

Romans

Introduction to Chapters 9-16

Romans is divided fairly neatly into three distinct sections, although the third section, chapters 12-16, could be divided into three sections itself.

In the first section, we've learned that we have been graciously delivered from a terrible predicament: we are sinners, unable to save ourselves, but, through grace and faith, we have been justified. Therefore, as Paul says in 8:1, "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

But not everyone has seized the opportunity to be saved.

Some have, in large measure, rejected Christ and the gospel. Most notably, the Israelites, to whom the law and prophets were first given, have almost universally turned their back on the promises originally made to them.

Why? And does their rejection by God cast doubt on His goodness and mercy? Paul deals with this "Jewish" question in chapters 9-11.

In chapters 12-15, Paul deals broadly with the practical effects of justification. The introductory passage, 12:1-2, says,

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of

God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Paul urges his readers to reflect on the mercies of God (His grace and forgiveness) and allow that to propel them on to "transformation" (change) through the renewal of their minds. In the various commands and admonitions that follow, he shows them how to live the sacrificial life that comes from true transformation.

Paul covers a lot of ground in chapters 12-15, but his primary concern seems to center on the importance of a united church. The subject of love figures prominently in chapter 13 and chapter 14 provides

valuable direction on how brethren can get along, even when disagreeing over matters of opinion.

Paul ends his letter with a valuable list of greetings in chapter 16. If you "grew up on the pew" in churches of Christ, you know v. 16 very well: "greet one another with a holy kiss; the churches of Christ greet you." More importantly, this section places emphasis on the fact that these letters were written to people just like you and me. Several men and women are mentioned and commended for their work, even though the work was not as noticeable as that of a Paul or an Apollos. The backbone of the kingdom is brethren who are doing their work quietly, behind the scenes. It will always be that way.

"...THIS SECTION PLACES EMPHASIS ON THE FACT THAT THESE LETTERS WERE WRITTEN TO PEOPLE JUST LIKE YOU AND ME."

Author and Date

Romans was probably written from Corinth during Paul's third missionary journey, c. 57 AD (Acts 20:2-3). There is no doubt that the letter is the work of Paul (1:1) and is addressed to the Christians in Rome (1:7). Paul wrote the letter while on his way to Jerusalem to deliver the monetary assistance that had been collected for the benefit of the saints there (15:25). Afterwards, he hoped to go to Rome on his way to Spain (15:24). As we know from the latter part of Acts, Paul did get to Rome, but in a manner much different than he had planned. It is generally believed, in fact, that Paul died in Rome in 68 AD.

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Bibliography & Abbreviations

ASV	The American Standard Version
Barclay	William Barclay: The Letter to the Romans (1957)
Barth	Karl Barth: The Epistle to the Romans (1933)
Bauer	Walter Bauer, A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, rev. and aug. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from the 5th ed. (1979)
Black	Matthew Black: Romans (1973)
Brown	John Brown: Analytical Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans (1981 reprint of 1857 ed.)
Bruce	F. F. Bruce: The Letter of Paul to the Romans (1985)
Brunner	Emil Brunner: The Letter to the Romans (1959)
cf.	<i>confer</i> ; “compare”
Cranfield	C. E. B. Cranfield: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Volumes I and II (1975, 1979)
Denney	James Denney: “St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans” in the Expositor’s Greek Testament, Vol. II (1979 reprint)
EGT	The Expositor’s Greek Testament, W. Robertson Nicoll, Ed.
ESV	The English Standard Version.
f.	See following verse.
ff.	See following verses.
GNB	Good News Bible (Today’s English Version)
Godet	F. Godet: Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (1895)
Haldane	Robert Haldane: The Epistle to the Romans (1966 reprint)
Harrison	Everett F. Harrison: “Romans” in the Expositor’s Bible Commentary 10 (1976)
Hendrickson	William Hendrickson: New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (1981)
Hodge	Charles Hodge: A Commentary on Romans (1972 reprint of 1864 edition)
JB	The Jerusalem Bible
Kaseman	Ernst Kaseman: Commentary on Romans (1980)
Kittel	The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols. (1964-76)
Kubo	Sakae Kubo: A Reader’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament (1975)
Lard	Moses E. Lard: Commentary on Romans (1875)
LB	The Living Bible
Lenski	R. C. H. Lenski: The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans (n.d.)
Lloyd Jones	D. M. Lloyd Jones: Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-8:39, 6 vol.’s (1970-75)
LS	Liddell and Scott’s Greek English Lexicon (1963 reprint of 1871 ed.)

Luther	Martin Luther: Lectures on Romans (1961)
McGarvey	J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton: Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans (n.d.)
McGuiggan	Jim McGuiggan: The Book of Romans (n.d.)
Metzger	Bruce M. Metzger: A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (1971)
Moo	Douglas Moo: The Wycliff Exegetical Commentary: Romans 1-8 (1990)
Morris	Leon Morris: The Epistle to the Romans (1988)
Mott	L. A. Mott, Jr.: Faith in the Book of Romans (1977)
Moule	H. C. G. Moule: The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (1896)
Murray	John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans (1965)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NBD	The New Bible Dictionary, J. D. Douglas, et al, eds., 2nd Ed. (1982)
NIDNTT	The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols. (1975-78)
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	The New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
Nygren	Anders Nygren: Commentary on Romans (1952)
OT	Old Testament
Palmer	Earl F. Palmer: Salvation by Surprise: Studies in the Book of Romans (1975)
RSV	The Revised Standard Version
SH	William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (1907)
Synonyms	Richard Chevenix Trench: Synonyms of the New Testament (1880)
Thomas	W. H. Griffith Thomas: Romans (1912)
TWBB	A Theological Word Book of the Bible, Alan Richardson, ed. (1958)
Vaughn	Curtis Vaughn and Bruce Corley, Romans (1976)
Vermes	G. Vermes: The Dead Sea Scrolls in English (1972)
Whiteside	Robertson L. Whiteside: A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome (1945)

Bible quotations and references are from the English Standard Version (ESV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB) or the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.

Romans 9-11

The Jewish Question: How Will Israel Be Saved?

This is a difficult and often misunderstood section of Romans. Many of Calvinism's champions allegedly find support for unconditional election here and others believe Paul teaches that Israel must be restored as a physical nation. Careful scrutiny of what Paul actually says, however, will prove how specious these arguments are.

Paul said in the theme statement of the letter (1:16) that the gospel is the power to save for the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. He points to promises made through Abraham and his descendants to show how God's plan to save man is a plan of "righteousness by faith" apart from law. Salvation is "of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22) but it not achieved through the law (Paul's argument up to now is that salvation *never* has been achieved through law).

But this creates a problem: if salvation is not now realized through the Jews and their religion, what place do they have in God's scheme of redemption? What will become of Israel? These chapters address that question. Tension between Jews and Gentiles was still a potential (and often, very real) problem in the churches of the first century. Paul goes to great pains to explain why Israel as a nation is no longer the conveyor of God's righteousness and how Israel can be saved. Paul concludes that they are saved just like Gentiles.

We will achieve greater success in understanding this chapter if we remember that Paul is discussing the community as a whole, not individuals. He is seeking to demonstrate why Israel (generally) has been rejected by God. Also, he is discussing spiritual matters here. Paul is not concerned with Israel as a nation—he never mentions them as such and never even hints at a future "kingdom of Israel" to be restored in Palestine. His concern is with the spiritual condition of Israel (9:1-3; 10:1-3).



Romans 9:1-33

Paul expresses extreme sorrow over the self-imposed condemnation of his fellow Israelites, even to the extent of saying that he would volunteer to be “accursed from Christ” if it would serve to save them (vv. 1–3).

He proceeds to name the privileges and the great honor that God showered on Israel. To them, he says, belongs the *adoption*—God chose them, not because they were worthy among all other people, but because He loved them and had a plan for them; He formed them into His family (cf. Isa. 43:7; Dt. 7:7–8). The *glory* of God was with them, in the cloud and the pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21–22) and in other appearances of God to His people throughout history. Also to Israel was given the *covenants*, first to Abraham (see Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1ff.; 17:1ff.) then to Isaac, Jacob and David (2 Sam. 7:12–17). Even the covenant name, *Yahweh*, was given to Israel alone.

The *service of God* refers to the works of the Levitical priesthood in serving in the temple, the “place” where God would meet His people (see Dt. 12:1ff; Heb. 9:1–10). And to Israel first came all the *promises* of God, from His promise to Abraham onward (cf. Heb. 6:13–18). The *fathers* came through Israel and it was from Israel that *Christ came, according to the flesh*. Israel was greatly privileged to be the conveyor of such tremendous blessings and yet they, mostly, have turned their back on the “eternally blessed God,” Jesus Christ.

It is because of this rejection that Paul writes these chapters. His overarching concern is to vindicate God’s dealing with His chosen people, who had such great promises but let them slip from their grasp through unbelief.

Yet, God is still a just God, righteous in all His ways, and is proven to be just even in His treatment of His beloved Israel.

Paul asserts that God’s word has not failed. What word? He must be referring to the word of promise, given to Abraham in Gen. 12:3, that “all

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...



An occasion for grief

Christianity is supposed to be full of joy and happiness, isn’t it? How is that Paul can say he has great sorrow and continual grief in his heart? Reconcile Paul’s statement here with his admonitions to “rejoice” found in other places (cf. Phil. 3:1; 4:4, etc.).

Read Exodus 32:31–32. What similarities do you find between Moses and Paul?

Consider how deeply Paul must have grieved for his fellow Jews to cause him to make the remarkable statement that he would be willing to be cut off from Christ if it would save Israel. Then ask yourself how much you grieve over those who are lost, even of your own family.

nations would be blessed” through his offspring. This promise was repeated on several occasions and finally realized in the birth of Isaac.

The word of God was fulfilled, just as God intended—Abraham’s seed produced a great nation but, more importantly, a great blessing for *all* nations. Therefore, there is a “new” Israel (cf. Gal. 6:16). This “new Israel” is the “nation” that comes from the promise. It is no longer the flesh that makes one a descendant of Abraham, but “children of the promise are counted as offspring” (v. 8).

Paul anticipates another question: is God unjust because He chose one nation (represented by Jacob) over other nations (represented by Esau)? It is important to remember that Paul is not discussing the personal salvation of Jacob and Esau here. Paul is estab-

Romans 9:1-33, cont'd

lishing God's sovereignty, before proceeding to show why most of Israel has rejected Christ, and why the gospel has been embraced by the Gentiles.

The principle is stated thus: God is in control and has always been in control (v. 16). He shows "mercy to whomever He will" (v. 15) and others He "hardens" (v. 18). But God does nothing arbitrarily; there is purpose behind all that God does. Pharaoh is an apt illustration of the way God's purpose is carried out. He was "elect" (chosen) for a purpose that "God's name might be declared in all the earth" (v. 17). Paul indicates that this is why Pharaoh was given power ("raised up").

But God does not "harden" a man's heart against that man's will. God took Pharaoh as He found him—an unbeliever opposed to God (see Ex. 5:2)—and used him to carry out His purpose. God has never hardened the heart of a believer nor has He ever saved an unbeliever, though He has often used them to carry out His designs (cf. Isa. 45:1, regarding His use of Cyrus, the Persian king who conquered Babylon and allowed the children of Israel to return to their homeland).

But someone may raise the argument that everyone is under God's immediate control and the way a man acts is merely an extension of God's sovereign purpose in that man (cf. v. 19). Paul answers this first by pointing out that the creature has no right to question the creator (v. 20). Besides, God does not make a man (or nation) good or bad, but some become "vessels for honor," some, "vessels for dishonor" (v. 21), depending upon their response to God's call (see chapter 10). "Vessels of honor" include both the remnant (faithful Jews) and "people who were not my people" (Gentiles)—in other words, all those "whom He called" (vv. 24-29; recall 8:28-30; II Thess. 2:14). Others have chosen not to call on God and God "endured them" in or-

der to make the "riches of His glory known" to those who would obey (v. 22-23). But God desires that all men be saved (2 Pet. 3:9) and has never done anything (nor "elected" anyone) with the purpose of obstructing His salvation.

"What shall we say then?" (v. 30). With those familiar words (used only in Romans), Paul summarizes his first line of argument concerning the "Jewish problem": that "Gentiles have attained to righteousness" (justification), by their faith, even though they were not "pursuing" God's justification (v. 31). But the Jews have failed to "attain to righteousness" because they insisted on pursuing justification through the law (v. 32). The Jews had the Law and took great pride in it. But they missed Christ (see John 5:39) and therefore, missed God's righteousness. Paul shows that the only means of righteousness is through keeping of law or faith. In their pursuit of righteousness through law, the Jews "stumbled over the stumbling stone," (v. 32) which is Jesus.

Here is the crux of the problem. One cannot claim to be justified by law and faith in Christ at the same time. Before a person can successfully come to Christ and rely on Him, he must first realize his dire condition before God. The gospels paint the picture well—the Jews opposed Jesus at every turn, because they had established a righteousness (a means of justification) of their own and Jesus challenged that "righteousness" as something not from God but from the precepts of men (cf. Mt. 15:1-20). They never could come to say with Isaiah, "all our righteousness' are as filthy rags" (64:6). Instead, they blasphemed God and His law by claiming they were "keepers of the law" while disbelieving in Him to which the law pointed (cf. Jn. 5:39-40; 7:19).

But Paul ends this section on a positive note, saying that all those "who believe on Christ will not be put to shame," a quote from

Isaiah 28:16. The original statement is interesting in comparison to Paul's use of it, because it says "whoever believes will not act hastily." The idea in the Isaiah passage is that those who believe shall enjoy the "poise" that comes with faith in God when God comes to judge His people, which is what Isaiah is prophesying about. It has the same sense in Romans: those who are living by faith (see 1:17) will not be ashamed (they can "keep their poise") when they stand before God at the judgment. In other words, "there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus" (8:1).

Questions on chapter 9

1. Comment on Paul's surprising statement that he "could wish" himself "accursed and cut off from Christ" if it would mean salvation for the Jews. How could he make such a statement?
2. Name and describe the privileges that Israel enjoyed. What's the point?
3. What is the significance of pointing out that Christ came from Israel?
4. V. 5 – is it "Christ... who is over all, God blessed forever" (NAS) or "Christ who is God over all" (ESV).
5. How is it that "Israel" can refer to something other than physical Israel? Find some other passages that make the same point and explain the significance of it. Discuss the importance of v. 7 in this regard.
6. What "promise" is Paul referring to in vv. 6-13?

7. Did God bestow blessing upon Jacob because of Jacob's outstanding character? What's Paul point in referring to God's choice of Jacob over Esau? Why does he say, "Esau I hated"? How does this correspond with Peter's argument in Acts 10:34-35?

8. What is Paul's answer to those who might ascribe injustice to God?

9. What is the source of God's mercy – His will or our works? How does this fit the argument of chapters 1-8?

10. Paul mentions God's "use" of Pharaoh to show His power and proclaim His will. Did God create Pharaoh as an evil man? Did He make Pharaoh do anything he didn't want to do? How did His use of Pharaoh "proclaim" His name throughout the world? See Joshua 2:8-11)

11. Who were "the vessels of wrath"? Who were "vessels of mercy"? [vv. 22-23]. Who were those who "were not My people"? What is the "remnant" as used here?

12. In what sense did the Gentiles not "pursue righteousness"? What did Israel do, in contrast? What was Israel's mistake? Over what or whom did they stumble?

- 13.

Romans 10:1-21

Paul continues his heartfelt plea for Israel. His greatest dream is for Israel to come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. Feelings, however, cannot hide the reality that Israel has failed, and failed miserably. While they have a “zeal for God,” it is “not according to knowledge” (v. 2). They sought to justify themselves by works of law (their “own righteousness”) instead of “submitting” (the verb, *hupetagesan*, is used in the passive sense, “to submit”) to the righteousness which God alone can give.

Paul said that Christ is “end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Some have taken this to mean that Christ ended law as a means of righteousness, or even that Christ abolished the law. Neither is Paul’s point here. Instead, he is saying that Christ is the *goal* of the law. The Greek word *telos* can mean either “termination,” “fulfillment” or “goal.” Paul is saying that Christ was the end of the law in the sense that He brought it to completion, or brought it to its intended goal. It makes little sense to say that Christ terminated or fulfilled the law for everyone who believes since, to the extent Christ terminated or fulfilled the law, He did it for everyone, whether they believe or not. The point of this whole section is that salvation comes, not through law, but through Christ, who is the law’s intended goal and result (cf. Gal. 3:19-25; Mt. 5:17-20).

What law? Probably, law as a principle, though the Law of Moses would be included in the more general idea of “law.” Christ ended the principle of being saved by perfect performance of law. “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (3:28).

Israel insisted on living and being judged by law but Moses said that one who makes the claim to do the law must live by it — all of it. Here’s the problem: if you are going to be justified by law, all of the law must be kept (see Gal. 3:10). Living by *faith*, on the other hand, involves a completely dif-

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...



Faith comes from...

Do you ever wonder how many people actually read God’s word — ever? I suppose one of the most common statements at judgment will be “I didn’t know. . .” Do you believe God will save someone who makes that argument? Isn’t the word of God readily available to everyone?

But closer to home, how can our faith be strong if we do not read God’s word? If faith comes from hearing God’s word for the Jew, then it comes from hearing God’s word for everyone. We cannot expect to have faith unless we are wholly devoted to the study of God’s word. Ask yourself an important question: Is it the gospel to which you have responded? Or something else?

ferent disposition. The faithful are those who know that the work has been accomplished. Jesus has descended from heaven and has risen (ascended). As Moses said in Deuteronomy 30, there is nothing too difficult or hard to bear. God has done the hard part, all that’s left is for us to believe and confess (v. 9, 10) and call on the name of the Lord (v. 13). Those who do so, whether Jew or Gentile (v. 12), “will not be put to shame” (v. 11).

Only those who believe will call on the name of the Lord, which involves implicit trust and complete submission to God, and only those who “call on Him” will be saved. But if one does not hear the proclamation, he cannot have the kind of faith that saves, because “faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of God” (v. 17). So, God sent many preachers over the years to herald the “glad

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tidings”(v. 15; cf. Heb. 1:1). He sent prophets, apostles, evangelists, teachers and preachers to tell the story.

Yet, just as Isaiah had prophesied (v. 16; cf. Isa. 53:1), not everyone has “obeyed the gospel” (notice, he doesn’t say “believed”; some would argue that there is nothing to be “obeyed” in the gospel, that it is based on “faith alone,” a concept foreign to the scriptures).

Paul foresees some objections: Can Israel claim she has not heard (v. 18)? No, Paul says, for the sound of the preachers “has gone out to all the earth” (quoting Psalm 19:4, the same Psalm that says that “the heavens declare the glory of

God and the firmament His handiwork”). Maybe they didn’t understand (“know”); maybe the message wasn’t clear enough—is that possible (v. 19)? No! If it was clear to Gentiles, then surely Israel, who had been prepared for centuries to receive the message, should understand (v. 20).

Paul sums up the problem in v. 21: Israel has proved to be a “disobedient and contrary people.” It is for that reason alone that they have been lost. God has made every provision for their salvation but they have turned their back on God’s righteousness and sought their own.

Questions on chapter 10

1. Israel had “zeal,” but that didn’t suffice. Why?
2. Paul says the Israel was “ignorant” of God’s righteousness. What does he mean? Is ignorance an excuse?
3. What was Israel’s “own righteousness” that they were seeking to establish?
4. Explain “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness...” [Hint: Paul is NOT saying that Christ ended the Old Testament law.]

5. A righteousness based on law requires what?

6. What is the difference in a righteousness based on faith and a righteousness based on law? Explain how Paul makes the argument in vv. 5-11. Why does he focus on belief and confession instead of repentance and baptism? Does v. 11 teach that baptism is not necessary? Why or why not?

7. Describe the basic problem of the Jews in coming to faith in Christ. What is “confession” in this context? See v. 16ff. Also see v. 21.

8. What would you say to person who said, “I’ve never heard the gospel”? Why does Paul say an Israelite cannot logically make that argument? Why is one who “works” owed a debt of wages?

9. Why does Paul use so much Old Testament scripture in this section? [For extra study, explore HOW he uses the scriptures to make his point].

10. In what sense did the Gentiles find God though they did not “seek” him (v. 20)?

Notes

Romans 11:1-36

Israel, for the most part, had rejected salvation through Christ. Does that mean everyone in Israel is summarily cast out? Paul points out that he is an Israelite (v. 1), proof that God's has not forgotten Israel. The gospel, after all, is to the "Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16).

There have always been a few faithful men and women in the nation of Israel (the *remnant*), sometimes feeling very alone. Elijah felt this way and yet God assured him that he had "7,000 men who had not bowed the knee to Baal" (v. 3-4). At the time Paul wrote his letter there were many faithful Christians who were Israelites, a "remnant according to God's gracious choice" (v. 5, NASB), who wondered about what God had in store for them. Paul emphasizes that this "election" was not based upon the "good works" of those who were chosen, but was based upon God's grace in providing a way for all people to be saved (v. 6).

But those in Israel who had stubbornly refused the gospel call, choosing to seek God's righteousness in other quarters, had not obtained what they were seeking (v. 7). They were "hardened." Sanday and Headlam point out that "they have not failed because they have been hardened but have been hardened because they failed." The word "hardened" comes from a medical term which refers to a hard substance growing where bones have been fractured, or of a stone in the bladder. It came to be applied metaphorically to the hardening of the heart (see Mk. 6:52; 2 Cor. 3:14). Sometimes it refers to an action on the part of God, sometimes to something one does to himself. In any case, it is never unconditional and final. One who is hardened may repent and enjoy God's blessings in the end.

In vv. 8-10, Paul combines harsh statements from Dt. 29:4, Isaiah 29:10 and Psalm 69 to make the point that Israel's willful blindness was killing them spiritually. It is like a drunkard who kills a person and then claims he didn't know what he

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...



Rejecting the mob mentality

Most of the Israelites rejected Jesus. That was the crowd's choice, the "conventional wisdom" of the day, and few chose to buck the tide. And so they were lost.

It is healthy to remember that the faithful have always been few and far between, that the road to life is a narrow one (Mt. 7:13-14). Most people have a mob mentality, and think there is some inherent virtue in big numbers. But, usually, a "religious crowd" is more of an indication of failure than success. The Bible validates the point: where the truth is taught, there are few who can accept it. Paul says, however, that God always takes notice of those who are with Him. And he reminds us that there are others who are staying the course, just as there was in Elijah's day.

The disease of conceit

Paul is telling the Gentiles that they have been "grafted in" by God's grace and are now able to partake of the salvation offered first to Israel. He warns them, however, not to be conceited about their position, but instead they ought to "fear." Why?

Many teachers in the Calvinistic tradition try to make Paul say that salvation is unconditional for the "elect." What does verse 22 say to you about that? Will God save you regardless of what you do with your life?

How might we, in Christ's body, be guilty of being "conceited"?

Romans 11:1-36, cont'd

was doing. But he is responsible for getting into such a state of “stupor.” “It is clear that Paul sees catastrophe as inevitable for unbelieving Jews as they continue to reject the gospel” (Morris, page 405).

Romans 11:25-26 is notoriously difficult to interpret. Many have built a doctrine of the final salvation of physical Israel on these verses, but the position makes little sense when considered in light of Paul’s argument in the rest of Romans. Paul’s point is clear: both Jews and Gentiles, if they are to be saved, will be justified by an obedient faith (6:17; 10:16).

The interpretation of this passage turns largely on how we interpret “Israel.” Most commentators think it means physical Israel, since Paul is discussing Gentiles and Jews in this chapter and even refers to himself as an “Israelite” (11:1). However, at the beginning of this section, Paul said that, “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (9:6). In 2:29, he said “a (true) Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not the letter.” In other letters Paul denies that there is any spiritual distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Gal. 3:28), arguing that Christ has broken down the dividing wall between them (Eph. 2:14). It seems quite inconsistent for Paul to say now that someday all (physical) Israel will be saved.

There are difficulties here but Paul is teaching a consistent doctrine throughout: that whoever is saved is saved by the grace of God, and only those who exhibit saving faith will be justified, whether Jew or Greek. In the end, all “Israel” will be saved, “Israel” referring to the true children of God under the new covenant (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:3; Heb. 8:8-13).

What does this have to do with Paul’s argument? Jews are to view themselves, not as a separate privileged class apart from Gentiles, nor as those who have been unconditionally “rejected” (11:1), but as members of the com-

munity of Christ. Paul, after explaining why Jews have failed to be accepted, explains that the promise made to Abraham that “all nations would be blessed” applies to Israelites as well because they too can participate in the blessings which will be shown to the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). That promise is as irrevocable as the calling of God (v. 29). “Irrevocable” does not mean unconditional but simply means that God will not take it back. The promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ and the calling of the gospel goes out unfettered to all people, Jew and Gentile alike (2 Thess. 2:14; cf. Col. 1:23; Isa. 55:11).

While Israel did stumble, in that most of the nation rejected Christ, they did not “stumble to fall” (v. 11), which means that she has not been unconditionally rejected. Paul says that Israel’s “fall” has proven to be “riches for the world” (v. 12) in that Gentiles have been saved. The salvation of the Gentiles, in God’s providence, was designed to gain the attention of the Jews, to make them “jealous” (v. 11), hopefully for the same kind of salvation.

Paul argues that if Israel’s failure has brought good to some, much more good will come from their fulness (v. 12). The meaning of “fulness” is not easy to determine. It probably means the fulfillment of God’s will, which is for all men (including Jews) to be saved. If they would “come in,” it would be God’s will. Paul has proved that both Jews and Gentiles sinned (1:18-3:20). Now he shows that they both can be saved.

Paul’s ministry was to the Gentiles and he hoped, by “magnifying” their acceptance of the gospel, to provoke some in Israel to accept it (vv. 13-14). Think of the impact when a Jew believes in Christ as his Savior! That is Paul’s point (v. 15).

Paul shows that Israel is still a holy (“set apart”) nation. Remember that Paul is writing



FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...

Romans 11:1-36, cont'd

before the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel was still intact, though under heavy Roman rule.

He also has a message here for the Gentiles (v. 13); he wants them to show a proper respect for Israel. He says if the “root is holy so are the branches” (v. 16). That is, if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the “root”) are holy, then the branches (the rest of Israel) share in that holiness. “Some of the branches were broken off” (i.e., some individuals did not follow in the steps of faith which the “root” had established) and the Gentiles (the “wild olive tree”) were “grafted in among them.” The Gentiles, though never “God’s chosen people,” were able to “partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree.”

But Paul warns the Gentiles “not to be arrogant against the branches,” (v. 18) remembering that they owe their salvation to the “root” which still supports them (cf. Jn. 4:22). The Gentiles stand on their faith and the Jews have fallen because of unbelief. What happened to the “natural branches” can happen as well to the “wild olive tree.” The Jews are welcome back into the “olive tree” if they will only believe the gospel is still open to them v. 22-23.

If we get too dogmatic in our view of the preceding passages, Paul’s words here will certainly convict us. God’s reasoning is too deep for us (cf. Isa. 55:8-9) and His ways are past finding out. Our concern must first be our obedience to God, not trying to figure Him out. Those who desire to do God’s will are the ones who are most likely to understand it (cf. Jn. 7:17).

Note that Paul’s doxology (“verbal praise to the glory of God”) is prompted, not by what we know of God (as in Psalm 19:1, for example), but by what we do not know. Those who love God praise Him both for what they see that He has done (creation) and for what they find unfathomable about Him. Paul has been dealing with a problem and has, through inspiration, explained it as well as it can be explained in

Check your baggage!

This is a difficult section of scripture. Terms like “partial hardening,” “the fullness of the Gentiles” and “all Israel will be saved” challenge our thinking. It is a good place to check up on our Bible interpretation skills. There are a couple of principles which we must apply here, or be hopelessly confused. First, be careful not to read anything into the passage – check your “baggage” (presuppositions) before coming to this, or any other text. Many scholars see physical Israel in this passage because they have *already decided* that Christ is going to restore the physical nation. Secondly, make certain that your interpretation is consistent with the rest of scripture. One of the first rules of Bible study is to let scripture explain scripture. When that rule is applied here, it is hard to see how Paul could be saying that all of the physical nation of Israel will be saved. That makes no sense, in the context of Paul’s argument that all are saved through Christ.

Use this passage to double check your Bible study habits.

So...how’s your faith?

Words like these challenge our human pride. We want all the answers and a succinct solution to every problem. But even the apostle knew that we cannot possibly know all the mind of God because His wisdom is far too deep for us (Psalm 139:6).

This is really a very good test for us. Eventually, everything comes down to faith in God, faith here meaning implicit trust even in the absence of explicit knowledge. It’s like turning on a light switch even though we have no idea of how electrical currents work. Likewise, we don’t have to “know everything” before we believe it. If we do, then we will never really submit to God, because God has not chosen to reveal everything. *So, it all comes down to faith.* How’s your faith?

Romans 11:1-36, cont'd

words. Still, the solution to the problem is ultimately in God's hands.

Again, Paul quotes Isaiah (v. 34), this time chapter 40, verse 13, a section which extols the "incomparable greatness of Yahweh" (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 7, Isaiah). It recalls Romans 9, where Paul reminds his readers that they are clay in the potter's hand and have no right to ask God, "why have you formed me thus?" (9:20). God made the same argument to Job, speaking out of the whirlwind (chapters 38-41), and saying, "where were you when I laid the foundation of the

earth?" Paul quotes Job 41:11, making the point that we have nothing to give God—He owns it all anyway (cf. Psa. 50:10-12; I Chron. 29:14). And what God does give us is truly a gift. No one can make a claim on God.

In v. 36, Paul praises God with a tri-prepositional expression. Moffat translates it thus: "all comes from Him, all lives by Him, all ends in Him." Morris says, "Paul is speaking of God as the Originator, the Sustainer and the Goal of all creation" (page 429). Paul ascribes to Him "all the glory forever"—supreme glory belongs to God, the Almighty. Amen!

Questions on Chapter 11

1. What arguments does Paul make in 11:1-10 to show that God has not rejected Israel?
2. The "remnant" is mentioned again. What is it? Why is it important in Paul's argument?
3. Paul mentions grace and works again in this chapter (v. 6). Explain Paul's argument, specifically his statement: "otherwise grace would no longer be grace."
4. Who is the "elect" in v. 7?

Questions

5. Do vv. 8-10 suggest that God prevented Israel from coming to a knowledge of the truth? If not, what is the meaning? Cf. Mt. 13:10-17.

6. Vv. 11-12 – how does the Gentiles' salvation make Israel "jealous"? Cf. v. 14. How does Israel's trespass result in "riches for the world" and their "failure" "riches for the Gentiles"? What does Paul mean by their "full inclusion" (ESV) or "fullness" (NAS)?

7. What is Paul aiming to accomplish, according to 11:13-16? What's the point of his analogy about the dough and lump?

8. Describe the analogy of the olive tree and what it means from both a Gentile and Jewish perspective.

9. What was "holy" about the nation of Israel at the time Paul wrote the letter?

10. Paul reasserts that the Israelites were "broken off" due to what? Why must the Gentiles be careful to remember why the Israelites were lost?

11. 11:22 states clearly that God is both a God of mercy and a God of wrath. Why do people miss this point?

12. Is this section applicable at all today? Or was it only applicable while Israel still existed as God's chosen nation?

13. Who might tend to be "wise in their own conceits"? (v. 25). What is a "mystery" as used in the New Testament?

14. Vv. 25-26 – what is the "partial hardening"? What is the "fullness of the Gentiles"? How will "all Israel be saved"?

15. Explain v. 29. What passage(s) does v. 32 remind you of? In what sense have Gentiles received mercy because of "their [Jews'] disobedience"?

16. When things are difficult to explain, what is the ultimate answer? Is that the meaning of vv. 33-36, or is Paul saying something else?

Romans 12-15

Living the Transformed Life

Doctrine comes before duty. Paul often bases his practical exhortation on the doctrine that he has expounded earlier in the letter. We observe this especially in Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and I and II Thessalonians. Romans is no different although his “doctrinal” section is much longer than in the other letters.

Paul believes that an understanding of theology is a prerequisite to living right. Specifically in Romans, Christian living is a product of the great “mercies of God” (12:1). Stated another way, Paul says that the Christian is motivated by what God has done on his behalf to live like God wants him to live. His non-conformity to the world and his transformation are a result of an understanding and appreciation for the love of God expressed in Christ.



Paul speaks of the obedience of faith in both the first and last chapters of Romans (1:5 and 16:26). In the first part of Romans, develops the “faith” component – we live by faith (1:17) and God’s righteousness (His plan to save man) is a righteousness “by faith” (3:21, etc.). In the second section, Paul tells us that “faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God” (10:17).

In this section, Paul develops the “obedience” component of “the obedience of faith.” Faith is not mere belief (see James 2:19), but motivates us to act in specific ways that show that our faith is real.

Sadly, there are many who seek to be “justified” but refuse to be transformed. But God requires both. There is no justification without transformation (or vice-versa, for that matter). This section is rich in teaching about what the “transformed” person looks like. Our attention to it will reward us with a fresh appreciation for what it means to please God.

Notes

Romans 12:1-21

“Therefore” (v. 1) refers back to the whole letter. Paul is simply saying that conduct must follow doctrine: “as you are justified by Christ and put in a new relation to God, I exhort you to live in accordance with that relation” (Sanday and Headlam, p. 351).

Paul says that we are to “present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (12:1, ESV) and that we are to do it “by the mercies of God.” “By the mercies of God” can refer to either motivation or ability. It probably implies the former, that the mercy of God is the ground or motivation for our good conduct. When Paul uses the term “bodies,” he may be implying that there is nothing wrong with the physical body and that we can surely serve God in it. In I Cor. 6:15-20, Paul demonstrates a high view of the body in its service to God. But it is probably better, here, to understand “bodies” as referring to the whole person (NEB: “your very selves”) which we are to give as a living sacrifice, as compared to the dead sacrifices of the Old Testament, and holy (set apart for service; dedicated) and acceptable to God (the Greek word often means “pleasing to God,” and that is the sense here). We present our bodies, but we do it on God’s terms, not our own. Our aim is to please Him.

Giving our bodies in such a way is “reasonable service” (NKJV), or our “spiritual worship” (ESV). It is difficult to determine which translation is best, but the thought is clear: we glorify (or worship) God through our chosen lifestyle of service to Him. In v. 2, Paul goes on to point out that we are to stop being conformed to this world or “age” (Phillips: “do not let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold”) and “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...



This world — a tottering stage

Think about the term “this world” (v. 1) for a moment. In the Greek, it means “age”; for us, it means our generation. Franz J. Leenhardt said, “what madness it is to join this puppet show which is displayed on a tottering stage.”

How do you think of the “world”? List some of the attributes and characteristics of “this present age.”

Use your gifts, and accept the gifts of others

There’s always a tendency in any group to become critical of others in the group. In the church, there is temptation to believe that everyone ought to be doing everything (although we are good at exempting ourselves from doing those things we find some excuse not to do). Paul makes it clear that members are given different gifts – that includes the elders, deacons and preacher, as well. They should not be expected to do everything, whether or not they have the talent. Notice that Paul makes some very interesting distinctions here. For example, he talks of those who “show mercy” and those who “give.” Obviously, we are all to “give” and “show mercy.” But some have the ability, opportunity and resources to do special work for those in need and they should do so.

One of the problems in any church is that those who have the gifts refuse to use them. Are you fully utilizing your gifts? There is much to apply in this section of Romans. Most of the admonitions have to do with our dealings with other people and are all “doable.” The most difficult, though, may be Paul’s directions concerning revenge. The revenge motive is a common plot in novels, TV and movie scripts, and even some songs. We find ourselves rooting for the victim and cheer when he “gets even.”

When we are injured in some way, it is all we can do to keep from hurting in return and it is especially hard if we have ample opportunity. But Paul tells us to overcome evil with good, and certainly that presents a challenge, doesn’t it?

Think about the last time you were hurt – what did you do? What did you *want* to do?

Romans 12:1-21, cont'd

To be *conformed* means to fit a pattern; to be *transformed* means to undergo a total change, like caterpillar to butterfly, from the inside out. This transforming comes about by a change in the mind. It is not subjectivism or emotionalism that God desires, but a rational change of the thoughts, a deeply intelligent approach to life, a character shaped by the Holy Spirit driven word of God (cf. Titus 3:5, “renewal of the Holy Spirit”).

The next statement tells us the purpose or result of this transformation. It leads to discernment of the will of God and a setting to the task of getting it done. We are able, through the renewing of our minds, to determine what is good, what is acceptable and what is perfect i.e., the will of God. That same renewal helps us achieve what we’ve determined to be His will.

Paul is concerned not only with the Romans’ attitude toward God but toward each other. After all, our treatment of each other reflects our real disposition toward God. If one or another member thinks more highly of himself than he ought to, then unity in the body of Christ becomes tenuous. So Paul enjoins humility (cf. Phil. 2:3-4), especially as it relates to the way each member functions in the local congregation (vv. 4-8).

Verses 4-8 are reminiscent of I Cor. 12:12ff. where Paul also uses the analogy of the human body to describe the church. Each member has a function, based on the “measure of faith” (v. 3) given him. The “measure” does not refer to a “quantity” of faith but to a measuring instrument or standard. Cranfield, who did some detailed work on this passage, decided it means “a standard (by which to measure himself) namely (his) Christian faith” (*New Testament Studies*, VIII [1961-62], page 345-51). We are to use the standard of the faith to measure our gifts, humbly

realizing that everything comes from God. (cf. Eph. 4:7ff.).

As our physical body is made up of many members, each with a different function and yet working toward the same goal, thus should the church work together as “one body in Christ” (vv. 4-5). Paul says that we are members of one body, but also that we are “members of *one another*” (v. 5). Each member is to exercise his different gift (a product of God’s grace v. 6). The prophet is to prophecy according to “the proportion of his faith,” meaning that he is to prophecy in a way that corresponds to *the* faith (note that faith has the article here). The prophet, in the first century church, was not to go beyond what he was given or he would not be prophesying from “faith.”

Other gifts follow: ministry or “serving” (ESV). The Greek word is *diakonia*, meaning lowly service of any kind; those who teach should get to teaching; those who exhort, which may mean either encouraging or consoling, should get on with their exhorting; those who give, do it with liberality (Paul is probably talking about those who come to the aid of the poor, a common occurrence in the early church); those who lead, do it with diligence (a sense of urgency); and those who show mercy, do it, not with a grim determination to get through it, but with cheerfulness make it a joy and a delight to help those who need your help, whether poor and indigent or sick and suffering.

From the discussion of humility toward each other and the proper use of gifts in the body, Paul turns to various admonitions concerning our treatment of each other. He is not now discussing different gifts that are exercised by different members, but virtues that all members are to practice. He begins with an exhortation that is common enough: *Love each other!* He

Romans 12:1-21, cont'd

tells us to “let love be without hypocrisy” (cf. I Pet. 1:22). Love (*agape*), the central principle of the new covenant (cf. 13:8ff; I Cor. 13; Jn. 13:34-35), must be practiced in all sincerity. This *agape* will, in turn, hate every evil thing—since evil can never benefit the beloved—and will cling to all that is good (as defined by God).

Another kind of love (Gk. *philadelphia*), brotherly love, is to characterize the community as well. This concept was unique to Christians in the first century: “there are no examples of this more general use of *philadelphia* outside Christian writings” (TDNT, I, Pg. 146). The community is a “family” and family members are “devoted to one another” (v. 10). Therefore, we “outdo one another in showing honor” (ESV). In other words, we will esteem others better than ourselves and seek their good.

Paul follows with a series of mostly self-explanatory admonitions. The essence of his directions are that we are to be energetic in serving the Lord and each other, in both action and attitude. We are to keep our minds focused on the goal, even in the face of tribulation. We are not only to pray, but be “devoted to prayer” (v. 12). We are to be others-oriented, even blessing those who persecute us (cf. Mt. 5:10-12).

All in all, we are “to be of the same mind toward one another,” humble in our own estimation of ourselves (v. 16; cf. v. 3). We are never to take our own vengeance, never “repay evil for evil” to anyone, but leave it to God (v. 17-21). Our attitude is to seek peace with all and do our best to overcome evil with good (v. 18, 21).

Questions

1. In 12:1-2, Paul is describing both an attitude and a lifestyle. What are they? What is the motive for these?
2. What is “transformation”? Why is “mercies” in the plural? What is Paul referring to?
3. Paul has discussed the use of the body in other passages in Romans. Where and what did he say about it?

4. What is “spiritual worship” (ESV) or “reasonable service” (other versions)? How do we discern the will of God?

5. V. 3 – what is “sober judgment”? And what is the “measure of faith” that God assigns to each one?

6. In what other letter does Paul use the analogy of the body to describe the use of our abilities (or spiritual gifts, in the first century church)?

7. Name the gifts Paul mentions in 12:6-8 and a short description of each one. Do they all exist today?

8. Think about how we should function together, in the use of our gifts. What are some of the potential problems that can affect a local church in this area?

9. Paul gives several brief instructions in 9-13. List and describe each.

10. How are we to treat those who do harm to us? Why? What are we absolutely forbidden to do?

Romans 13:1-14

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...

It seems natural enough for Paul to follow his prohibition of personal revenge with a discussion of subjection to the governing authorities (v. 1), though it is not certain whether Paul intended a connection. In any case, the teaching here is similar to that of Jesus in Mark 12:17 (“Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”) and Peter (I Pet. 2:13-17). Christians are to be law-abiding citizens, no matter how evil or corrupt the government because, after all, it is God who raises up and brings down kings (Dan. 2:21).

“There is no authority except from God” (v. 1). This does not imply that God condones everything that a government does—hardly! It is no less a villain than Nero who is at the helm as Paul writes this. But it establishes the truth that even a Nero rules only at the discretion of the King of the universe and that even a government headed by Nero generally punishes evil and rewards good (v. 3), if only to keep the general order. Those who oppose the government of which they are a part, then, are opposing “the ordinance of God” and “will receive condemnation” (v. 2).

The government’s role is to administer law and order and, in serving this function, is a “minister of God.” We are not to personally avenge ourselves, but the government is ordained by God as “an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (v. 4, ESV). Paul is speaking to the Romans here, telling them that if they do evil they have reason to be afraid of the wrath of the government. But then he reminds them that they are not to be in subjection only because they fear the wrath, “but also for conscience’ sake” (v. 5).

There are two sides to this qualification of obey “for the sake of conscience”: Christians don’t obey the government just because they want to avoid the dangers inherent in a “life of crime.” Christians do the right thing *because it is the right thing to do*. Conscience is also a limiting factor. We cannot obey the government when it asks us to do something that violates our conscience (cf. 14:23). Such would be the case in the near future for these Romans under Nero.

Paul concludes his argument by telling the Romans to render to the government what is due them, whether “taxes, custom, fear or honor” (v. 7). As Paul told Timothy, we are even to pray for all who are in authority (I Tim. 2:1-2) and Peter told his readers, “honor the king” (I Pet. 2:17).

Our dual citizenship

For the Romans, there were some difficult days ahead and their difficulties would be authored by the government of Rome. Circumstances would be such that they would have to make some choices about whether they should obey the government or not. Of course, they would have to refuse when the government’s demands conflicted with those of Christ.

We in the United States, have not had to make such choices because our constitution guarantees our right to religious freedom. We should thank God that we live in such a country as this and work hard to maintain the status quo. But also, we must be careful to obey all of Paul’s instructions in this letter and submit to the governing authorities in all things that do not conflict with our faith. And yes, that includes the paying of taxes!

Love fulfills law

In 3:31, Paul had said that our faith “establishes” law. In other words, in religious matters, living by faith raises the law to the level it deserves in our minds; we take cognizance of it, realizing it is from God. We also realize our inability to keep it, and rely on (trust in, have faith in) God for our strength.

But Christians also “establish” law by loving others. Love fulfills law in that the morals found there are all summed up in our commitment to the best interests of others.

Romans 13:1-14, cont'd

We owe the government our allegiance because the governments are ordained of God for a purpose. But now Paul says to owe no one anything except the duty to love them. This is an on-going “debt” we owe each other because to love our neighbor is to fulfill the law (v. 8). To the question, “who is my neighbor,” we need only turn to the words of Jesus in answer to the same question (Lk. 10:29-37). Our “neighbor” is anyone to whom we can show *agape* by committing, or extending ourselves to them, for their own good.

In loving our neighbor, we “fulfill the law” (8, 10). In one sense, this means that all of those provisions of the law that are designed to protect our fellow man from harm (“you shall not commit adultery... murder... steal... covet” v. 9) are not necessary if we practice *agape* (cf. I Tim. 1:5-11, where Paul says the law is not made for the righteous person but for the lawless person).

So love, which never wrongs a neighbor, fulfills the purpose of the law or, stated another way, brings the law to its intended result. Therefore, Jesus said love is the “new commandment” (John 13:34). That doesn’t mean that the commandment is new in time (Lv. 19:18 teaches love for our neighbor), but that it is new in *quality*. Jesus restored and renewed the command to love and gave it new meaning. It is by this love that the world will know that we are disciples (Jn. 13:34-35).

We are to extend love to everyone, even our enemies, according to Jesus in Mt. 5:43-48. It is not based upon feelings of love, which cause us to act in the person’s interest only when we like them (i.e., our motives can be completely selfish when we act on a person’s behalf only when we feel like it). But *agape* is a reasoned choice based not on the lovability of a person but upon our commitment to him, which arises out of and is motivated by our prior love for God.

In a graphic day/night analogy, Paul urges his readers to wake up because “salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed”

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...



Making provision for the flesh

One time a little boy disobeyed his father and went down to the river. The father found him and the little boy quickly pleaded that he had no intention of going into the water. The father, observing the top of his swimming trunks appearing from underneath his trousers, asked him why he brought them, if he had no intention of going swimming. The boy replied, “Oh, I just put them on in case I got tempted!”

We cannot hope to avoid the fire associated with “sins of the night” as long as we play near the flame, making “provision for the flesh.” People who drink, even just a “little bit,” run the risk of getting drunk and violating clear Bible teaching against drunkenness. Many people put themselves into compromising situations and then wonder what happened when they find themselves overcome with temptation. The key to success is to “walk as children of light” and “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:8, 11).

(13:11, ESV). There must be a sense of urgency about the Christian life. Time is of the essence; there is no place for apathy or indifference. Today is the day of salvation (cf. Heb. 3:13). This must be the daily mind-set of the Christian.

The phrase “salvation is nearer” is subject to a number of possible interpretations but probably the simplest is best: each day *each hour!* brings us closer to the day when we will be finally redeemed from this “earthly tent,” a day we eagerly await in anticipation and hope (see 8:22-25; cf. Phil. 3:20). “The night is almost gone” probably refers to the passing of this world of darkness and the powers that rule it (cf. Eph. 5:11; 6:12). John said “this darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining” (I Jn. 2:8). The day will come when we will be spared further temptation; but for now, we

still live in the world, which is under the power of the evil one (I Jn. 5:19).

Paul says, then, that we should behave like those who are of the day and cast off the works of darkness. We are to put on the armor of light (v. 12) and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (v. 14).

There are certain practices of those who are “of the night” (cf. I Thess. 5:1-11) that Paul specifically forbids, arranging them in a series of three pairs. “Carousing” (“a joyous meal or banqueting”; used only in a bad sense, “excessive feasting” Bauer. We call this “partying”) and drunkenness; licentiousness (unlawful sexual intercourse) and “lewdness” (“unrestrained lust” Morris); “strife and envy,” both pointing to a self-willed determination to have one’s own way, even to depriving another (or wishing to deprive him) of what he has.

Instead of dabbling in these deeds of darkness, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul says. “Christ is put on first at baptism (6:3; Gal. 3:27) but we must continually renew that life with which we have been clothed (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:12)” (Sanday and Headlam, page 379).

Questions on 13:1-14

1. At least one Jew is reported to have said, “We have long since decided not to serve Romans or any other man, but God alone” (Bell. Jud. VII vii 6). What would you say to him?
2. What is the origin of the institution of civil government?
3. In what way is civil government “God’s servant for your good”? What is Paul specifically referring to?
4. We’re to be subject to the government “for conscience sake” (v. 5). Explain.

5. Is Paul talking about monetary debt in v. 8? If not, what?

6. Explain how love fulfills the law and provide some other New Testament passages that say something similar.

7. What is Paul trying to get his readers to do or think in vv. 11-14?

8. In v. 11, what is the “time” that we “know”? In what way are we “asleep”?

9. What are the “works of darkness” and what is the “armor of light”? What specific things does Paul mention under “works of darkness”?

10. How does Paul use the term “flesh” in Romans? How might we make provision for it?

Romans 14:1–5:7

In this famous chapter, Paul deals primarily with the proper attitude toward those who are “weak in faith.” We must be cautious in applying the principles here, or hopeless confusion will occur.

First, we need to properly identify those who are “weak in faith” (v. 1). Sanday and Headlam are helpful here: “Weakness in faith means an inadequate grasp of the great principle of salvation by faith in Christ; the consequence of which will be an anxious desire to make this salvation more certain by the scrupulous fulfillment of formal rules” (p. 384). These are brethren who are weak in conviction, knowledge, conscience or will.

Second, we must understand that Paul is talking about personally-held beliefs, not about issues which involve the community as a whole. This is crucial. Paul is not suggesting that the Roman church bow to every whim or be sympathetic to every hobby of every brother who comes their way. The command is to “receive,” not “indulge.” Common sense tells us that the work of the church would grind to a halt if the body had to endure endless debates on every silly little notion that men have had over the years (cf. I Tim. 1:3-4; 4:6-7; 6:3-5).

Thirdly, Paul is not talking about doctrinal issues here. He is talking about “opinions” (ESV; NASB; RSV) or “doubtful things” (NKJV). This is confirmed by the specific examples given: eating of certain foods (v. 2) and esteeming certain days above others (v. 5). In the New Covenant, neither of these issues can properly be labeled “doctrine” or “law.” They are matters of opinion.

Most likely, these are issues affecting the Roman church because of the confluence of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Apparently (and ironically), Paul refers to the Jewish brethren as “weak” because they continued to observe these scruples as if they were required for

salvation. Paul says that those who hold on to these disputable matters so tenaciously are weak in faith (v. 1). They think they are matters of spiritual life or death. The instruction is directed primarily to the strong who are told “to bear with their scruples” (15:1).

Likewise, the weak are enjoined from condemning the strong in these matters (3b). For them to hold these beliefs as a matter of conscience is fine, but they are not to prejudge those who do not share the same view. The key to the chapter is found in 14:17, “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” When we reduce the kingdom of God to squabbling about neutral matters, like food and drink, we have violated the very spirit of the kingdom.

Finally, while some of these issues were previously matters of God’s revealed law we should not assume that Paul is applying the principles of this chapter to matters which are not religiously or morally indifferent. 14:1 and 15:1 should settle the question (“opinions” and “scruples” are hardly equivalent to *matters of law*). Just because we fallible humans may have difficulty deciding which issues are indifferent and which are “law,” does not mean we can receive and “leave alone” (i.e., make no judgment about) the brother who is teaching or practicing a matter which God has spoken clearly about. Just because we do not agree which issues are indifferent (“opinions”) does not mean that God doesn’t view some issues that way. How can we possibly apply this chapter to matters of law (i.e., those matters upon which God has clearly revealed His will) when Paul says that “he who serves Christ in these things (‘opinions’) is *acceptable to God and approved by men*” (14:18)? Since “these things” are practiced by those who are “weak in faith,” they must be matters of indifference to God.

Romans 14:1—15:7, continued

The goal of all of this is found in 15:6. Paul is concerned that all of the Romans brethren (Jew and Gentile alike) “with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” They could never do so while bickering over the little personal idiosyncrasies which may well be unnecessary to salvation, but spiritually benign. Paul feels that those who are strong in faith have the greater ability to keep peace and react in ways that serve to edify instead of destroy (14:19–20).

Note that these issues are such that the strong have some control over the situation. When Paul says not to put a stumbling block in a brother’s way (v. 21), he is implying that the strong can control the matter to some extent. If a brother has a scruple against eating meat, we can easily serve him vegetables and not offend his conscience. To serve meat would be both unnecessary (it promotes no doctrine of God) and destructive: we risk destroying our brother because of food (14:20) and will be judged for it. Why? *Because it doesn’t matter!* On these issues, to his own master he stands or falls (14:4).

In all things, we must act in faith, doing nothing that violates our conscience because whatever is not from faith is sin (14:23). Nor will we do those *indifferent* things that would risk offending another’s conscience because we aim not just to please ourselves and press our rights, but to please our neighbor (15:2), just as Christ did not please Himself (15:6). Therefore, Paul concludes, receive one another, just as Christ received us, to the glory of God (15:7).

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...



The art of getting along

From a practical standpoint, this has to be one of the most important chapters in the New Testament. How to disagree without becoming disagreeable is a very real challenge in virtually every congregation. Paul gives us a number of rules to smooth the way. Make note of them and apply them whenever there is a potential dispute over an “opinion”:

1. Accept the weak, but not to pass judgment on his opinions (14:1, 3a, 22; 15:1)
2. The weak are not to judge the strong (14:3b, 10–13a).
3. Be fully convinced about what you believe (14:5b).
4. Do not become a stumbling block (14:13b, 21).
5. Pursue peace and edification (14:17, 19; 15:1–2).
6. Whatever is not of faith is sin: Don’t violate your conscience (14:23).

Questions on chapter 14

1. Define the “weak in faith.” [This is crucial to understanding this section of scripture]. Weak in what?
2. What kinds of things are we not to “quarrel over”?
3. What specific things are given as examples?
4. Are vv. 8-9 a commentary on 1 Cor. 10:31?
5. If we are doing something “by faith” we should be _____ convinced in our own mind.
6. What does Paul say about judging others in this section? What is the context? What is forbidden?
7. What about a brother who causes another to “stumble”? What charge does Paul level against such a one?

8. Why did Christ die, according to v. 9? What is the significance of the statement?

9. Paul said “nothing is unclean in itself” (v. 14). Nothing? Is that limited at all? (cf. I Cor. 10:23, “all things are lawful”).

10. What is the essence of the kingdom of God? How – at least in the context of Paul’s warnings here – can we turn it into something trivial?

11. Cf. 14:19 with 12:18. When is peace impossible? See I Cor. 11:19.

12. When might an activity be sin, even if not named as a sin in God’s word?

13. If we follow Christ’s example, how will we treat others?

Romans 15:8-33

The teaching in 14:1–15:7 would find ready application in the Roman church. Made up, as it was, of significant numbers of both Jews and Gentiles, conflict was likely to spring up from widely different backgrounds in religious training and culture. Paul urges them, therefore, to receive each other that they “may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 6). Paul is concerned with unity, desiring that the onlooking world would see Jews and Gentiles in the Roman church, with one accord glorifying the one God and Father of all (cf. Jn. 17:20–23).

But there would always be exclusivistic, elitist Jews in the first century church, who would demand that Gentiles adhere to the rudiments of Jewishness (see Acts 15; Galatians). So Paul states unequivocally, for the benefit of both Jews and Gentiles, that Jesus came to confirm the promises made to the fathers, that these promises applied to Gentiles as well as Jews, so that Gentiles might also glorify God for His mercy (vv. 8–9).

To support his argument, Paul quotes a number of OT passages: Psa. 18:49 (2 Sam. 22:50); Dt. 32:43; Psa. 117:1; Isa. 11:10. These show that it had always been God’s plan to include the Gentiles in the blessings. They too can look forward to being filled with joy and peace by the God of hope and can abound in hope by the Holy Spirit (v. 13).

Paul expresses his confidence in the Roman brethren, though he still found it necessary to write in a more “daring” (the Greek word, *tolme-ros*, means “bold, daring, audacious” [Bauer]) way on some points, in order to remind them (cf. II Pet 3:1). It is interesting that Paul says he wrote to them “boldly” because of the grace given to him (v. 15). Grace is often associated with softness instead of boldness. People expect that grace will cover up their sins. But Paul says that God’s gracious calling of him to apostleship compelled him to write and remind them so that they can continue to be full of goodness, filled with all

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...



Gentiles — yesterday & today

In the Old Testament, the Gentiles were the class of people who had no direct revelation from God. They learned about “the Holy One of Israel” primarily through God’s dealings with Israel (with a few exceptions).

Describe the plight of the sensitive Gentile in Old Testament times. What was his spiritual, emotional and intellectual position in regard to God? Did he have any hope?

Can we appreciate the fact that many people are in a similar position today? In what respects are they in a different position; i.e., what do they have that Gentiles in Old Testament times did not have? What can we do to help them?

Paul’s humility

One of the most admirable virtues of the apostle Paul was that he did not seek admiration – he directed it all toward Christ. Paul didn’t preach Paul, he preached Christ. Here, toward the end of the letter, he is careful to remind the Roman church that everything he has done has been Christ working through him (cf. Gal. 2:20). Likewise, in Phil. 4:13, when he said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” the emphasis was not upon what he could do, but upon Christ who strengthens.

I believe that the average “person in the pew” needs a frequent reminder that preachers are not to be glorified – Christ is. And preachers need to be constantly reminded that the gospel is not about them – they are not the good news – Christ is!

Romans 15:8-33, cont'd

knowledge and able to admonish one another (v. 14). He doesn't want them to fall away from Christ.

He likens his ministry to the Gentiles as the sacrifice that a priest brings to the altar, and he desires that it be unblemished, acceptable and sanctified (*set apart, dedicated, consecrated*) by the Holy Spirit who inspires him to write (v. 16). Because of what God has done in him on behalf of the Gentiles, Paul has reason to glory (or "exult") in Christ Jesus (v. 17). His ministry has been carried in the power of Christ, and so he glories, not in himself, but in Christ and only in those things that pertain to God. Paul is not seeking adulation for himself, but presumes only to speak of those things that Christ has done through him (v. 18) that has allowed him to fully preach the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum (v. 19).

Further, Paul says he has limited his mission thus far to preaching in places where others had not gone (v. 20). Paul is not talking about "jurisdiction" here, as if preachers chart out certain territory as "theirs." He is simply saying that it is his mission to preach in new places; to establish churches where there are none. His calling is to plant while others may be called to water (I Cor. 3:6-9) — they all work together for the increase of the kingdom, which God ultimately gives.

In v. 21, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15 in support of this mission. Paul preached Jesus among those who had never heard of Him, and helped them to understand the good news of the kingdom of God.

Probably referring back to v. 20, Paul says he had been hindered in getting to Rome (v. 22), though he desired very much to go (cf. 1:10-11). Now, Paul is going to Jerusalem to minister to the poor saints there, with contributions from churches in Macedonia and Achaia (see I Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-7; 9:1-15). The Gentiles, who had benefitted spiritually from the Jewish heritage, were now in a position to help them mate-

rially, and were anxious to do so (v. 27). Paul calls this material gift "fruit" from the Gentiles (v. 28) — he would put his seal on it and then attempt to go to see the Romans.

We know that Paul did get to see Rome, but not in a way that he expected. As Whiteside says, "Paul's purposes and plans were not always inspired" (page 288). Meanwhile, he urged the Roman brethren to pray for him as he had reason to expect trouble in Jerusalem among those who are disobedient (cf. Acts 20:22-24). Paul had reason to fear those in Judea, since they had tried to kill him several times before.

While he never sought trouble, neither would he be deterred from his task, knowing that his life was in the hands of God. In comparison to the trouble he would find in Judea, he looked forward to "refreshing rest" in the company of the Romans (v. 32).

A proper sense of "brotherhood"

While the Bible is clear that churches are to be autonomous (self-governing) and independent and that there is no fellowship among churches, there is still a sense of "brotherhood" that we should feel with other saints in other places. We all share the same hope in Christ Jesus and should have a special place in our hearts for all of those who have obtained a "like precious faith" (II Pet. 1:1).

When there are saints in need, wherever they are, we have a pattern that we can follow in order to help them. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia helped the saints in Jerusalem. We can help churches in other parts of the world, according to our ability and as needs present themselves. As we reflect on this passage, let's renew our eagerness to help and be always ready to share.

Questions

1. How does Paul show the Romans that the Gentiles are joint heirs of the hope of God? Why does he do this?
2. In what way was Christ a “servant to the circumcised”?
3. Think about Gentiles in the Old Testament. Can you think of some scriptures that refer to them? How about prophets? Which ones were sent to the Gentiles?
4. Does chapter 15 cast any light on chapters 9-11? If so, what?
5. How does the Holy Spirit give us power to “abound in hope”? Cf. 5:5
6. Paul pays the Romans a huge compliment in chapter 15. What does he say?
7. Paul likens himself to a priest and the Gentiles to his “offering” (v. 16). Explain.

8. How does Paul describe his primary “mission”?

9. As we saw in chapter 1, Paul had intended to visit Rome, but had been hindered. But he is still planning to come to Rome. He says, though, that he will not build “on another man’s foundation” and that his main mission is to the Gentiles. Does all of this tell us anything about the church at Rome? Who controlled Paul’s ministry?

10. What was Paul doing when he wrote the Roman letter? What “spiritual blessings” have the Gentiles enjoyed because of the Jews in Jerusalem?

11. What does Paul intend for the Romans to “strive together” for (v. 30)? Why “strive”? What was going on in Paul’s life? What two things does Paul ask the Romans to pray about on his behalf?

Romans 16:1-27

Paul begins to list a number of saints to whom he wishes to greet and to commend, beginning with “Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea” (v. 1). Morris points out that while several translations (such as the RSV) translate the Greek word *diakonon* as “deaconess,” “it is not easy to defend that translation since the word ‘deaconess’ is not found until much later” (page 528).

Phoebe was not an “office-holder” (NEB translation) but one does not need to hold an office in order to serve. It is perhaps indicative of the sharp clergy-laity distinction in the religious world today which would force an official position on Phoebe, as if only “officials” can do the work of God. Verse 2 instructs the Romans to “receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints.”

In the very personal letter from Paul to Philemon he makes a similar remark, but says “receive him (Onesimus) as you would receive me.” Paul often uses the term “in the Lord,” and it always involves that special bond and fellowship of union that we, as Christians, have with Christ (Murray, page 226). That is the spirit with which the Romans are to receive Phoebe as fellow Christians!

Next in the list is Pricilla and Aquila who Paul first met at Corinth (Acts 18:2). Paul says they “risked their own necks for his life” (v. 2). If this is recalling a one-time event, then it is unknown when it took place. It may, however, refer to their general disposition and courage in helping Paul preach the gospel.

It should be noted that there are a number of women in the list that follows, illustrating that the work of the Lord is not limited to the male of the species. While women are not to take public leadership roles in worship (1 Tim 2:11-15), they are to be put to work in all appropriate areas.

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...



The important role of women in the kingdom

Women occupy a very important place in every local church. Women have special qualities that every church desperately needs. They are able to provide emotional help and add a special touch of grace to each of our lives. Many are accomplished teachers, like Pricilla; others may have business skills or other training that they can use in serving the church. We do well when we utilize all of the talent we have in the local church, within the limitations of scripture, whether that talent is male or female. *Let's take inventory!*

Hook, line and sinker

Many good people who consider themselves Christians accept things that Paul was horrified about. They regularly submit themselves to teaching that is unlike the doctrine that was taught in the first century church. Why is this? What causes people to fall for the smooth words and flattering speech that is nothing but deceptive?

Do you think that the teachers are any more culpable than the hearers? If so, in what way? How can we guard against becoming one of the “simple” ones?

Paul has many friends in many places, even in Rome where he had never been. Many whom he greets had gone there from other places. “One wonders how he kept track of them in that day of inconvenient communications” (*Whiteside*, page 294).

Paul not only mentioned specific people that the Romans were to greet, but encouraged them to “greet each other with a holy kiss.” To-

Romans 16:1-27, cont'd

Paul interrupts his greetings with a stern message concerning those who have caused division and offenses among the brethren. Perhaps in his reflecting upon all the good brethren with whom he had had contact, he remembered that all brethren are not like-minded. Some scholars think the words are out of place here, but even Barth said this is a “last urgent appeal, which is, however, not a foreign element in the epistle.”

Demas (2 Tim 4:10), had not yet forsaken the Lord and gone back into the world, but surely others had. Many of these would be seduced by teachers who seek to satisfy their own appetites for power, instead of the spiritual well-being of brethren.

Paul says to “keep your eye on” these teachers and “avoid them” (v. 17, ESV). Whether these teachers were in Rome or not is disputed (most think not) but whatever the situation at the time Paul is warning the Romans against those who act as slaves of their own appetites, instead of the Lord (v. 18). The form of their teaching “smooth words and flattering speech which deceives the hearts of the naive” (ESV, v. 18) was designed to mask the false doctrine they taught. This is “common Christian teaching... the common stock of Christian instruction” (Morris, page 539). The statement is general enough to include anything taught which is contrary to clear biblical teaching. “The man who causes division in the Lord’s church by the introduction of things not taught is an enemy of Christ, even though he may not think so” (Whiteside, page 296).

The “for” in v. 19 must mean that the obedience of the Romans, that was known to all, should not be compromised by the report of false teachers getting an upper hand there. Paul desired that they be watchful and, while he was rejoicing over them now, he didn't want to be disappointed in them later. So he urges them to be both wise enough to discern the good (true

doctrine) and innocent enough to avoid the evil. The word “innocent” means “unmixed.” Trench sees in it “the absence of foreign admixture” (Synonyms, page 206). Their doctrine must be pure.

This dedication to the truth will lead to the crushing of Satan by the God of peace (note the irony). But the crushing will take place under the feet of the Romans (v. 20).

Paul resumes his greetings, this time from his companions to the Romans. Timothy is Paul’s well-known “son in the faith” (cf. I Tim. 1:2). Lucius, Jason and Sosipater are described as kinsmen (cf. vv. 7, 11), which could mean they were related by blood to Paul. If not, it simply means that they were fellow Jews. Tertius, Paul’s amanuensis (recording secretary – see I Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; II Thess. 3:17), greets the Romans “in the Lord,” indicating that he viewed his service as not only to Paul, but to the Lord (cf. Col. 3:23-24). Gaius is probably the Gaius whom Paul baptized at Corinth (I Cor. 1:14) and he may be the Titius Justus of Acts 18:7 (see Murray, page 238). The church may have met in the home of Gaius, since Paul refers to him as host of the whole church. The church included some who had social station, since Paul mentions Erastus, the treasurer of the city (he may or may not be the same Erastus mentioned in Acts 19:22 and II Tim. 4:20). Quartus is called the brother, probably meaning brother in Christ instead of brother of Erastus, Tertius or Paul.

Paul closes with a *doxology* (ascription of glory to God, from the Greek word for glory, *doxa*). It is to the God who is able to establish (“set up, fix, firmly establish” [Bauer]) the Romans according to the gospel Paul eagerly preaches (“my gospel,” the *kerygma*) and the proclamation, or “the preaching of Jesus Christ.” The first term probably refers to the preaching of Christian doctrine, in a general

Romans 16:1-27, cont'd

sense, the second to the specific preaching about Jesus. This preaching came by revelation of the mystery, not by human wisdom (see Gal. 1:12). The gospel cannot be known except that God revealed it to man, hence it is a “mystery” until it is revealed (v. 25). But now it has been made manifest, the Old Testament being revealed (represented by the prophets who made God’s will known in all nations) only in Christ, according to the commandment of God. Both the prophetic utterances of the Old Covenant and the revelation of the New were by the specific ordination of the everlasting God. The purpose was not to bring about intellectual assent alone but for obedience to the faith (v. 26).

“To God who is alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever.” Only God could have formulated and revealed such a plan in One such as Christ and all glory is due Him for His wonderful grace.

Amen.

FROM THEIR WORLD TO OURS...



The gospel’s aim: obedience and God’s glory

The gospel has been revealed for the purpose of producing obedient faith (v. 26). Those who love the gospel and adhere to it will be faithful people and faithful people are those who glorify God. That, ultimately, is the whole idea, because God alone is worthy of all glory. We hope this study of Romans has helped you love God more and has served to increase your faith and love. Glorify God in your life, everyday, in everything you do.

Questions on chapter 16

1. The Greek word for “servant” in 16:1 is *diakonos*, the same word translated “deacon” elsewhere. Why do we know that Phoebe didn’t occupy the office of “deacon” in a local church?
2. Where do we read about Priscilla and Aquila? What notable things did they do in the kingdom?

3. How many women are mentioned in Paul's list. You'll have to guess because some of the names can refer to either female or males, like our "Terry" or "Dana." What's the point, though?

4. Paul uses the term "in the Lord" several times. What does that mean? Cf. I Cor. 7:39.

5. What are the "churches of Christ" mentioned in v. 16? What is a "holy kiss"?

6. Before Paul ends the letter, he issues a warning – what is it and why? What is the church to do about this problem?

7. What does v. 20 mean? Any connection with Gen. 3:15?

8. Notice the mention of Tertius and Erastus. Who were these people?

9. What seems to be Paul's ultimate purpose in writing the letter? See also 1:5.

Notes