though he doesn't cover many key doctrines and seems focused more on accomplishing a specific purpose. But as we will see, the letter is not just a general statement of Christian beliefs. It's a personal letter to believers struggling with real issues and still learning the implications of believing in the God of Israel.

## **LIFE AS A ROMAN CHRISTIAN**

Imagine being a Gentile believer in first-century Rome when your congregation receives a letter from Paul. Paul didn't plant your church—he had never been to the city at the time he wrote to you—but you've heard stories about its founding. The first members seem to have been Jews who embraced Jesus as the Messiah, and gradually God-fearing Gentiles like you, and other new converts, were drawn into the fellowship. In fact, that's how many churches throughout the Roman empire started. Yours just happens to be at the hub of the empire, and tens of thousands of Jews live there. It makes sense that they would be the first to receive this message.

A few years ago (AD 49), the emperor Claudius expelled Jews from the city over a controversy about "Chrestos," apparently Jesus. Not all Jews departed—logistics would have made such a large-scale exodus virtually impossible—but those involved in the controversy and many prominent leaders left, including many Jewish Christians. The church lost many of its founding members and leaders—Paul apparently ran into a couple of them in Corinth not long afterward (Acts 18:2)—and for a time, you wondered whether the Roman congregations would survive. They did, and some even thrived. Gentile believers who stepped into vacated leadership roles learned quickly. God brought your congregation through what had seemed like a devastating crisis at the time.

When Claudius died in AD 54, his edict expired with him, and Jews (and Jewish Christians) who had left Rome were allowed to return. Everyone in your

church was relieved, but the return of the exiles created some unexpected issues. They had left as leaders, but those roles have now been filled by others. They had once been the majority, but with the addition of Gentile members, they are now a minority. You can sense the friction between genuine believers on both sides who are seeking the church's best interests but with competing claims to authority. This define-the-relationship season isn't easy on the fellowship.

Neither is the imperial culture. The verdict is still out on how Nero, the successor to Claudius, will treat Christians, but the imperial cult has been growing, and no one among your fellow believers can honestly affirm that "Caesar is Lord," as every Roman is expected to do. Hardly anyone beyond the churches and synagogues in the city—or in the rest of the empire, for that matter—can comprehend a religion that doesn't involve local temples, shrines, sacrifices, and other rituals, or even the idea that only one true God exists, and many people look down on you for honoring the God of those oddly countercultural Jews. Some who have learned of your beliefs wonder what this God requires of his worshipers and what he gives in return. Some think you're neglecting your civic responsibility and behaving very un-Roman-like. Even some of the newest believers in your church still wrestle with these issues.

To be honest, so do you. You aren't about to recant the faith that has so radically changed your life, but you wonder why so few people think the Good News is all that good—or even relevant. Many of your Roman compatriots consider it strange news, if they consider it at all, and your fellow believers who are Jewish seem disillusioned that so many of their people are now distancing themselves from the Jesus movement. If God's great salvation for his chosen people is rejected by most of them, have his age-old promises to them failed? Having longed for a messiah for centuries, have they taken a look at the one who has come to fulfill the promise and decided to give up hope instead? Has God rejected them now in favor of Gentiles? The Good News of salvation seems to have come with some very troubling consequences.

This reconstruction of the context in Rome at the time of Paul's writing requires some speculation, but not much. This is how historical events in the AD 50s would have shaped Christian experiences to some degree, and we see evidence of it in Paul's letter. He emphasizes Israel's faith and history but also assumes he is writing to a largely Gentile audience (see Romans 1:13; 11:13;

15:15-16). And reading between the lines of his argument, it isn't difficult to see the likelihood of Jewish and Gentile Christians sorting out their relationship and raising some serious concerns. The letter is sweeping in its theological scope, but also particular in showing two groups of believers their common ground. Romans wasn't written in a vacuum. Paul didn't just happen to be in the mood to lay out a grand vision of salvation. He addresses some thorny issues that were troubling the believers at a pivotal moment in history in the most influential city in the Mediterranean world.

## **PAUL'S PURPOSE IN WRITING**

Because Paul had not yet been to Rome, he'd had no hand in establishing the city's churches. But Rome was the imperial heart, the power center of the world Paul lived in, and therefore a huge attraction for someone called to reach the world with the gospel. Unable to visit but hoping to pass through the city on an upcoming journey, he wrote this letter to share his intentions with the city's believers.

He also wrote to address some of the problems and concerns these churches were facing. There seems to have been tension between Jewish and Gentile factions, each group apparently misperceiving the other's role in God's purposes. Those misperceptions must have raised some difficult questions about Israel's place in the story of redemption; how the law (actually the whole Torah) applied to followers of Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile; whether there was still any point to being Jewish; why the majority of Jews were rejecting their own Messiah while many Gentiles with no background in God's long revelation received him so easily; and, in light of this perplexing turn of events, whether God was being faithful to his own promises that he had sworn to fulfill.

Paul addresses each of these questions while also offering an expansive view of redemption history and casting a stirring vision of the new humanity being birthed in Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The breadth of the letter has led various commentators to see it primarily as a presentation of the salvation message;\* a theodicy, a "defense" of God's ways; Paul's version of a systematic theology; or a pastoral letter that, in addressing specific

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\* Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformers (and countless Protestants thereafter).

beliefs and problems in the church, goes well beyond most in explaining foundational truths. Regardless of Paul's specific purpose, the result is multi-faceted and far-reaching.

There is considerable debate about whether Jews of the first century thought they earned salvation by doing the works of the law (as was the assumption of the sixteenth-century Reformers), or that they did the works of the law because God had already saved them—that is, because God had chosen them and given them the law, they were obliged to live out that covenant. If the first assumption is true, Paul is writing about how all people, who are unrighteous, can be saved. If the second is true, Paul is writing about how God's works among the Jews now apply to all people, including Gentiles. Both views overgeneralize; presumably neither one fully captures Paul's thought, because it isn't possible to precisely reconstruct the situation in the Roman churches and the motives in Paul's heart. But elements of both views are found in his letter.

In any case, Paul's letters were always directed toward specific situations, even when the discussion broadened to the bigger picture. In Romans, the picture is as big as it gets. It is a vital letter for understanding the gospel message and even all of Scripture.

## ROMANS AND US

Martin Luther thought that Romans and Galatians were the two most important letters in Scripture and recommended reading them once every week. He had his reasons; they addressed a very pressing concern in the early sixteenth century and shaped his foundational belief about justification by grace through faith alone. For that foundational premise, Romans is always relevant.

But we should never mistake Romans for a comprehensive presentation of New Testament theology. Nowhere in the letter does Paul address certain crucial doctrines: for example, the nature of Jesus as God and man, his return at the end of the age, or the doctrine of the church (other than its characteristics as one body). He gives a clear and powerful presentation of some—but not all—big-picture truths.

One of the best ways to grasp the meaning of a biblical book is to put yourself in the place of its original readers. The preceding exercise in imagining life as a Roman Christian gets us started, but we should maintain that perspective

all the way through the letter, as much as modern believers can. Though based on God's promises to Israel, these words were written to Gentile and Jewish believers in a new and growing community of faith that had become available to all.

Throughout the letter, vital truths emerge, including humanity's universal predicament, the nature of the message of salvation by grace through faith, the relationship between faith and works, the death of our old life and the gift of new life through the resurrection of Jesus, how this all fits in God's overall plans, and what it all means for daily life. Read for the depth and details, but never lose sight of the breadth of the vision Paul presents.

These truths always apply, and we'll never exhaust the meaning and insights that come from them. They will always drive us deeper and make us stronger. See them all as invitations to experience the fullness of new life in ever-increasing wisdom, power, and love.







# ROMANS

# 1:1–3:20

## THE UNIVERSAL PROBLEM

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For an ancient letter, the beginning of Romans is fairly standard, and it doesn't take Paul long to dive into his purposes for writing. As he does, he builds a connection with the Christians in this city he has never seen. He addresses them as Gentiles—though there are Jewish believers among them—pointing out that this “Jewish” gospel is for all nations, including those represented in Rome. He is grateful for all the believers there and longs to visit them.

Because of apparent tensions and misunderstandings between Jews and Gentiles in the Roman churches, Paul wants to set the stage for what God is doing in the world in this age. The context for this gospel is the fact of desperate human need—spiritual depravity with its moral, social, and intellectual consequences. This need is shared by everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. No one has the upper hand. All are on level ground.

Perhaps Paul's words come across as general theology, but there's a more

specific purpose behind them. (There always is.) The gospel only makes sense in this context, and heirs of the gospel can get along only when they understand how equally they need it. The rest of the letter depends on this setup. Without Jesus, everyone on earth—the people Paul is writing to and about, and also Paul himself—lives in foolishness and rebellion. With Jesus, everything becomes new.

## BACKGROUND

In leveling the ground beneath the Jews and Gentiles, Paul deftly sides with both groups, even as he establishes the depravity of the entire human race. Jews were especially appalled by Gentile sexual perversion, licentiousness, and idolatry, which proliferated (often in connection with each other) in large cities like Rome. Paul joins in their revulsion (1:18-32). Gentiles were likewise turned off by Jewish pride in their heritage and chosenness, and Paul joins in their distaste for it (2:12-29). Read through the lens of each group's biases, these passages shed light on the dynamics between them. They also reveal the genius of Paul's rhetoric.

Which group was now favored by God? Apparently this was a point of contention, as Paul had likely heard. He had connections in Rome, including Priscilla and Aquila, whom he had met in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3, 18) and who now hosted a house church in Rome (Romans 16:3-5). They and other Jewish believers rightly understood the chosenness of their people. But Rome had gone from being a regional power to a vast and wealthy empire in less than three centuries. It seemed to be on the rise, and Jews seemed to be increasingly marginalized. If the Jewish gospel was being preached to Gentiles with greater results, did it mean that God's hand had shifted to the people most responsive to him?

As a Jew called to reach Gentiles, Paul was uniquely positioned to answer these kinds of questions, ease tensions, and help each group understand its ordained place in God's purposes. And even though he had no direct experience with the churches in Rome, he had longed to visit them. He must have seen this center of Gentile power, the capital city of his vision, as vital to his mission. The apostle to Gentiles could hardly have stayed away forever.

This is the context behind the opening to the letter. Paul begins by mentioning his own calling. Then he thoroughly establishes the roots of the gospel in Israel's history and Scriptures, but also affirms the inclusion of Gentiles (1:1-6)—incorporating several “counter-imperial signals” that point to Jesus, not Caesar,

as the world's true Lord.\* He will claim that a higher, greater kingdom than Rome is rising, which will carry more thorough and lasting salvation, peace, and justice—all benefits of the empire touted by Roman elites—but first he must establish our fallen, futile condition. He can hardly offer a picture of a new humanity until he has shown us the tragic predicament of the old—a predicament in which Jews and Gentiles share equally.

## THE BIG PICTURE

In many ways, 1:16-17 states Paul's purpose in writing and gives us an outline of where he's headed. He will explain how God's righteousness is revealed (chapters 1-3), demonstrate God's power at work to save us through faith (chapters 4-11), and show us how to live by this faith (chapters 12-15). Over the course of the letter, we will see a gospel that transcends earthly empires (and emperors), racial and cultural barriers, and even sacred religious traditions. It also has the power to fundamentally alter the human condition. By receiving this salvation—this *rightness*—by faith, we become something we were not and enter into our original design, which we have not yet experienced.

In Paul's day, the false wisdom mentioned in 1:21-22 took the form of empty idolatry of statues and shrines. In ours, it's empty philosophy, secularism, and dependence on a finite and faulty intellect that together suggest the world could be self-created (therefore making us independent and not obligated to honor any higher being). This age-old darkness may look like light as new ideas develop, but it's the same old emptiness. The world insists that followers of Jesus are living in a fiction, as deluded people with an imaginary friend. Paul reveals how those in the world are the ones living in delusion, unaware of the horrific plight of all humanity.

This is why the promise of Romans—the fundamental transformation of human nature through the life and resurrection of the perfect Bearer of the image of God—is humanity's only hope. No law, philosophy, or earthly kingdom can change us. They can only expose our utter inability to overcome our fallenness. And that is exactly the message of this letter. Yes, we are trapped in our own futility, but our fallenness has been overcome in Jesus. An entirely new life—a new *kind* of life, in fact—unfolds for those who believe.

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\* N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 76.

## EVERYONE EVERYWHERE

.....

Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them.

1:5

Imagine people outside the church, even from distinctly non-Christian cultures, surprisingly becoming Christians. Most of us would be thrilled by this demonstration of God's power and grace. But what if, because of their radical conversion experience, they began teaching longtime churchgoers about Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit—all while defying some of our treasured, traditional definitions of godliness? We can assume that some branches of the church would welcome them while resenting their quick assumptions of leadership roles, some would be highly suspicious of them for not following familiar paths into the faith, and some might even call them false teachers. New movements and trends always draw a range of responses among believers.

In some respects, this is just human nature. If something or someone doesn't align with our long-held assumptions and fit our humanly defined orthodoxy, we are reluctant to support it. Yet God has a track record of working in surprising ways. We tend to forget how surprising it was for God incarnate to come as a baby in a manger, offer life through a humiliating execution, and use the foolish things of this world to shame the wise.

We don't have to imagine the scenario described above. Something like it is happening in many parts of the world today as God brings "unlikely" believers

into his Kingdom. That was the experience of the early church as well. God was reaching across ethnic and religious divides to draw many to himself. Paul saw it as his mission to proclaim this message to “Gentiles everywhere”—literally “all nations.” A salvation rooted in Israel’s history (1:2-4) was now open to everyone. Jesus was being presented as the rightful Lord of everyone the Roman empire ruled. And this transition from a “Jewish gospel” to an “everybody gospel” had become rather controversial.

### **RE-ENVISION THE “OTHERS”**

It’s natural to see the world around us in terms of “us” and “them.” Virtually everyone does—religiously, politically, socially, ethnically, economically, and more. But the gospel breaks down old categories of “us” and “them” and insists that everyone who is “them” is a candidate to become “us.” It’s a reminder to expect the unexpected with God.

Do everything you can to maintain your vision of the God who defies assumptions and goes to extravagant lengths to reach the world—even in ways that might seem uncomfortable to his people. Practice seeing “them” as “us” and pray with all your heart for God to break down every barrier to his love and mercy—including any that may linger within your own heart.