

Romans: A Chapter-by-Chapter Study

Introduction

There is little-to-no dispute that the apostle Paul authored this letter to the church of Rome with the help of his scribe, Tertius (16:22). Most scholars believe this letter was written around 57 A.D. while Paul was on his third mission trip. It is widely accepted that Paul wrote the basic Christian theology here for the Roman church since they had never had an apostle visit or teach them before. Paul is paving the way for a visit to this church. Although Paul was a Roman citizen, it is widely believed he wouldn't see the city of Rome until his arrest in 58 A.D. Paul only visited Rome twice. He would be executed there on his second visit.

Since the Romans hadn't had any formal training from apostles on the Christian doctrine, Paul carefully worded this letter in such a way as to define the Christian view and beliefs that left little room for discussion. The Roman church was made up of both Gentiles and Jews, so Paul ensured that both parties would receive answers to their questions without favoring either one. As Paul had never visited the Roman church, he had little to go on except what had been passed to him through others. Therefore, Paul doesn't address any problem areas with the church, only Christian doctrine. It should be noted that most of Paul's letters were written to churches that he helped start. This was not the case with the Church of Rome.

It is common for both church elders and new believers alike to seek answers to doctrinal questions in this book. It is believed that passages from this book are what led the Roman Emperor Augustine to become a Christian and for Martin Luther to begin the Protestant Reformation.

Chapter 1

V1-7

At this point in Paul's life, he had been preaching the Gospel of Jesus for roughly 25-30 years. He was a well-known figure throughout the Christian church and beyond. Yet, he still introduced himself as a servant to God. All of verse 1 is dedicated to proclaiming himself as one that God called upon to do His work.

Paul is also careful to point out that this "new" religion isn't new at all. God revealed His plan through the prophets of old and Jesus is the fruition of those prophecies. The miracles that Jesus performed and His resurrection from crucifixion are the culmination of the Hebrew teachings that Paul so vigorously studied before he converted to Christianity.

The first doctrinal revelation is provided in this greeting: Jesus gave us grace and apostleship so that we might have faith.

Verse 7 provides the closing to Paul's formal greeting, as well as the first period of the book as this passage is all one sentence.

V8-15

Paul opens the body of this work by stating his desire to visit the Roman Church and that he regularly prays for these people that he's never met.

What does Paul mean when he says he owes a debt to “Greeks and barbarians...” in verse 14?

Paul was able to preach the gospel to many nations and to communicate with thousands of people via the roadways and the mail system that Rome provided. Although Rome oppressed many peoples and nations, Paul thanked the Roman government for the ability to spread the Word of God.

V16-17

These two verses are often referred to as the purpose or thesis opener of the book of Romans. Many commentaries dissect these two verses in great detail.

The word “salvation” is used specifically by Paul here as this was a philosophical term that the Greeks and Romans would recognize immediately. It was the belief of many philosophers of the day that man was sick in the soul and in need of a cure. Paul is offering that cure in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Paul mentions that salvation came to the Jews first and then also included the Greeks. This was in keeping with the Old Testament teachings of God providing a “chosen people” to witness to the world so that the world could be saved. It should be noted that the word “Greek” used here is not referring to the Greeks as a race, but rather to those that are “cultured” in the Greek teachings.

What does Paul mean by using the phrase “from faith to faith?”

Later translations change this phrase to “faith from first to last” which is probably more accurate in its idea. Faith is the all-encompassing salvation, not good deeds or righteousness.

V18-23

Paul opens this passage with *why* we need salvation: the wrath of God. The cultured Greeks would understand this to a degree as their mythological gods were often portrayed as angry. But the wrath of the Creator was a righteous anger. Only the salvation of Jesus could rescue us from the anger we deserved. This era of culture provided many distractions and alternatives to God, yet this was not new to God as He had to contend with the disobedience of the Jews since the time of Exodus!

V24-32

What does it mean when Paul says, “God gave them up to uncleanness...” in verse 24?

God gives us free will and allows us to experience the results of our sinful nature. He does this in the hope that we will realize we need a Savior. No matter what we try to fill our lives with, the void will always remain without God to fill it. Paul goes on to list the ways that man tries to fulfill their desires, speaking specifically to the favorite sins of the day and of the region. It is commonly believed that Paul wrote this letter from the city of Corinth where sexual immorality was rampant.

Chapter 2

V1-11

After describing the unclean sins in the previous chapter, Paul begins to point out that all have sinned, even those who think they are righteous. This would speak to both Jews and Greeks alike as the philosophers of the day spoke of being morally superior to their non-Roman counterparts in the

world. Paul reminds the reader that God will judge everyone for the sin in their hearts, regardless of how well those sins are hidden or how righteous someone thinks they might be.

Paul calls the goodness, forbearance, and patience of God's riches worth owning. The sin that we commit is the throwing away of those riches. People mistake God's patience for compliance or even non-existence. Paul reminds us that His patience and goodness are what allows us to be saved. Man cannot be righteous on his own. We need God to provide salvation.

Paul closes this passage with a sentence that would sting the Jews. God has no partiality to anyone. Sin removes us from God. His grace saves anyone and everyone from sin. The Jews had mistakenly believed that being the "chosen people" gave them God's favor over others. The favor God did show them was not so they could feel superior, but so that they could show God to others.

V12-16

This passage may seem harsh to non-believers but as our Creator, God has given us a conscience to discern right from wrong. Those who sin without knowing the law are just as condemned as those who know the law and do not follow it. This same conscience is what allows people who have never heard the law to still do what is morally right.

V17-24

The law is a gift from God given to His chosen people. Yet, the Jews were proud of this gift as it made them feel better than their Gentile brethren. Instead, they should have felt called to live by the gift instead of boasting about the gift.

Paul reminds the Jews that having the gift of the law is a responsibility, not a privilege. They should have been living according to the words of the Levitical and Mosaic law and being in example. Most Jews knew the law but never practiced what they preached.

V25-29

Many Jews saw their heritage and their covenant of circumcision as their salvation. They were God's chosen people, and the covenant was made long ago. They could simply coast their way into Heaven. Paul reminds them that a covenant works both ways. The Jews were not keeping their part of the bargain. With the salvation of Jesus, one need not be physically circumcised to belong to God. Their faith made a spiritual covenant with God!

Many commentators point out that baptism could be considered the New Testament version of circumcision. Both are outward and physical promises to God, but if the heart doesn't follow, these rituals mean nothing.

Chapter 3

V1-4

Paul reminds the Jews that even though they are not saved through circumcision or being the chosen people (see 2:25-29), it is still an honor to be the people through whom God chose to reveal Himself to the world.

How does the unrighteousness of man demonstrate the righteousness of God (vv4-5)?

This verse can be confusing and has been the source of much debate among many new believers or readers, but it is not meant to be so. What Paul is eloquently saying is that God is true even when man is false. Paul is reminding the new church that they need to follow the Word of God, not the opinions of mankind.

V5-8

The previous passage leads Paul to address a common problem among many new believers of the day. If God is always true, He created us, and even our disobedience will glorify Him, then shouldn't our continued sin still be permissible? Paul answers that even though God can still use our sin to justify Himself our disobedience still belongs to us. God has provided the law and the means of forgiveness. Even though God can use our sin as a tool, only our faith can save us. Faith is demonstrated through obedience.

V9-18

Paul then addresses his fellow Jews with Old Testament scripture proving that the chosen people are not better than their Gentile counterparts. Paul uses Psalms and Isaiah (Psalms 14:1-3, 5:9, 140:3, 10:7, 26:1, and Isaiah 59:7-8) to show that even the old scripture teaches of the sins of the chosen people.

V19-20

The knowledge of our sin comes from the Word of God as Paul just demonstrated, but the Word also points the way to salvation from sin. Paul makes it very clear that the law isn't meant to save us, but to show us how broken we are.

V21-26

Paul begins to weave together the plight of both Jew and Gentile in this passage. The Jews have always had the law, and they are well aware how hard it is to keep the law and not to sin. The resurrection of Jesus and our faith in Him as our Savior are what saves us from sin.

Paul also makes it clear that obedience of the law, no matter how "righteous" one thinks they may be is not worthy of salvation. The obedience of the law to show how worthy we are is not salvation. We are saved through our faith in Jesus. Our obedience should come from that faith, not from self-righteousness.

Verse 23 is a profound statement even today, but to the Roman church of the mixed Jews and Gentiles, this would hit home even more. It would humble the Jews who have always had the law, and it would equalize the Gentiles who were still learning not only about Jesus, but the prophecies that He fulfilled from the Old Testament. One of our many human commonalities is that we are all sinners and we all need Jesus.

Some translations use the word "propitiation" in verse 25. This word in this context means a substitute-sacrifice. However, the Greek word used here has many meanings. It is also translated as the "mercy seat", or the lid of the Ark of the Covenant where blood was sprinkled as an atonement sacrifice.

It should be noted that Paul says that God "set forth the propitiation." God *started* the process of salvation for His creation. Jesus the Son was acting on behalf of God the Father. God desperately wants His creation to seek Him.

V27-31

With salvation coming only through Jesus, obedience to the law by itself means nothing. Doing good deeds for the sake of doing something good means nothing. These things must come from the root of loving Jesus. Otherwise, they're just deeds.

Paul is "righting the ship" in this passage. The point of making the Jews the chosen people was so that they would be a beacon to the rest of the world to show the greatness and righteousness of God, not so that they could lord the favor of their creator over the rest of the nations. God is the Creator of *everyone*. Therefore, the salvation of Jesus is for everyone.

Chapter 4

V1-3

Paul continues his address of self-righteousness versus faith in this chapter by using the founding father of the Jewish nation, Abraham, as an example. While Moses is considered the patriarch of the Jewish religion, Abraham is revered among Jews as the patriarch of the Jewish race. There was much debate amongst the Jewish scholars of the day that Abraham was righteous because of his belief in God. Paul is countering this school of thought.

V4-8

Paul is stating that it's the motive behind the deeds that matter. If someone is doing good works just to satisfy themselves and make themselves look righteous in the eyes of others, then these are not good deeds at all. Deeds as the result of faith in Jesus are motivated by belief and trust rather than self-righteousness.

Paul uses a Psalm of David (Psalm 32:1-2) to show the Jews that even the Old Testament states that faith in God is the only deliverance from sin.

V9-12

Another inconvenient fact that Paul uses to show that Jew and Gentile alike are equal in God's eyes is that Abraham had not yet been circumcised before God found Abraham righteous. The Jewish scholars of the day would scoff at this declaration.

V13-15

Paul also points out that God's promises came to Abraham and his descendants *prior* to Moses receiving the Law. There was no way for the Jews to earn their inheritance. It was simply given to them by God. The Law came after the promises of God.

V16-18

Paul points out that our faith allows the grace of God to save us. He is trying to establish requirements on behalf of the believer. We have to provide faith in order to receive grace, just as following the law would allow communion and blessings from God. The Jews had allowed corruption and sin into their lives and many of them only followed the law out of self-righteousness or simple tradition.

Faith in God can bring about supernatural, life-altering experiences. Abraham and Sara had a son well past their age of being able to do so, as an example.

V19-25

Abraham's faith and obedience increased his faith in God. The first step taken in faith can lead to bigger things. Abraham didn't stop believing despite the age of he and his wife. His faith through that led to even stronger faith in his life.

Paul closes this chapter by stating that Abraham's righteousness was not just for Abraham. God used Abraham to show the world that righteousness was for everyone if they simply turned to Him. In the same way, faith in Jesus will save everyone who believes from death!

Chapter 5

V1-5

Paul spends the first 4 chapters discussing how works performed out of self-righteousness mean nothing but works through faith lead to salvation. Paul begins this chapter listing more benefits of faith in Jesus. Verse one begins the list with Peace with our Creator. Sin is overcome and peace restored with our faith in Christ. Verse 2 continues the list with the grace of God. Grace removes the requirements of the law so that we may be in good standing with God. Some early translations use the word "rejoice" in verse 2. Newer translations may use the word "celebrate." The Greek word is more accurately translated as "triumphant boasting."

Paul continues his list in verse 3 describing a present-tense earthly glory for Christians. This would probably be met with skepticism as the Christian church was heavily persecuted in this era. Paul is trying to convince the Roman church that even in hardship, the glory of God can shine brightly through their love for one another. Our earthly hardships lead to a chain of Godly characteristics that will lead to heavenly bliss. Tribulation brings perseverance, which brings strength of character, which leads to hope. This hope is given to us through the Holy Spirit of God.

V6-8

Paul reverts to the previous chapters, reminding the readers that they are not righteous on their own. If they were, there would be no need for Jesus to sacrifice Himself! Jesus did not die for our goodness, but for our sin. This is the "*agape*" love that Paul speaks of in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13).

V9-11

God gave the Jews (and the world, in turn) the law so that we might be saved from sin and be able to have a relationship with God. Sin is what separates us from God. Jesus filled that void of separation and did away with the necessity of old covenant sacrifices by sacrificing Himself. Our righteousness comes from Jesus, not from ourselves.

V12-14

Why would the fall of man be placed on the shoulders of Adam and not Eve (Genesis 3)?

Paul discusses the fall of man "from the beginning," mentioning that sin entered the world through "one man." Paul places the fall of man on Adam since Eve was deceived by Satan. Adam sinned willfully. He was not tricked into sinning like his wife was. Through this sin, death was introduced to the world and the separation of God and Man began.

Paul also refutes a common argument of the day that breaking the law is what leads to sin. Paul states that sin was in the world before the law so this could not be the case.

V15-17

Paul is being slightly poetical here when he states that one man brought sin to the entire race, but one Man brought grace to all of humanity. Just as the sin of Adam had consequences for all, the actions of Jesus provide grace to all.

V18-21

Paul continues his compare-and-contrast between Adam and Jesus. Adam brought judgment, Jesus brought justification. Adam brought condemnation, Jesus brought justification.

Paul closes this passage by stating that the law did not make us sinners, but neither did it make us righteous. The purpose of the law is to make man's sin clear so that we may see our separation from God. Jesus introduced a way out of that sin that the law so clearly indicated.

Chapter 6

V1-4

Paul starts off this chapter by revisiting a concept he addressed in 3:8. There was much debate among the new Christian churches that if Jesus had died for our sins and accepted our punishment that it was okay to continue in a life of sin even after accepting Jesus as the Christ. Paul states that our acceptance of Jesus also accepts His death. His death becomes our death as believers. We have died to ourselves and become new in Christ. Our baptism is a public symbol of that death and resurrection.

V5-7

The purpose of the death and resurrection of Jesus was to free us from sin. If we continue to sin after accepting Jesus, we haven't truly accepted what it means to accept Him.

V8-11

Paul reminds the readers that death was overcome by Jesus. There is life after death and our reward for dying to ourselves and following Jesus is eternal salvation in Heaven, free from sin!

V12-14

Verse 12 is a statement aimed solely at Christians. Non-Christians do not know what it means to break free from sin. Only those that know what sin is and what it costs can know to be free from it. The habits of a lifetime of sin will be hard to break. Paul is encouraging the readers to break old habits and renew their lives with Christian habits. The closing of verse 14 reminds us that even if we know what sin is, we still must accept the gift of grace from God to be free from sin.

V15-18

There is a distinction in the Greek translation between the word "sin" in verse 15 and verse 1. The opening of the chapter uses a tense of the same word to describe a perpetual or continual sin. Verse 15 uses a tense referring to a single act or an occasional sin. So even though these two verses sound the same in English, Paul had different intentions using these 2 verses.

Paul uses this passage to distinguish the believer from the non-believer. The believer is free from a life of sin. This doesn't excuse sins that occur after acceptance, but those sins can be dealt with as opposed to living a life wallowing in sin.

V19-23

What does Paul mean in verse 19 when he says he speaks in human terms?

This is a form of apology to the reader. Paul was using the example of slavery to illustrate his point. However, many of his readers were slaves. Paul was excusing the use of the illustration.

Just as we were once slaves to sin, we are now slaves to righteousness. We must give up our old ways and live in Christ Jesus. Paul closes this chapter with an oft quoted verse. Being a slave to sin only leads to death and damnation. Being a slave to God leads to freedom and eternal life.

Chapter 7

V1-6

Paul tries to illustrate to the new Christian church what the difference is between Jew and Christian. While the Jews had the law, Christians have a new life through Christ and are no longer bound to the law or the slavery of sin.

Does Paul mean we no longer have to obey the Mosaic or Levitical law?

This is a source of much confusion for many new believers and even mature Christians. Paul isn't saying we can disobey the ten commandments or ignore laws concerning how we treat one another. One of the purposes of the law was to keep the Jews in good standing with God. It gave them a guideline on how to maintain purity and cleanliness before God that was necessary because of our sinful nature. This is no longer necessary as a Christian. One of the other purposes of the law was to show humans how to treat each other: with love, mercy, grace, and compassion. Those are traits that a Christian should adhere to.

V7-13

Paul follows the logical progression of his previous example to the next step. Simply because the law reveals sin doesn't make the law sinful. But Paul follows this train of thought even further using human nature as his guide. Just like stubborn children, when we're told not to do something, it becomes even more tempting to do it. The law made certain things off limits, so those things became desirable. Just like children, we may not know that something is bad for us until we're told. But once we're told "no," we want to try it even more. In our rebellious nature, sin gained a foothold through God's holy law.

V14-19

Paul begins to explain the dichotomy of the nature of man and the holy law in this passage. The law comes from a perfect, sinless God, while man is full of sin. The law only reveals our sinful nature to us.

Knowing what is right and even desiring what is right isn't enough. Our sinful nature takes away our strength to do what is right. As Christians, we acknowledge that we are sinners. It's the resurrection of Jesus that wipes that sin away.

V20-25

The Christian life brings about its own struggles. How does a sinful human live a Godly life? Paul informs the reader here that it is impossible under our own power. We as humans can never be Godly. But we as Christians can be forgiven. The point is to try to be Godly knowing that we never will be, but that God will forgive us for not being Godly. Simply put, we need a savior. Paul reminds the reader of this in the closing verse.

What does Paul mean when he uses the phrase, “body of death” in verse 24?

At first glance, it would be easy to assume that Paul is simply referring to our own human selves that perishes to sin. While this could be true, most scholars believe Paul is referring to a horrid custom of the day. It was common for prisoners to be shackled to dead bodies so that the prisoner had to eat, sleep, walk, and bathe with a rotting corpse. Often, the corpse would be chained onto the prisoners’ back. The putrid smell, the attraction of insects and rodents, not to mention the mental anguish would all be a form of torture for the prisoner.

Chapter 8

V1-4

Paul is making a declaration that would be either a relief or a statement of blasphemy to the Jewish readers. To those that follow Jesus, the law can no longer find them guilty of sin. Just as God the Father would not find Jesus guilty, He does not accuse those who believe in Jesus.

It should be noted that the second half of verse 1 is believed to have been written by someone other than Paul. Early manuscripts of the letter to the Romans do not contain the words, “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (NKJV).” Some translations leave this phrase out entirely (NASB). It is not known when this phrase was added or by whom. These words are used later in this chapter and it is thought to have been added by an overzealous scribe or translator.

Just as verse 1 states that Christians are free from the guilt of sin, verse 2 states that Christians are free from the law, or power, of sin. Paul states that the law, while just, could not save. Jesus could save by being both human and sinless. The perfection of Jesus is what makes us free from sin.

V5-8

Paul lets the reader know that their only baseline for if they are following Jesus or not is themselves. Only an individual truly knows themselves well enough to determine where their mindset is at. Are they acting selfishly? Are they seeking the things of this world? Or are they following the desires of God? Are they seeking the love of Jesus? There are outward signs of these things, but it is ultimately up to the individual to determine for themselves who or what they are following.

V9-11

Paul makes it very clear in this section that to be a Christian is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We as Christians have God living in us! Our words, thoughts, and actions are influenced by God every day. This is a hint of the heavenly eternal life that waits for us after our physical bodies here die off.

V12-15

Once we have been freed from sin and saved from death, we are no longer our own but indebted to the one who saved us. We should think of the rest of our lives as a life-debt to Jesus, not time to spend frivolously on worldly things.

Paul is also careful not to compare this life debt to the common slaves of the day. This is not slavery. This is adoption into the family of God.

V16-17

The Spirit of God joins with us. That is not something to be taken lightly! This is a bond, a shared inheritance with Jesus. There is so much weight in this statement that it becomes hard to fathom.

V18-22

It should not be forgotten that there would be Roman slaves among the audience of this letter. Persecuted Christians sitting in a city that had little tolerance for them. Paul was not brushing aside the sufferings of the members of this church. He was painting a picture of something they could look forward to. The suffering they were enduring was the same that all creation was enduring and will endure until sin is finally removed from the world.

V23-25

Having the Holy Spirit live within us gives us a glimpse of what eternity will be like. A modern comparison would be like being adopted as a child and knowing that you're going to a new home with a loving family that wants you, loves you, and will care for you, but you're stuck in the lobby waiting on paperwork.

V26-27

Paul gives us a glimpse of the supernatural abilities that each of us as Christians have because the Holy Spirit lives in us. This can be an urge, a feeling, words that we say that we don't know why we say them, or prayers that we pray without knowing why we need to pray them.

V28-30

This passage would be a hard pill to swallow for many of the readers of the day. Many would have lost friends and family to persecution or have been punished for their beliefs, themselves. It would be hard for them to understand what good could come from that. But the fact that they were still holding onto their faith was proof enough that the Holy Spirit was in them. A better life was waiting for them in eternity.

V31-39

Paul displays his passion for God and his fellow Christians artistically as he closes this chapter. God has gone to great lengths to open the door for mankind! All we have to do is accept the gift He offers. We are justified and blameless through Jesus and we can finally come before God free from sin.

Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 to remind the reader that persecution is nothing new to followers of God. But the Love of God conquers all and nothing, not even death, can keep Him from loving us.

Chapter 9

V1-5

With chapters 1-8, Paul focuses on both the Jews and the Gentiles need for a Savior. In this chapter, Paul begins to address the condition of Israel. This first paragraph shows Paul lamenting over how the Jews have missed the coming and going of the Promised Messiah!

V6-9

Paul is quick to point out in a very round about sort of way that it is not God that failed to keep His promise. Israel simply missed the opportunity. Just because the Jews are the “chosen people” doesn’t mean they are saved. They still have to uphold their end of the covenant. And they have to recognize the Messiah when He appears.

V10-13

Paul uses the example of Jacob and Esau to point out that we as humans may not always understand the logic behind God’s plan. But it is God’s plan, nonetheless, even before they were born.

V14-16

This passage can be hard to understand for some. Even though God may be merciful to some and not to others, this doesn’t mean that God isn’t fair or righteous to everyone. Mercy is not getting what we deserve. God is always just. He is sometimes merciful.

V17-18

This is another passage that can be taken out of context, much like its subject matter in Exodus. God created mankind and each human to be unique. He created the Egyptian Pharaoh of Exodus to be a hard-hearted man. Pharaoh could have chosen at any time to be a different person, but he simply went with his natural inclination. God can choose to do with us as He pleases just as we can choose to do with ourselves as we please.

V19-21

Paul answers the question of predestination in this passage harshly. If we as the creation of God do not have free will, then we truly are God’s creation and we have no right to question what the Creator does with us!

V22-24

Paul poses an interesting question to the Roman church and to those that ask about why God created them. As the Creator, God can use His creation to glorify Himself in whatever way He sees fit, with whatever people group He see fit, Jew or Gentile.

V25-26

Paul quotes from Hosea 2:23 and 1:10 to say that having the Gentiles among the saved fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament.

V27-29

Paul quotes from Isaiah 10:22-23 and 1:9 to show that even though God’s wrath fell on the Israelites of old, His mercy kept them from dying off completely and they were allowed to flourish once again.

V30-33

Paul addresses the conundrum facing many Christian-Jewish converts of the day. Why do the Gentiles have the same reward without being from the line of Abraham? Paul simply states that the Jews were pursuing the wrong thing. The Jews were looking to be saved by the law, not by faith.

Chapter 10

V1-4

Paul begins this chapter with a knowledge that he is all too familiar with. He was one of the many Jews that had the knowledge of the law but was blind to the meaning of the prophecies. The Jews were so set on being righteous that they ignored what the prophets told them was coming in place of the law.

V5-13

Paul again demonstrates that our own righteousness means nothing as we can't do what Jesus did. Our faith that Jesus did those things for us is the only salvation we need and what makes us righteous. Paul lays out a path for both Jew and Gentile that confession (public admission) and belief in your heart (faith and trust) are what make us righteous. Verse 13 is important for two reasons. It says "all" or "everyone" depending on the translation which means there is no distinction between race, color, or creed, and it says the phrase "who call upon Him," which indicates that we have to participate in our salvation. We have to accept the gift from the Gift Giver.

V14-17

Paul changes direction in this passage by giving instructions to the new believers. Those who believe have the responsibility of sharing the Good News with others. Verse 15 speaks to the common thread found in the gospels of the washing of feet. The roads that were traveled were not only walked by humans, but by animals. This meant the roads were often filthy with animal waste. With only sandals to protect the feet, it is no wonder that the custom of washing feet before entering a dwelling was so common. Paul is stating that even one with feet as filthy as these can be beautiful if they are bringing the good news of Jesus Christ and eternal salvation.

Yet, even Isaiah (53:10) predicted that the gospel would be rejected, even by God's chosen people.

Paul uses the phrase, "faith comes by hearing" as a reflection of the era. While there were educated Greeks, Romans, and Jews, most first-century citizens were not educated enough to read. Their information came from word of mouth.

V18-21

Paul quotes some more from the Old Testament as a sort of condemnation of the Israelites who have ignored the Messiah. Verse 18 is from Psalm 19:4, verse 19 is from Deuteronomy 32:21, verse 20-21 is from Isaiah 65:1-2. The Israelites have had every opportunity to know what was coming and more importantly, Who was coming. This makes Israel all the more accountable for their own actions as they simply ignored the signs.

Chapter 11

V1-5

After chapter 10, it would seem the Israelites are doomed. Paul addresses that in the opening of chapter 11. Even if the majority of Israel rejects the Messiah, it doesn't mean all are lost. Paul uses the example of Elijah from 1 Kings 19:10. Even though God may be angry with the majority of His people, God can work with a few faithful remnants.

V6-10

Paul quotes Isaiah 29 and Psalm 69 to further state how God can use a small membership to make the majority look foolish. In this instance, the Jews had become so comfortable in the fact that they were God's chosen people that they believed that fact was their saving grace. They didn't need a Messiah since they were chosen!

It should be noted here that Paul uses the word "elect" (in some translations) to describe those that chose or "elected" to receive God's grace.

V11-14

Paul addressed Psalm 69 to say that even though Israel has stumbled, they have not fallen. Their stumbling has brought salvation to the Gentiles. There are many examples throughout Acts where the gospel went out to the Gentiles only after the Jewish people rejected it (Acts 13:46, 18:5-6, 28:25-28).

V15-21

Paul comforts the Gentiles by letting them know that just like olive shoots could be grafted onto an old olive tree to revive it, the Gentiles would be brought into God's chosen people to revive the followers of God and the Messiah.

What does Paul mean by "first fruits" in verse 16 (NKJV)?

Some translations refer to dough or include it alongside dough as the first fruits offering. Paul is using a metaphor here, but scholars debate on what the metaphor means. Some think it to mean the Jewish patriarchs (the New Living Translation removes the metaphor completely and lists the names of the patriarchs) while other scholars believe Paul was referring to the early Jewish converts (some scholars think he may be including himself) to Christianity.

V22-24

God's goodness and grace extends to all, Jew and Gentile. Those that don't believe need only to accept God's grace and they can be "grafted in" to God's family.

V25-27

The "mystery" here is that Israel will be saved. Israel may be "blind" to the Messiah at the time of Paul's writing, but that's only so that the Gentiles can be saved and that the gospel can be made known to all mankind. Paul quotes from Isaiah 59 a promise that God has made to Israel that He will give them His focus and an opportunity for them to return to the fold and see the Messiah. There is still much debate and mystery as to how and when this prophecy will be fulfilled.

V28-29

The Jewish priests and Pharisees had reason to be hated among the Christian community, but Paul is reminding them that if nothing else, they are still God's chosen people. There are obviously more reasons than that to not hate someone, but Paul is making an argument for the Jewish nation.

V30-32

Just as mercy has been extended to those who are not God's chosen people, mercy should be shown to those who reject the Messiah.

V33-36

Paul closes this chapter in a spirit of praise, quoting from Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11.

Chapter 12

V1-2

Paul opens this famous chapter by asking the readers to choose God. He reminds them that as Christians, they no longer belong to themselves, but they have been bought and paid for by the mercy of God. The very nature of the world we live in tries everything from the subtle to the drastic to get us to focus on anything other than God. As Christians, our focus should be solely on God. The Holy Spirit will "renew our mind" so that we may not only overcome the temptations of this world but be a shining light in this world for others to find their way out of the darkness.

V3-5

In this section, Paul says that everyone in the church has a function and serves a purpose. But he also reminds everyone not to let any function serve as a means to form a hierarchy. Just because one's job or purpose may seem more important than someone else's doesn't mean that they should lord it over others. In fact, verse 3 reminds readers that they are all lowly sinners and that God isn't trusting them because they're holy, but because they're faithful.

V6-8

Paul lists spiritual gifts here and reminds the reader that gifts are not doled out on the basis of merit, but rather on how God sees fit to give them. It should also be noted that Paul lists spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-10 that differs somewhat from this list.

- Prophecy - The gift of prophecy is listed with a caveat: it must be practiced in proportion to our faith. The prophecy of God given to a prophet may seem unbelievable even to the one speaking it. It is up to the prophet to be faithful enough to believe if the prophecy is truly from God or not. If they don't feel it is, they should not speak.
- Service - The gift of ministry or service, depending upon the translation, in this verse is used in a broad context as serving in practical ways.
- Teaching - The gift of teaching is different than the gift of ministry in the sense that teaching implies that there is instruction from one person to many people.
- Exhortation - Exhortation differs from teaching in that it is encouragement rather than instruction.
- Generosity or Giving - A giver provides support above and beyond the tithe to the church. This could be to a ministry, the poor, or the church itself.

- Leadership – There is another caveat with this gift. A Christian leader must not give up, even if they feel discouraged. As a leader, their mindset is contagious, and they must press forward.
- Mercy - With the gift of mercy there must also be cheerfulness. It can be difficult to show mercy, but it can be even harder to be cheerful about it. The spiritual gift of mercy will include cheerfulness, as being merciful pleases God.

V9-13

Paul lists here some of the standard attributes of Christians or, at least attributes which Christians should try to attain. It is often noted that these are easier said than done.

What does it mean to be each of these?

- Loving without hypocrisy
- Hating what is evil
- Clinging to what is good
- Be kind and loving to one another
- Work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically
- Rejoice in hope
- Patient in troubled times
- Distributing to the needs of each other, given to hospitality

V14-21

Paul changes from our attitudes towards our fellow Christians to our attitudes to those outside the church. He does not hold back with his first statement as this is counter to human nature. Verse 14 is one of the hardest verses to adhere to as a Christian.

Paul closes this chapter by reminding the church how to behave around non-believers. Our faith does not make us better than them. It makes us a gateway for them. Paul quotes from Proverbs 25:21-22 as a way to remind the Jewish converts that this concept is nothing new.

What does the phrase, “heap coals of fire on his head” mean from the Proverbs quote?

Although this phrase is probably lost to modern readers and may have even been seen as old fashioned at the time of Paul’s writing, most scholars believe this refers to either a “burning conviction” that would come from being shown kindness or the literal act of providing coals from a fire to help a neighbor start their own fire as an act of kindness.

Chapter 13

V1-2

This opening statement of the chapter would be hard for some of the audience to hear. There were slaves, there were persecuted Christians, there were Jewish zealots, among others that would have good reason to want to rebel against the Roman empire. Just as God allows individuals to suffer, God can use governments to bless to curse people. God used Nebuchadnezzar to overthrow Israel and scatter them to the wind as is recorded by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others in the Old

Testament in order to punish them for over 400 years of rebellion. Whatever authority exists in the world today is allowed to exist because God allows it to exist.

Should the early colonists of the Americas have rebelled against Britain to form the United States?

Should a supposedly Christian country go to war against another country for committing humanitarian atrocities?

V3-7

Paul is encouraging the church to be good citizens. Put God first and do not compromise the Christian faith, but follow the law that is given, even if those laws seem counterproductive. Paul goes so far as to say that not only should we pay taxes and customs, but we should be reverent and even honor our rulers, including praying for them (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

V8-10

In this passage, Paul summarizes the purpose of the Old Testament law with one statement: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The spirit behind the Levitical and Mosaic laws was love; Do all these things so that you can practice loving one another. Through that practice, our hearts would soften towards each other, and we would discover what it truly means to love sacrificially and selflessly. This is the love that Jesus demonstrated his entire life on earth. This is why Paul spent so much time in the first half of this letter stating that following the law meant nothing. If you follow the law and don’t learn how to love, then following the law is pointless. Obeying the law out of love for God and love for one another is the key to understanding who God truly is.

V11-14

The metaphor Paul uses here is to remind Christians not to become complacent in their daily faith. Letting our walk with Jesus turn into a religious ritual makes us no better than the Pharisees who crucified Jesus. It is important to renew our faith daily. Paul warns of the temptations of the world that will draw our attention away from our daily faith.

Chapter 14

V1-4

Paul is reminding the members of the church to be kind to one another and not judge one another based on spiritual maturity. Someone who is “weak in the faith” could be a new believer, someone who doesn’t have access to good teaching or the Bible, or someone who has been spiritually challenged or exhausted.

What does Paul mean when he says someone who is weak eats only vegetables in verse 2?

There is much debate on whether Paul is being literal or metaphorical with this statement. Scholars offer many ideas on the possibility of Paul referring to meat sacrificed to idols, so this person has a lack of protein, or if this person is fasting from meat, or if this person is only eating kosher meat. The metaphorical argument would see the “meat-eaters” as the weak ones while the vegetarians were the strong ones in some sort of legalistic dispute. There is no definitive answer as to how Paul meant this statement to be taken.

Regardless of whether we “eat meat” or not, we are not to judge our fellow Christian. We can offer support, friendship, and fellowship, but never judgement.

V5-9

This passage is a little vague in description, but the principle is still the same as the previous passage on spiritual maturity and judgement. However one reconciles their faith in God, whether it be through the food they eat, the days they observe, or any other issue, that is between them and God. As long as it doesn't go against Biblical teachings, it should be left up to the individual.

V10-13

Paul reminds his audience that however righteous and judgmental we may feel in the moment we will all be humbled before Jesus on the day of our own judgment. Paul uses verse 13 to remind the reader that we are still responsible to keep each other on the righteous path (Paul will address this in chapter 15:14 and again in 2 Timothy 4:2) but to do it in a loving way, not in a way that will cause harm.

V14-21

Paul offers this to Christians who would debate with someone who is abstaining from something even if it's “clean” or harmless: is it better to cause a fellow Christian to stumble or to continue to discourage them in their abstinence? If you are not an alcoholic, would you have a glass of wine in front of your friend who is a recovering alcoholic? Or would you abstain from wine for your friend's sake?

V22-23

Paul closes this chapter with the personal responsibility of each Christian to examine ourselves for anything that may take away from our faith. If there's even a hint of something that isn't faith, that hint is sin.

Chapter 15

V1-4

Paul continues the theme from the previous chapter concerning how to deal with those who are struggling with certain vices. Loving others may mean giving up simple pleasures for the sake of not causing others to stumble. This is an example Jesus set for all to follow.

V5-6

Paul knows that sometimes our own selfishness will get in the way of this type of sacrificial love, so he offers this prayer for patience and comfort that all Christians may treat each other in a loving way just as Jesus loves us.

V7-13

Paul quotes several passages from the Old Testament (Psalms, Isaiah, etc.) to show that Jews and Gentiles should come together as Christians and not be divided over petty disputes.

V14-16

Paul is beginning to wrap up his letter at this point and starting to summarize his purpose in writing to the church in Rome. Paul wants to encourage this church in doing what they know is right and to not be divided over theological arguments.

V17-19

Paul is giving an account of his journeys in this passage all while giving glory to God. The word of Jesus has been spread from Jerusalem (the East) to Illyricum (modern Albania, the West). Notice that between this passage and the preceding passage, Paul has referenced all three members of the trinity, God the Father, Jesus the Son, and The Holy Spirit. Even though there is no word in Greek for “trinity,” Paul still shows the three beings in his writings.

V20-21

Paul considered it his life’s work to spread the gospel to new, fresh people. Not because it was wrong to build up existing work, but because there were so many people to reach.

V22-29

It was because of his desire to reach places that hadn’t received the gospel that he hadn’t been to Rome to visit the new church. They had already been established and didn’t need his help. Still, he desired to meet this group of new believers. Paul’s intention was to journey to Spain and visit the Roman church along the way. But he had many other things to do before this journey could take place.

V30-33

Paul asks for prayer as he continues his journeys. One thing he must do is go to Jerusalem which he knows will be dangerous. According to the book of Acts, Paul would go to Jerusalem and be arrested, where he would be sent to Rome to be put on trial.

Chapter 16

V1-2

The final chapter of Romans is a list of faithful friends and servants to Paul that he hopes will at some point visit the church in Rome. He starts off with Phoebe, who is most likely the one bringing the letter to the church from Paul. Paul speaks highly of her in the opening paragraph of the chapter.

V3-16

Paul instructs the Roman church to greet any and all of those who Paul lists here as trusted servants of Christ.

- Priscilla, or Prisca in some translations, and Aquila. This couple is also mentioned in the book of Acts in chapter 18. They were the hosts of one of the many churches.
- Epaenetus. He is believed to be one of the converts in Corinth where Paul was when he wrote this letter.
- Mary
- Andronicus and Junia. These are believed to be early Christian converts, possibly even apostles.

- Amplias, or Ampliatus in some translations. There is an early archaeological tomb found in a Roman catacomb with this name on it which is believed to be the same person.
- Urbanus and Stachys
- Apelles
- The household of Aristobulus. It is noted by scholars that the members of the household are welcome, but not Aristobulus himself. It is widely accepted that the head of this household was not a convert even though many of family members were.
- Herodion
- The household of Narcissus
- Tryphaena and Tryphosa
- Persis
- Rufus and his mother. This is believed to be the same Rufus mentioned in Mark 15:21.
- Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and their companions
- Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and their companions

While letters, emails, texts, and other forms of communication may seem trivial by today's standards, a parchment was a rare form of excitement in the first century A.D. Authors took advantage of every available space, so for Paul to make a list of people for the Roman church to be on the lookout for would not be unheard of. But for this list to be enshrined in the Word of God would be truly remarkable.

V17-20

This paragraph is the source of much skepticism among scholars, as the change in tone seems to indicate something happened to make Paul write this down. There is no hint given as to what caused this paragraph to be suddenly interjected at the end of the letter, but some serious event took place to make Paul warn the church to be cautious of those that would divide and deceive the church from within.

V21-24

Paul includes greetings from some of his helpers in Corinth. This is the only letter where the scribe is mentioned by name.

V25-27

Paul concludes this letter by reminding the Roman church that God's wisdom is beyond that of man. Even if we don't know what the reason is for the suffering in the world, for evil being allowed to seemingly prevail, we don't *need* to know. Our faith has already given us eternal salvation beyond what this world has to offer.

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