

ROMANS

The books that I primarily used for this study were Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Romans by F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Romans by Leon Morris, with some references taken from The Daily Bible Series The Revelation of John by William Barclay, Through the Bible Revelation by Vernon McGee, and Life Application Bible's commentary.

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This work is dedicated to Sheila Smith, my wife.

William S. Smith

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BACKGROUND

AUTHOR: Paul is generally recognized as the author of Romans.

WHERE WRITTEN: Probably written while Paul was in Corinth. See the reference in **16:23** to “Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy ...” Gaius is mentioned in **1 Corinthians 1: 14**.

DATE WRITTEN: Romans was probably written sometime between AD 57 and AD 58. This would place it somewhere towards the latter part of his 3rd Missionary Journey.

TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN: While some think it was a circular letter, many think it was written to the church at Rome. The interesting thing about the church at Rome is that there is no NT record of any of the apostles actually establishing the church there. It is believed that the church was originally made up of Jews who were present for Peter’s address on Pentecost. Later, the church was made up of Gentiles as well. The Jews, including the Christian Jews, were expelled from Rome sometime between AD 41 and AD 54 (there were earlier expulsions as well, but prior to the founding of the church). By time Paul wrote his epistle, the Jews would have returned, so the letter would have been addressed to both Jewish and Gentile Christians.

OCCASION: Paul was nearing completion of his 3rd Missionary Journey, and was preparing to go to Jerusalem (**Romans 15:25**). The verse itself talks of “in the service of the saints there” or “to minister to the saints”. Taking into account the date of the writing and his earlier letters to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor 16: 1 and 2 Cor 9: 1) about the collection for the saints, we can safely say that his visit to Jerusalem was to deliver the gift offering. Acts 19: 21 tells us that Paul intended to visit Rome after traveling to Jerusalem. I like what Barclay has to say about why this collection/gift was so important to Paul. He said “That collection was two things. It was an opportunity for his younger converts to put Christian charity into Christian action, and it was a most practical way of impressing on all Christians the unity of the Christian Church, of teaching them that they were not members of isolated and independent congregations, but of one great Church, each part of which had a responsibility to all the rest.”

WHY DID PAUL WRITE TO THE CHURCH AT ROME: The majority of Paul’s letters were written to churches that he had helped plant, and often dealt with problems within the church addressed. This was not the case with Rome. Paul did not help establish the church there and he doesn’t seem to be addressing problems within the church there. So, why did he write to them? Paul was finishing his 3rd Missionary Journey. He would soon be taking the money that had been collected as a gift offering for the Jerusalem Church. He was looking towards Spain as a possible next evangelical field. He had wanted to visit Rome, and Rome would make a good base for him. The people there would have heard of him - but would they have heard his real views or simply some of the falsehoods that had been spread about him? Writing to Rome then gave Paul a chance to share his beliefs with them and to prepare the way for his visit there.

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1: 1 - 7 In the first seven verses Paul introduces himself and his mission. He starts out by describing himself as a “servant of Christ Jesus”. Servant (doulos) could also be translated slave. Paul is describing himself as belonging to Jesus. There is an interesting reference here to the prophets of the Old Testament who were described as “slaves of God”.

Paul further describes himself as an “apostle, set apart for the gospel of God”. When we think of apostles we often think of the 12 Apostles. But we should keep in mind that apostle (apostolos) means someone who was sent, a messenger. There is also the idea that an Apostle needed to be someone who had seen the risen Lord. Does Paul satisfy these requirements? We not only have Paul’s testimony about this, but what about **Acts 9:15** where the Lord spoke to Ananias.

What was Paul’s message and who was he sent to? Paul here says he was “set apart for the gospel of God ... to call people from among all the Gentiles”. The gospel was about Jesus. Jesus, foretold through the prophets, descendant of King David, and resurrected from His death.

Paul then concludes his opening remarks by recognizing the saints at Rome as also being called to faith in Jesus and send them his normal “Peace and Grace” greetings.

1: 8 - 15 Why would Paul pray for the Roman church, which he has had no previous contact with?

Several possibilities come to mind, ranging from because he hoped to get their support to he cared for the church universal and not just the churches he had personally planted. Indeed, a strong Roman church made up of both Jews and Gentiles would reflect on his ministry. Besides which, it was very common for letters in these times to include a pious remark in the opening. What do you usually say when you meet someone that you haven’t seen in a while?

Also, if Paul hoped to use Rome as a base of operations for reaching Spain, then he would be very thankful for their strong faith. Besides, if Paul only talked of himself and didn’t mention the Romans at all, what kind of impression would that have made?

Paul not only prays for the Roman Church, he regularly and consistently prays for them. Not only does he pray for them, but he prays that at (long) last he will be able to visit them.

Do you think Paul has some specific spiritual gift in mind that he wants to impart to them?

Morris says “There is no reason to think that Paul has the special gifts in mind here, ... The term is used here in the more general sense of anything that builds up the spiritual life.”

Finally, Paul wants to preach there as well. And Acts tells us that he did in fact preach while in prison. Who does he want to preach to? I think the “Greek and non-Greek ... the wise and the foolish” go together to show that he has everyone in mind. He’s not concerned with the level of culture or the level of learning. He is “obligated” to preach to them. As Barclay says “It may seem strange that Paul speaks of Greeks when he is writing to Romans. But even then Greek did not mean just a native of Greece, but represented a certain mind, spirit, and culture.

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1: 16 - 17 Paul said he was not ashamed of the gospel. Barclay wrote “Paul had been imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Berea, laughed at in Athens and in Corinth his message was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling-block to the Jews. Out of that background he declared that he was proud of the gospel. There was something in the gospel which made Paul triumphantly victorious over all that men could do to him.” And Paul tells us that the gospel “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes”. Some might say that the gospel message is too simple, too easy. People who like to think of themselves as highly intelligent may feel that they are too smart to believe the gospel message. I’ve been told that. But you what? I believe it. It may be foolishness to some and a stumbling block to others, but to me, it is as Paul said: “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”

Most commentators agree that these two verses are the crux of Romans - the essence of the message. And they are powerful indeed. After telling us that he is proud of the gospel message, Paul goes on to say “in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed”.

The question comes up whether we’re talking about the righteousness “of God” or “from God”. The NIV uses “from God” while others use “of God”. I think the NIV has it right - God is giving/providing for us what we can not obtain/earn on our own. I like what McGee has to say here: “It should not be the righteousness of God, because that would be His attribute, and God is not sharing His attribute with anyone. It is a righteousness, and it is from God; it is not man's righteousness. God has already said that He will not accept the righteousness of man, for the righteousness of man is as filthy rags in His sight according to **Isaiah 64:6**. Paul is talking about the imputed righteousness of Christ. God places a lost sinner in Christ, and He sees him in Christ. The believer is absolutely accepted because of what Christ has done for him. The only method of procuring this righteousness is by faith. It is a by-faith righteousness. You can't work for it; you can't make a deposit on it; you can't buy it. You can do nothing but accept it by faith.”

What is “righteousness”? I personally like the explanation that righteousness is “right standing with God”. McGee simplifies it even more by saying that righteousness “is the antonym of sin.” The following verses will expand on the idea that we can not become right with God based on our own actions. Paul will show this to be true both for those under the Mosaic Law and for those who never heard of the Law.

Paul says “a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’.” The “just as it is written” reference is to **Habakkuk 2:4**.

What does it mean “faith from first to last” or “faith to faith”?

I think it means that salvation comes from faith. We can't earn it. Now, I personally believe in what I call a “life cycle” of salvation. It includes hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, being baptized, and then growing in spiritual maturity. I don't try to pinpoint the exact “instant” where we are saved. I think it is more important to recognize that the process lasts us until we die here on earth and then join God in heaven. But inherent in my view is the fact that salvation and righteousness come from God. It takes faith on my part to believe and accept. It takes faith on my part to follow through with all a life that now belongs to Jesus.

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Having told us that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, Paul now tells us why we need that salvation. No one is left out. First - Gentiles.

1: 18 - 32 The section starts out with “the wrath of God is being revealed”. Reading further tells us what or why the wrath is directed against or caused by. In Revelation we read about God’s wrath being poured out. How is it being revealed here?

In the original Haley Mills movie “The Parent Trap”, the summer camp director made a reference to Gilbert and Sullivan’s “Let the punishment fit the crime”. This is pretty much how God’s wrath is revealed here. Men don’t acknowledge and seek God, so God let’s them go their own way - and it’s not a pretty sight. Read verses 29 through 31 for a description of this.

Do you think this is all just an example of early Christian fundamentalists sounding the moral problems trumpet? Barclay said “Paul said nothing that the Greek and Roman writers of the age did not themselves say.” Barclay went on to give examples which you can read in his works.

What about verse 27 where it says “Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” Is this talking about Aids? No, I don’t think so. Paul is basically saying that their acts were their own punishments.

Let’s go back to **why** the wrath of God is being revealed. Paul tells us that God’s qualities (His eternal power and divine nature) should have been evident by study of the things He created. But instead of glorifying God, men instead exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator.

Things haven’t changed much, have they? Today many want to dismiss God by explaining away Creation in a “Big Bang” theory. Isn’t it interesting that they can never explain how the cosmos forces came to be in the first place.

Paul makes another interesting point. He talks about men making images to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. What idols do we follow today?

Is Paul making a case that everything we need to know to be saved can be learned from studying God’s creation?

The answer to the above question is no. Paul is telling us that we justly deserve God’s wrath because we have failed to acknowledge and worship God. Morris says that “Paul is not here speaking of a saving knowledge of God. The context is concerned with the condemnation of the gentile world, not its salvation.” This section and following lead up to **3: 9** where Paul says “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.”

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The Life Application Bible says “ In these verses, Paul answers a common objection: How could a loving God send anyone to hell, especially someone who has never heard about Christ? In fact, says Paul, God has revealed himself plainly in the creation to *all* people. And yet people reject even this basic knowledge of God. Also, everyone has an inner sense of what God requires, but they choose not to live up to it. Put another way, people's moral standards are always better than their behavior. If people suppress God's truth in order to live their own way, they have no excuse. They know the truth, and they will have to endure the consequences of ignoring it.”

2: 1 - 11 There is some debate about who this section was addressed to. Do you think it was addressed to the Jews or the Gentiles?

Several of the commentators that I like felt it was addressed to the Jews. Certainly the later part. I sometimes wonder if it was addressed to us (you and me). We sit here reading and feeling smug. We don't worship idols and false gods. But maybe we need to read a little closer about what Paul is saying. He is saying “you think you're above this, you think you're pretty much all right ... well, think again”.

I like what Bruce says about this section. He says that there were moralists of the day who might have felt that they weren't like the Gentiles Paul was writing about. They were morally upright. One such individual was the Stoic moralist Seneca, who was a tutor for Nero. He was so morally upright that early Christian writers talked about him as if he had been a Christian. Seneca, by the way, was also noted for his connivance at Nero's murder of his mother Agrippa. (Bruce also feels that much of this section deals with the Jews).

Paul compares God's judgments with ours. How would you compare the two?

God's is true. Ours tend to be biased.

How would we show contempt for God's kindness, tolerance, and patience?

Continuing to live sinful lives would show our contempt for God's acts. We need to remember that God will give to each person according to what he has done. This is true for both the Jew and the Gentile. God does not show favoritism. We can try to live lives pleasing to God. We can seek to give glory and honor to God. We can follow His ways with the aim of gaining eternity. Remember, Paul isn't talking about earning salvation here. He is focusing here on God's impartiality towards both the Gentile and the Jew.

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2: 12 - 16 It's simple, really. The Jews had the Law, and they will be judged for failing to keep it. The Gentiles didn't have the Law, but they still knew right from wrong and they will be judged for failing to do right.

Some translations (NIV included) put verses 13/14 and 15 in parenthesis. This almost implies that the two verses don't really belong, or that they are a special explanation of what has just been said. Actually, it's better just to have the two verses flow with the other verses. They go together to show that everyone will be judged based on what knowledge they had.

Paul also addressed a misconception that some Jews had. They thought that because the Jews had been given the Law that they would de facto be saved. Paul says just being a Jew isn't enough, just HEARING the Law read wasn't enough. They had to obey the Law.

Today, we have even less excuse. We don't just hear scriptures read to us, we are able to read them for ourselves.

While I'm here, I might as well touch on another of my soap boxes. Today some people think that being baptized is a one way ticket to heaven. It's not. We must go on to follow/obey God's teachings as revealed to us in the New Testament. Otherwise we're no different from the Jew that heard the Law read but didn't obey them.

When will all this take place? Paul says it will occur "on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ". We call this "Judgment Day". We (Christians) see God the Father doing this judging through Jesus Christ, or put another way, we (Christians) see Jesus doing the judging. We will all be judged. All of our secrets will come under scrutiny. We will all be found guilty for our sins. Judgment would be fatal except that as Christians we will be saved by grace because we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior and His sacrifice (death on the cross) paid our debt. It is not just a one time act of acceptance (or even baptism), it is going on to live as Christ directed us, to continue to grow in spiritual maturity. Will we stumble along the way? Yes.

What do you think Paul had in mind when he said "my gospel"? Was he introducing something new or different?

When Paul referred to "my gospel", he was referring to two things. First, he was referring to the gospel (good news about Jesus) that he shared/preached about. Second, he was referring to the gospel as something that he has made his own. As Morris says "He has appropriated it and made it his own. He does not mean that he thought it up or that it belongs to him in any special way or that there is some peculiarity in the way he sets it forth. He means that he knows it really and not theoretically. He espouses it wholeheartedly and not formally. To preach the gospel effectually it is necessary to make it one's own."

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2: 17 - 29 Notice the opening statement in verse 17 - “if you call yourself a Jew”. Why do you think Paul said that rather than saying “you who are Jews”?

Paul is preparing for his argument that it is more a spiritual condition rather than a physical one. We might say he is distinguishing with being Jewish by heritage versus religion. But that wouldn't be correct either. My children were raised in a Christian home. But they had to make a personal decision to accept Christ. Then they became Christian. Paul will show that it is more a matter of spirituality rather than genes. Why is this distinction important?

There are two views on verses 17-20. Either Paul is being sarcastic or he is being sincere. In either case he is saying are you proud of your belief in God? Are you proud about your knowledge of His directives for our lives? Do you consider yourself knowledgeable enough to be considered wise? If so don't be too smug because in verses 21-24 Paul wants to know why you're still sinning. Jesus said are you proud that you haven't committed adultery? If you've looked at a woman with lust then you've committed adultery in your heart.

Paul says that “As it is written: ‘God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’” The reference could be to general thinking of the day (as Jews were not well thought of), but it could also be a reference to several Old Testament scriptures including Isa. 52:5; Eze. 36:22, 23; and 2Sa. 12:14. Barclay goes into a lot of detail about how the Jews were viewed. It is quite interesting to read how they were viewed as atheists because they did not have idols. They were also disliked because they received special privileges from the Roman government. They were, to a limited degree, allowed to hold their own court, they were exempt from military service, they were allowed to keep the Sabbath. Their beliefs and dietary restrictions were also the cause of ridicule. Of course, there were other things, such as their attitude, that infuriated others. Hmmm. Do we Christians ever act “holier than thou”? Do we ever tell others that they are all going to Hell? Do we refuse to socialize with non-Christians?

We need to be careful about our actions and our attitudes. First, we don't want to cause God to be mocked because of what we do/say. Second, we don't want to leave such a bad impression that the other person hardens their heart against God because of what we did/said.

Paul goes on to say that if you're circumcised, but break the Law; then it is as if you were not circumcised. If, on the other hand, you are not circumcised, but do keep the Law; then it is as if you were circumcised. Being circumcised is a spiritual matter, rather than a physical condition. (By the way, the Jews were not the first nor were they only ones to be circumcised.)

Verse 29 is a play on words. Bruce explains it this way: “The Jews derived their name from their ancestor Judah (Heb. *Yehuda*), whose name is associated in the Old Testament with the verb *yada* (praise), his mother's words at his birth ... and his father's deathbed blessing, ‘Judah, your brothers shall praise you’”.

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In this chapter Paul deals with several objections that might be raised (or that had been raised in his past dealings). His answers here are very short and simple, but we'll find several of them revisited in depth in later chapters.

3: 1 - 4 If a Jew (circumcised) can become as a non-Jew (uncircumcised), and vice versa, then what is the advantage of being a Jew? There is great advantage, says Paul. The Jews were “entrusted with the very words of God.” This subject is covered again in chapters 9-11.

You might be tempted to say “what is the big advantage of being entrusted with the very words of God?” Scott said “by their possession of the Law, the Jews have an advantage over the heathen, much as an educated man has a better chance in life than the one who has never been in school.”

Well, if some of the Jews didn't have faith, does their “lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?” Absolutely not! says Paul. God remains true, even if every man on earth was a liar. See Psalms 51:4 for the Old Testament reference that Paul refers to.

3: 5 - 6 If our unrighteousness serves to make God's righteousness clearer (easier to see, understand, appreciate); then isn't God wrong to punish/judge us for our unrighteousness? Paul apologizes for even mentioning this possible objection. Paul points out that if this were true then God would not be able to judge the world. Why do you think that is so?

Judging requires/involves finding some guilty/wrong. If there were no punishment/wrath, then what would be the point in judging the world.

3: 7 - 8 Very similar to the last objection. Paul says if you're going to say that, why not just say “let us do evil that good might result”. And Paul says to that “their condemnation is deserved”. Now, I'm not sure if he is referring to the condemnation of those that said “do evil...” or if he is referring to the condemnation of the idea. In either case, it is clear that Paul is not buying into this objection.

3: 9 The big question here is who is Paul talking to? The Gentiles, the Jews, or the Christians? What do you think?

If he is talking to the Jews, then this section is an unstated “Second” to the “First” in verse 2. The advantage lies in having been entrusted with God's word. But that didn't keep the Jews from sinning as shown in the following Old Testament references. If he is talking to the Gentiles or to the Christians, then he is continuing to show that all have sinned. But I tend to think that it fits best if still addressing any Jews that are relying on their heritage to save them. Don't rely on your heritage because God's Word is full of scriptures that show that all have sinned.

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3: 10 - 18 This is the series of Old Testament scriptures that Paul is using. Some of them may not be word for word from the Old Testament, but in those cases they seem to summarize what some of the passages say.

3: 19 - 20 I look at these two verses this way. If you were relying on being a Jew and having the law (in this case a reference to the whole of scriptures, including those just mentioned above), then realize that you are under the law. So you have nothing to say about being guilty and being accountable to God. Rather than being made righteous by observing the law, instead the law has served to make us aware of our sins. (Some commentators would apply these two verses to both Jews and Gentiles, but I don't think it makes sense to talk about the law which the Gentiles didn't have.)

3: 21 - 24 Paul has shown that the law (Jewish Law or Gentile's natural law) can not bring us to a righteous state with God. But, he says, a righteousness from God, has now been made known to us, and this righteousness is different than the law. What do you think Paul has in mind when he says "... to which the Law and the Prophets testify"?

Saying the Law and the Prophets was a way of saying all of the scriptures (Old Testament). It wasn't fully understood before. This righteousness from God comes THROUGH faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. Notice that it is not faith in Jesus that makes us righteous. But faith is required.

Jew or Gentile, it doesn't matter - "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,". Left at that it would be bad news for all of us. But Paul goes on to say "... and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

3: 25 - 26 Jesus became the sacrifice of atonement - His death on the cross, His blood shed for us in place of the blood of the sacrificial animal (lamb). God did for us what we could not do for ourselves, thereby demonstrating his justice. God could have displayed mercy in forgiving all of us our sins, but then He would not be showing justice. For you and me, that would have been a problem - how to be merciful and just at the same time. But luckily for us, God had an answer. Grace would be given to all those who have faith in Jesus. Not a belief that Jesus existed, but faith in who He is, and what He did, and what He has now become for us.

3: 27 - 31 Boasting is not possible. There is nothing to boast about. Boasting about observing the law won't save you. No, faith in Jesus (and that faith is separate from observing the law). Circumcised or uncircumcised. Jew or Gentile. God justifies all through that faith in Christ Jesus.

So, does all this mean that the law is then nullified? NO! (Some feel that this reference to "law" is to the entire Old Testament scriptures. Faith replaces trying to work out our salvation on our own, but rather than replacing or nullifying the Old Testament, the next chapter will show that faith has always been an important part of scriptures.

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4: 1 - 8 In **3:28** Paul had said “we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” I think that this section is a continuation of that thought. As Christians today, we have no problems in accepting this idea - but to the Jewish Christians that first accepted Christ, this was a hard concept. Paul therefor starts with 2 examples that would have meant a lot to the Jewish Christian - Abraham and David.

Paul starts off with a reminder that Abraham was their forefather. The Jews understood that Abraham predated the 10 Commandments, but they liked to say that Abraham fulfilled the Law’s requirements. They saw Abraham’s faith in God as works demonstrated by his living a life in accordance with the Law that would later be given to Moses. But Paul wants us to see that Abraham’s faith wasn’t demonstrated by his living according to a Law that hadn’t been given yet, but instead Abraham’s faith was a belief that God would keep His promises. Paul quoted **Genesis 15:6** which said “Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness.” If Abraham had been justified by works, then Abraham could have boasted about his works, but this wasn’t the case. Abraham could not boast (before God) about his works. But because Abraham had faith in (believed) God, God credited Abraham as righteousness.

Paul reminds us that when a person works, their wages are their right, something they’ve earned because of the work they did. The employer is obligated to give them their wages. It is not a gift. (Keep in mind that grace is a gift, something that we don’t earn).

Why do think Paul starts off verse 5 with a “However”?

Paul says “However”, which is to say that as compared to a person who does works and therefor has something coming to him - the person who does no works, but instead trusts (has faith in) the God who justifies the wicked, that person because of their faith is credited with righteousness.

This was also a hard concept for the Jewish Christian. You see, they relied on God as someone who would judge/punish the wicked. Justifying the wicked was something that a corrupt judge might do - but not God. We need to understand that God is not giving up His judgment role, but instead God is showing mercy to those who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This mercy is not earned by works, but is freely given to those who believe in (faith) Jesus. Later, Paul will visit the concept that once we believe we then change our behavior.

Paul ends this section by quoting David, the author of Psalm 32. His reference is to **Psalm 32:1-2**. The quote doesn’t talk about faith, but talks about God’s crediting righteousness apart from works.

Taken together, the references to Abraham and David show that God credits us with righteousness not because of works, but simply because of faith. It is not the faith that saves us, but God’s grace. As Morris says “Whereas systems of justification by works all look to the worshipper to produce the desired righteousness, Paul is speaking of a system that requires him to produce nothing. All he does is to reach out in faith for God’s good gift.”

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4: 9 - 12 Paul now asks if the quotation from David in verse 7 and 8 apply only to the Jew (circumcised), or do they apply to the Gentile (uncircumcised) as well. To answer this Paul asks if Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness before or after he (Abraham) had been circumcised.

Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised. Abraham therefore was the father of the circumcised who walk in faith and the uncircumcised who walk in faith. (Are we excluding females when we talk of circumcision? No, we are not talking about the physical act of circumcision, but of the practice of circumcising males that the Jewish nation had.)

4: 13 - 16 While overall this section is straight forward, there is the small matter of verse 13's "heir of the world". If you go back to Genesis 12: 2-3, 18:18 or 22:17-18 then you'll notice that the only inheritance spoken of is that the Jews would take possession of the cities of their enemies. Overall, the promise relates to descendants (great nation, numerous as the stars), and become a blessing to the world. I am not sure exactly what Paul had in mind when he referred to "heir of the world". There are several possibilities. In any case, this section reminds us that Abraham received God's promise not based on the law, but based on the righteousness that comes by faith. Paul says that if it were from keeping the law, then faith would have no value and the promise would have no value. Why?

Because Paul has already shown that no one can completely keep the law. The law teaches us about sin.

The promise, then, comes to all of Abraham's heirs - the circumcised followers of the law (who also have faith) and the uncircumcised who have faith.

4: 17 - 25 You could interpret "father of many nations" strictly according to the flesh. This would then take into account all of Abraham's sons and the nations that came from them. But that would not fit with Paul's emphasis on faith. It seems clear that the father of many nations refers to all true believers - circumcised and uncircumcised. Now Paul introduces "... God who gives life to the dead ..." Abraham had to have faith that as old as he and Sarah were, God could cause Sarah to bear a son for Abraham.

This faith, says Paul, is why "it was credited to him as righteousness", and Paul says this applies "also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

So the righteousness applies to us who have faith too. Not just any faith, but a faith in Jesus, who died for our sins and was raised to life so that we could be justified.

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5: 1 - 5 Because of our faith in Jesus, the righteousness applies to us too. Because of that faith in Jesus we have been justified. Because we have been justified we have peace with God. WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD. Wow - that is something.

It was Jesus who gave us access to this grace. What do you think this means?

Gaining access through Jesus means that we couldn't get there (access) on our own. Some commentators like to call it an introduction. I think it's more like a letter of introduction. Jesus isn't standing there introducing us to God the Father (although that is a neat picture). It's as if Jesus wrote us out a letter of introduction or gave a stage pass. Because of what Jesus did (sacrificial death) and our belief in Him we now have access to God, not as sinners, but as ones saved.

Because of this access and peace with God we are able to rejoice as we look forward to it. Meanwhile, we suffer here on earth, but Paul reminds us that good can come from our sufferings (hardships). Suffering produces perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope. Not a human-based hope where we rely on people, but a hope which looks forward to being with God, not as a guilty party waiting sentencing, but as an innocent person who has just been justified by God.

This hope won't disappoint us. Why? Because God has already poured out his love into our hearts. Paul talks about the Holy Spirit being given to us. When does that happen?

I sometimes think that the first act of the Holy Spirit is to prepare our hearts to receive the gospel message. I don't know if that's true or not. I do know that the Holy Spirit is given to us to seal our relationship with Jesus when we are baptized. It may be that Paul here is referring to that act, or he may instead be referring to God the Father using the Holy Spirit to pour His love into our hearts.

5: 6 - 8 When Paul says "at just the right time, when we were still powerless", is he saying that God waited until we were powerless before acting?

Paul is saying that God acted at just the right time. God had predetermined what would happen and when. Paul is merely saying that God acted on our behalf while we were still sinners. Because we were sinners, we were powerless to come into His presence on our own. Jesus didn't die for a group of believers - He died for sinners. And it was God the Father who sent Him. When Paul says that Christ died for the ungodly, he is not talking about a certain group of people, but is talking about all of us. It's luck for us that God is different than we are. It would be very difficult to find someone who would be willing to die for a righteous person or even a good person. But God sent Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners (and not very nice at all).

ROMANS

5: 9 - 11 If while we were still sinners Christ died for us, resulting in our being justified by His (shed) blood, then how much more will we be saved from God's wrath through Him! It would be senseless for Christ to die for us only to have us face God's wrath on Judgment Day after we have become righteous through our faith (and subsequent obedience to His teachings).

We can indeed rejoice in now being reconciled to God. What does being reconciled to God do for us? It gives us peace with God and freedom from His wrath.

5: 12 - 21 This section is a series of comparisons or counter-points. Adam and Christ. Sin and sacrifice. Death and righteousness.

Sin entered the world through one man - Adam. Keep in mind that all of us have sinned. So it's not as if we are being punished for Adam and Eve's sin. I think Paul could have written this to apply to each and every one of us, but I think he wanted to show two things: First, that sin has been present from the very beginning of mankind's story; and second, that Christ's single act of dying for us was sufficient to cover all sin, past, present, and future.

Take a moment to go through this section and list corresponding points under the two columns:

ADAM

CHRIST

What do you make of verse 20's "The law was added so that the trespass might increase"?

I see it in light of the Law being a tutor which helps teach us about sin. The trespass increases because we're more aware. But because Christ's single act was a one time sufficient act, the race can be said to increase to cover more sin. I don't believe the grace increases. I believe it was/is sufficient. The point is that it is enough - enough so that we will have eternal life with Christ.

ROMANS

6: 1 - 11 Once again the question “If we can do nothing to earn salvation, and if grace increases as sin increases, then should we sin more so that grace can increase more?” Once again the answer “NO!”. Paul says that if we died to sin, then we can’t continue to live in it. This isn’t a good illustration, but if we were exiled from England, then we could no longer live in England. We would have to live in France, or Germany, or ...

If you really believe that continuing in sin is something you should do, then you probably don’t really understand what being baptized is all about. These verses assume the baptism of the time, which was immersion and not sprinkling or pouring. Barclay tells us that those Gentiles wishing to become Jews underwent three things: sacrifice, circumcision, and baptism. After baptism, the new Jew was called a little child just born. The Greeks had mystery religions that also involved being initiated. Initiation was regarded by them as a death followed by new birth. To quote Barclay “We are not for one moment saying that Paul borrowed either his ideas or his words from such Jewish or pagan practices; what we do say is that he was using words and pictures that both Jew and Gentile would recognize and understand.”

What would you say is the difference between the Jewish novitiate baptism, the Greek mystery religion initiation (baptism), and the Christian baptism?

All of the above baptisms represent a person voluntarily choosing to change their spiritual beliefs or allegiances. In this much they are identical. The difference is what belief or allegiance or they switching to. The Christian is baptized into the name of Christ. He is deciding to follow Christ. He is accepting Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. Is this an important difference? Go back to **Acts 18:23 - 19:41**. This is where Apollos didn’t know about baptizing people in the name of Christ (he only knew about John’s baptism for repentance). This happened in Ephesus, and when Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found people who had only received John’s baptism, and who had not yet received the Holy Spirit. When they were baptized in the name of Christ, they received the Holy Spirit. But let me return to the imagery of immersion. We saw that both the Jews and the Gentiles understood the concept that a person being baptized was thought of as being born again. Why is that so? It’s because they understood the imagery that the old person/belief was being buried (had died). Some like to refer to the imagery of being lowered into the water as being lowered into the grave. Morris reminds us that the people at the time would use the word immersion not as a gently lowering, but a violent act such as drowning or a ship going under the water. Both of these ideas would involve the death of the person. Of course, when we baptize someone we first lower them into the water and then immediately raise them out of it again. The raising part represents the being born again/anew.

Our old self, the one that was associated with Adam/sin, “dies”. Our new self, the one that is associated with Christ/grace “lives”. Now Christ died and death no longer has any power over Him. Paul tells us that “The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God”. In the same way, we should consider “ourselves dead to sin but alive to God”. How then could we “go on sinning so that grace may increase?”. We can’t! But we do continue to sin, don’t we? We all still fail occasionally. Just remember that we’re not talking about that occasional failing or relapse, but we’re talking about an ongoing continuous habitual practice.

ROMANS

6: 12 - 14 Don't let sin be part of your life. Remember, you are not under law, but under grace. What does that mean?

Barclay says "... we are no longer under law but under grace. Why should that make all the difference? Because we are no longer trying to satisfy the demands of law but are trying to be worthy of the gifts of love."

6: 15 - 23 Well then. If we are under grace, and can not do anything to earn our salvation, should we just sin at will? NO!

While this is very close to question in verse 1, it is slightly different. If nothing we can do will earn us salvation, then why not sin away, and simply rely on grace? Once again, Paul's answer would make full sense to the people at the time.

What kinds of freedom does a slave have? What's the difference between an indentured servant and a slave? Who might (why would someone) offer themselves as a slave?

A slave has no freedom. They must do whatever their owner wants/requires. An indentured servant was basically a slave for the period of indenture. A person might offer themselves as a slave if they had no other means of livelihood. But this isn't Paul's point. Paul is saying "look, if you agree to be someone's slave, you belong to the one you obey. This applies whether you are slave to sin or to obedience." Why do you think Paul said "obedience"?

We don't just become Christians by having faith in Jesus. We need to learn and follow his commands and teachings. We choose to "obey" God's way rather than our way.

What does Paul mean in verse 18 that "you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness?"

Without God in our lives, we were slaves to sin. We sometimes did good things, but we also sometimes did wrong things. Without any reason not to, the natural thing was to give in to temptation. But with God in our lives, we now try to do the right thing. The great thing is that we do this out of love, not out of fear or obligation.

This section ends with one of the classic bible verses: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

ROMANS

7: 1 - 4 Why does Paul spend so much time talking about the Law?

Part of (and maybe a big part) of the Roman Church was made up of Jewish Christians. For the Christian Jew it was hard to put grace ahead of the Law. Paul first shows that we are no longer under law, but instead are now under grace.

Paul uses the example of a marriage. While our spouses are alive, we are “bound” to each other. I believe the wedding vow runs something like “... until death do us part.” Paul says that if while our spouse is still alive we have an affair, then we have committed adultery. No surprises there. He goes on to say that after our spouse dies, if we marry someone else then that relation would not be considered adultery. Why? Because death has freed us from our first obligation, and we are now free to enter into a second one.

So, the Jewish Christian was “bound” to the Law. But when they were baptized into Christ, they “died” and were “raised again”. This ties in with what Paul said earlier (**6:4**). That death has freed us from our first obligation (Law), and now we have entered into a new obligation (grace). Paul says this happens so that we “might bear fruit to God”.

What are some examples of the fruit we might bear?

I like what Barclay says here: “When that happens, Christian obedience becomes, not an externally imposed obedience to some written code of laws, but an inner allegiance of the spirit to Jesus Christ.” Then, everything you answered about fruit (sharing, caring, etc.) would take place.

7: 5 - 6 Before we couldn't bear fruit because we were controlled by the sinful nature.

The next part is where it starts to get complicated and hard to follow. Paul says that “the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work ...”. Now that we have been released from the Law we serve in the “new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code”.

Do you think that the Christian Jews might have objected to Paul's statement about “the sinful passions aroused by the law ...”?

I think they would. The Law was their pride and joy. It set them apart from their heathen neighbors. Now, Paul is saying that the law was the reason for sinful passions being aroused in them. This would be disturbing to them. The idea is that the law made us aware of certain sins, and because we are weak our sinful nature was attracted to sin. But with grace we follow out of love and devotion to Jesus, not out of strict obedience to the letter of the law.

ROMANS

7: 7 - 8 This leads to the question “is the Law bad?” NO! Paul says that he/we wouldn’t have known sin was except for the law. But didn’t Paul earlier show us that even those without the Law had the law in their hearts? Is Paul refuting himself?

No. It’s true that even without the (written) law, people have an inherent knowledge of right and wrong. But the law gave/gives us more insight. For example Paul says that he would not have known what coveting was all about - meaning he would not have known it was wrong to covet. This makes sense to me, as without God’s word I would think “it’s fine to want something I don’t have”. But God’s word helps me to understand that it’s OK to want things, but that coveting what belongs to someone else is wrong. Knowing it’s wrong to covet leads my sinful nature to look around and notice the really great spouse/objects that my neighbor has. (And no, I’m not equating spouses with objects).

Morris says this: “Paul is establishing the point that the law does not in practice function as a means of salvation. Rather, it is a means of establishing people’s guilt.”

7: 9 - 13 I think Paul is saying here that before law we thought we were doing pretty good (on our own). But then we became aware of law and that made us aware of how sinful we really were. Sin brought death and so the very law that was intended to help me be acceptable to God instead led me away from God. Was this the fault of the law? Did this show that the law was bad? No, it only showed me how sinful I really was.

I like Life Application Bible’s comments on this section. They say “Where there is no law, there is no sin, because people cannot know that their actions are sinful unless a law forbids those actions. God’s law makes people realize that they are sinners doomed to die, yet it offers no help. Sin is real, and it is dangerous. Imagine a sunny day at the beach. You plunge into the surf; then you notice a sign on the pier: “No swimming. Sharks in water.” Your day is ruined. Is it the sign’s fault? Are you angry with the people who put it up? The law is like the sign. It is essential, and we are grateful for it -- but it doesn’t get rid of the sharks.”

7: 14 - 25 The law is spiritual (from God). I am unspiritual (have a sinful nature). What does Paul mean that he was sold as a slave to sin? Why was he sold? Who sold him?

Those are the wrong questions. God didn’t sell us to sin. Paul is telling us that, just as a slave may not understand what they’re told to do, but must do it anyway; so too Paul doesn’t always understand why he acts (sins) the way he sometimes does. All of us sometimes sin when we know we shouldn’t, and we usually feel awful afterwards. It’s part of our sinful nature.

It’s a lot like breaking a bad habit. Very, very, very hard to do. We know what we should do, but we don’t. We keep doing the thing we’re trying to stop. Same with sin. We know better. We know what we should be doing. But by ourselves it’s impossible to change. Who can help us? Jesus!

ROMANS

8: 1 - 4 Paul had just said “who will rescue me?” and he answered it with “Jesus”. Because Jesus has rescued us, there is now no condemnation for those of us who are in Him. What do you think Paul has in mind when he talks about the law of the Spirit which frees us from the law of sin?

I think he is contrasting one with the other. The law was given us to follow, but we were unable to live up to it, and thus it led us to death (sin). The law of the Spirit of life refers to the Holy Spirit who is given us at baptism. Instead of worrying about the letter of the law, we can now rely on the Holy Spirit’s leading and try to follow the spirit of the law. How? By studying God’s Word (the Bible), and applying it to our lives and relationships, our dreams and our goals. Our work and our works. Not to earn salvation - but because we received such a priceless gift.

The law couldn’t bring us to a right relationship with God, because our sinful nature led us astray. So Jesus came to be an offering for our sin. What do you think “likeness of sinful man” means?

It doesn’t mean that Jesus was a spirit who “looked” like He had a body. No, it means that Jesus became flesh (became a man, with a body just like yours and mine). Unlike us, Jesus did not sin (He was like us however, and suffered the same temptations that we all face). Jesus lived “according to the Spirit”, which means He lived the way the Father wants all of us to live.

8: 5 - 11 This section reminds me of the “you can’t serve two masters” concept. Our sinful nature leads us to death, but when we follow God’s ways we can enjoy life and peace. The two are not compatible.

If we have taken Christ as our Lord and Savior, then we “belong to Him”, and He is in us. If He is in us (think of the Holy Spirit), then we have righteousness with God, thanks to Jesus.

Does this passage imply that our bodies are sinful, but our minds are pure?

No. When Paul talks about the sinful nature of our bodies, or flesh, he is referring to our choice to lead sinful lives and to give in to temptations. In the 10 Commandments, God included our minds (don’t covenant ...). But by and large, we can summarize most sins as something we go after because we are following the desires of the body. Living a spiritual life means that rather than trying to satisfy the body, we are trying to live according to God’s teachings for us.

If we still sin sometimes, does this mean we don’t belong to Jesus at all?

No. Because we are human we will still fail. What matters is that we keep trying to improve.

ROMANS

8: 12 - 17 Because the Spirit of God lives in us, our spirit is alive. Because of that, “we have an obligation”. Who are we obligated to?

We’re not obligated to the sinful nature which would like us to follow it’s ways). We are obligated to God. If we did live according to the sinful nature, we would die. But because we live by the Spirit (God), we are able to overcome the misdeeds of the body.

Because we are led by the Spirit, we are sons of God. What does “led by the Spirit” mean?

It means that we follow the Spirit’s leading, and that God is our leader. This shows us to be true sons of God, and not sons of the flesh. How do we know? The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that this is so. But wait till you hear this. We’re not just God’s children - we’re coheirs with Christ. Because we share in Christ’s sufferings we also share in Christ’s glory.

Morris has an inspiring thought here. He reminds us of Saul meeting Christ on the Damascus Road and Christ asking “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Just as we share in Christ’s sufferings, so too Christ shares in ours.

8: 18 - 22 Why all the talk about sufferings?

I’m not totally sure. Romans is one of Paul’s earlier letters, written about AD 57. About 5 years earlier the Jews had been expelled from Rome. This would have included the Christian Jews too. Nero was the current emperor. Nero was considered a tyrant, and would later blame the Christians for Rome’s fire, but his first persecution of Christians hadn’t occurred yet. Certainly we can say that suffering was the lot of the early Christians, and that many Christians today around the world still suffer for their faith. Besides, there is suffering in this imperfect world.

Paul tells us that we’ll suffer - but that the final glory waiting us will more than compensate.

Why does Paul say that “the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time”? And, how should we interpret “present time”?

The Life Application commentary says that the world is waiting to be “transformed ... to a new heaven and new earth” and to be freed of “sin, sickness, and evil.”

I think present time applies to the entire time from Christ’s death and resurrection until His 2nd coming. It applied to the Roman Church, it applies to us today, and to the church tomorrow.

ROMANS

8: 23 - 26 Not only is creation waiting for something new and better to arrive, but we Christians are too! When we were baptized we received the gift of the Holy Spirit. But even better than that is what is waiting for us at Jesus's 2nd Coming, when we will be with God. If we think about it at all, we should be groaning in anticipation. Not in anticipation of pain, but in anticipation of getting something so wonderful.

We can't see this physically. If we could, then there wouldn't be any faith or hope involved. But we do have hope, because we have God's word. And so, we wait patiently (with maybe just a little hopping around in gleeful anticipation).

Now, go back to the earlier verses in this chapter where the Spirit helps us cry "Abba, Father". The same Spirit that testifies with our spirit that we are God's children also now helps us as we wait patiently. We don't know what to pray for in all of this, so the Spirit intercedes for us.

How you interpret "groans that words cannot express" would depend upon your charismatic leaning. Some would look to this to see mutterings in spirit language. I simply take it to mean that we don't know what to pray for as we look towards this adoption as sons and redemption of our bodies. Since we don't know what to pray for, we can't find the words to express our thoughts. But the Holy Spirit does know, and so the Holy Spirit is able to intercede for us.

8: 27 - 30 God know us. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us in accordance with God the Father's will. And we know that God works for the good of those that love Him.

Now we get to talk about predestination. How do you define predestination?

Some would define it as God choosing in advance who will go to Heaven and who will not. I define it as God's knowing in advance who will choose Him and who will not. It's our choice whether to choose Him or not. And that choice leads us to Heaven or not. (That choice along with God's salvation gift to those who choose to follow Him). God predestined that all who would believe would be saved.

8: 31 - 39 Before jumping into this section, I want to relate back to our earlier problem of not always doing the right thing. Our minds know what is right, but our weaknesses cause us to sometimes do the wrong thing. How do reconcile this behavior? Paul here is telling us that we can overcome because God is on our side. And if God is for us, who can stand against us. God so loves us that He sent His only Son.

It's more likely that Paul is answering the question "how can we be sure that God will justify us and glorify us?" The answer stays the same. God sent His Son to die as a sacrifice for our sins so that we could be justified. Why would He change His mind? He wouldn't.

And, if God won't condemn us, the who can? Paul tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. The last two verses, like so many in this chapter, are ones that Christians love.

ROMANS

9: 1 - 5 Paul shares his sadness over his brothers' (fellow Jews) failure to accept Christ. Why does he introduce this thought here?

Leon Morris says that Paul has just finished saying that nothing can separate us from the love of God. What then happened to the Israelites? How is it that they have become separated?

Before dealing with why, Paul tells us that the Jews had the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises, the patriarchs, and that from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ. They had many things that they could truly be proud of in their relationship with God. But sadly, the majority of them failed to accept Christ.

9: 6 - 13 Does this mean that God's word (His promises) had failed? Paul says that "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel". Even though they could trace their lineage back to Abraham, Paul reminds them that God's promise didn't apply to all of Abraham's descendants. The promise didn't apply to Ishmael (son of Hagar), nor did it apply to any of his later six sons with Keturah (wife after Sarah died). Ishmael had twins, Esau and Jacob. God chose the second twin Jacob to be the covenant recipient. In both of these cases, God chose/elected who the promise would apply to.

This might seem to show that God pre-chooses who will be saved. Some believe in this predestination or election, and interpret it to mean that regardless of what you do (or don't do), if you are "of the elect" then you will be saved. This, to me, is an error. Paul is showing us that God is sovereign, and that there was never a blanket promise that would cover everyone merely because of their human lineage.

Some people are bothered by the idea that God "hates" someone. I don't think that God hated Esau, but that God chose Jacob over Esau. The love versus hate was a poetic way of describing this choice. This may have been simply God exercising His sovereignty, or it may have been because God knew the type of person Esau and Jacob would both become. Both had faults, and both had good points. God knew their hearts.

9: 14 - 18 So then, is God just being unjust? No, God is instead showing mercy. Many people are bothered by the idea that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Keep in mind that while there are many passages in Exodus that speak of God hardening Pharaoh's heart, there are also many passages that speak of Pharaoh hardening his own heart. So, if God hardened Pharaoh's heart it was after Pharaoh had already hardened his own heart.

There's something to keep in mind through all of the above. When we talk about God electing some over others, and having mercy on some over others, and hardening some over others; we need to keep in mind that just because God didn't choose to use Ishmael or Esau's lines that they couldn't be saved. Salvation is a gift available to all. God wants all to be saved. But we must accept that gift of salvation. I don't care that God may not bring about another Paul or Billy Graham through my descendants. I do care that I can be saved.

ROMANS

9: 19 - 29 Morris says “We must bear in mind throughout this section that Paul is ... dealing with the failure of Israel as a whole to respond to the Messiah over against the fact that the church was largely Gentile. He is saying that God works his purpose out by such means as choosing Isaac and rejecting Ishmael, choosing Jacob and rejecting Esau, or hardening Pharaoh. He is arguing that Israel’s present hardening does not defeat God’s purpose, but rather that it is God’s means of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles.”

Well, if God shows mercy on who He wants, etc. then how can God blame us. We can’t stand against His will. Rubbish, Paul says. (Paul didn’t really use the word rubbish). What Paul did say was that we have no business arguing with God (the Creator who made us). When someone sits down with a lump of clay, they can make it into anything they want. It might be a wonderful vase or bowl, or a simple cooking pot. The clay doesn’t have anything to say about what it is made into.

What determines whether the clay is noble or common?

Not the clay, but the purpose to which it is put.

You know - from the clay’s point of view it will be useful no matter what it is made into. I value the many craft projects that my children and grandchildren have made over the years. To me, they are all valuable.

Don’t miss verse 24. Paul says that God called some of us from the Jews and some of us from the Gentiles. We, the elect, the called, and sometimes the remnant will be His people.

9: 30 - 33 We Gentiles receive righteousness through faith. The Jews that didn’t receive it failed to receive it because they tried to earn it by works rather than simply accepting it by faith.

Who or what was the “stumbling stone”?

Jesus was the stumbling stone for the Jews. He wasn’t the Messiah that they had expected (or wanted), and so most of them refused to accept Him.

Today, we have other stumbling stones that keep people from accepting Jesus. What do you think some of them are?

I think the idea that all spiritual roads lead to the same place, that all will be saved, that we just need to live good lives are all examples of stumbling stones for some today.

ROMANS

10: 1 - 13 Before we start, take a moment to read **Deuteronomy 30: 9-14**. This is part of Moses' farewell speech. What is Moses telling the people to do? What is talking about?

Moses is telling the people that they need to follow the Law and they need to turn to the Lord (God) with all their heart and all their soul. I think too many of the Jews thought that the key point was to follow the Law. It's especially interesting to see Moses say that it's easy to do. **Deuteronomy 27:26** tells us that "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out." Is there a discrepancy here?

No. Moses is not talking about a legalistic following of the Law as being easy. He is talking about how easy it is to follow the Law when we are wholeheartedly following God. How close to Paul's teaching is that?

Paul tells us to believe in Jesus and to confess Him as Savior, to be baptized in His name, and to follow all the things he taught and commanded. If we wholeheartedly follow Jesus, these things are not difficult at all.

On to Romans.

Paul shares his heart's desire that the Israelites should be saved. For he knows that they are zealous for God. But as Barclay says, Paul also knew "that their zeal was a misdirected thing. Jewish religion was based on meticulous obedience to the law." How often did Jesus refute the Jews for a blind legalistic following of the Law? What examples can you give?

Paul tells us that the Israelites, not knowing God's righteousness, tried to establish their own. And their own was a legalistic strict following of the letter of the law.

What do you think Paul means when he says that "Christ is the end of the law"?

Your interpretation probably depends upon how you define the word "end". In this passage, the word translated "end" could also be understood as "termination", "fulfillment", or "goal". I like the "fulfillment" translation, but Morris points out that while "it would fit in with Paul's theology... it is not the usual meaning of the word he uses." (The word Paul uses here for "end" could be understood as "fulfillment", but it is not the usual word for "fulfillment" that Paul uses.)

ROMANS

Remember the reference to Deuteronomy on the previous page? Paul seems to have adapted that Old Testament passage to apply it to Christ. The righteous by law might as well try these impossible things, but the righteous by faith (in Christ) know that they don't need to do these things. The word in the Christian's mouth and heart is the word about Jesus.

The section concludes with the joyful news that all (Gentiles and Jews) who call on the name of Jesus will be saved. What does this mean to you?

To me, calling on the name of Jesus is not a mystical verbalizing of Jesus' name. In Paul's time, calling on the name of invokes the entire arena of wholeheartedly following Jesus' teachings and His commands.

10: 14 - 21 Talk about a great call for sending out missionaries. People will be saved by calling on the Lord. But they can't call on the Lord if they don't believe in Him. And they can't believe in Him if they haven't heard about Him. They can't hear if no one comes to preach to them. And no one can go preach if they aren't sent.

Now, the problem with the above statement is that it's partially out of context. It's a true statement, and it certainly applies to the Gospel. But what Paul was saying was that the Jews had heard, but had still rejected Christ. The context is about how God's promises are true, how God saves us by grace and mercy, and how it all comes about by us believing in Jesus. Paul is showing that the Jews had the opportunities to believe, but that not all of them had (indeed, most of them had not).

Verse 17 talks about "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." But remember that Paul wrote this to the Roman Church before he (Paul) had a chance to go to Spain. So, the message hadn't spread to Spain yet. How then can Paul talk about the message going out into all the earth?

Paul was taking poetic license. The message had certainly been preached through much of the Jewish world.

When Paul talks about "those that are not a nation", and "a nation that has no understanding" he is talking about us (Gentiles). I think that the "not a nation" means not a nation of God's people. I may be wrong about that. I think that the "nation that has no understanding" refers to the fact that the Gentiles did not have the prophets and the law to help them understand who Jesus was.

What do you think of the saying "a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing"?

I think it refers to having just a smidgen of knowledge and thinking we know all the answers. It certainly is not an excuse for us not to study and learn more about God's word.

ROMANS

11: 1 - 12 For the final time Paul asks if the things already talked about should be “proof” that God had rejected the Jewish people. And the answer once again is a resounding NO. Paul again tells his readers that he himself is an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. What other famous Israelite came from the tribe of Benjamin?

Saul, the first king of Israel came from the tribe of Benjamin. Now, I might ordinarily say that wasn't such a great thing. After all, Saul didn't stay king - he was replaced by David. But the tribe of Benjamin could also boast that it was the one tribe that remained faithful to Judah.

Paul again tells us that God did not reject His people. This time he uses an example from Elijah to make his point. Elijah thought that he alone had remained true to God. God told him that He had kept a remnant of 7,000 who had not bowed down to a false god. So too, now, even though most of the Israelites had rejected Jesus as the messiah, there was a remnant that had accepted Jesus. As for the rest, Jesus and salvation by grace had become a stumbling block for them.

While this was unfortunate for them, the good news was that salvation was opened to us. Are we “Gentiles” to gloat over this. No. Paul tells us that if their loss meant good things for us, think how much more good would come from their full acceptance of Christ.

11: 13 - 24 Paul talks at length using an example of branches being grafted onto a root. Israel is the root. The wild branches are the Gentiles. Some commentators have pointed out that Paul's example is easy to understand, but that the normal practice is to graft good fruit bearing branches onto strong roots. Paul's example is good and easy to follow, but doesn't reflect SGP (Standard Grafting Practices). Morris however points out that this is all true, but that during Paul's time there was a practice of grafting wild branches onto weak roots as a way to strengthen them. So Paul's readers would have been able to relate to his example. So there critics - take that!

11: 25 - 32 Paul seems to be saying that we should not be feeling superior just because we accepted Jesus and the Jews didn't. He says that the Jews have experienced a partial hardening, which may mean that the hardening isn't complete (remnants maybe, or maybe full change of heart). All Israel will be saved. Some interpret Israel here to be spiritual Israel, which includes us Gentiles. Others interpret it to mean the Israelite remnant that accepted Christ. And some take it to mean that during the end times Israel will be saved.

They are enemies to the gospel because they don't accept Christ. But before we carry that thought anywhere, they are still loved by God because of the patriarchs and the relationship God has with Israel. God has elected to save them, as the verses Paul quoted here seem to say. In His mercy God will save them just as He saved us. He may be talking about the Christian Jews here. I have to admit that I do not fully understand just how this whole section will work out.

11: 33 - 36 Barclay says that Paul has tried to explain all this as best he could, and that “having done his best, he is content to leave it to the love and power of God. At many times in life there is nothing left but to say: ‘I cannot grasp thy mind, but with my whole heart I trust thy love. Thy will be done!’.”

ROMANS

12: 1 In view of God's mercy (through which we received salvation as an unearned gift), we should "offer your bodies as living sacrifices". What do you think Paul means by this?

To me it means living our life in such a way that it would be wholly pleasing to God. When you think about the sacrificial animals, one of the things that might come to your mind is the fact that they were to be unblemished. For our lives to be considered a living sacrifice, we would need to live unblemished lives. What does that suggest/mean to you?

12: 2 Don't CONFORM, but be TRANSFORMED. I think this is even better than the original Greek words. Barclay says that if you look at the roots of the two Greek words used here, you find "schema" for conform and "morphe" for transform. We are conformed by the world when we try to fit in. Instead, Paul wants us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind - then we will be able to determine what God's will is and act accordingly. We will act not the way the world dictates, but in a way that would be pleasing to God. Notice that Paul speaks of using our mind to determine what God's will is. He doesn't talk about using our emotions.

12: 3 - 8 Paul talks about "the grace given to me". What do you think he is referring to?

Morris says that Paul is, among other things, referring to his gift of Apostleship. As such, his next instruction to the Romans (and to us) should be understood as instructions or an order. What is he talking about. I think saying that Jew or Gentile, we should relate to (get along with) each other.

He then uses one of his favorite examples as he says "in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Some people like to refer to the list of spiritual gifts found here as jobs or positions inside the church. While I believe that generally speaking, spiritual gifts are given to serve the local church body, I don't believe that the list found here is only church jobs. If this were true, then Paul would not be writing to the general church membership in Rome, but would be writing to the church leaders.

Rather than just talk about the spiritual gifts listed here, I'm going to include my personal list of spiritual gifts. The list is not intended to be complete, but I believe it to be fairly complete. You'll find the spiritual gift in bold, the Greek root word in italics, and a list of bible verses that either talk about or are based on the spiritual gift being discussed.

ROMANS

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The following is taken from a class of mine called "Paths to Service".

Administration: (*Kuberneseis Kubernao*: To guide/pilot)

(1 Cor 12:28; Acts 6:1-7, 27:11)

To understand what makes an organization function, and the special ability to plan and execute procedures that increase the church's organizational effectiveness.

Apostleship/Missionary: (*Apostolos* One sent forth)

(1 Cor 9:19-23, 12:28; Eph 3:1-9, 4:11; 2 Cor 12:12; Rom 10:15; Acts 8:4, 13:2,3, 22:21)

To start churches and oversee their development.

Discernment: (*Diakrisis* To separate, discriminate)

(1 Cor 12:10; Acts 16:16-18; 1 John 4:1-6)

To distinguish between truth and error, and identify deception in character and relationships.

Encouragement: (*Paraklesis Para*: To the side, *Kaleo*: To call)

(Rom 12:8, 1 Tim 4:13; Heb 10:25, Acts 14:22)

To reassure, strengthen, and affirm those who are discouraged or wavering in their faith.

Evangelism: (*Evangelistes Ev*: Well, *Angelos*: A messenger)

(Eph 4:11; Acts 8:5,6,26-40, 14:21, 21:8, 2 Tim 4:5)

To present the gospel to others and to lead them into a relationship with Christ.

Faith: (*Pistis* Firm persuasion)

(1 Cor 12:9, Acts 11:22-24, 27:21-25; Rom 4:18-21; Heb 11)

To trust God's will and act on it with an unwavering belief in His ability.

Giving: (*Metadidomi Meta*: With, *Didomi*: To give)

(Rom 12:8; 2 Cor 8:1-7, 9:2,6-8)

To contribute money and material resources to the work of the Lord with cheerfulness and liberality.

Healing: (*Iama* A healing)

(1 Cor 12:9,28; Acts 3:1-10, 5:12-16, 9:32-35)

To be God's channel to restore people to health.

Helps: (*Antileosis Anti*: In front, *Lambano*: To support)

(1 Cor 12:28; Rom 16:1,2; Acts 9:36)

To invest time and energy into the ministry of others in order to increase their effectiveness.

Hospitality: (*Philoxenia Philos*: Loving, *Xenos*: A stranger)

(Rom 12:9-13, 16:23, Heb 13:1,2; Acts 16:15)

To care for people by providing fellowship, food, or shelter.

ROMANS

Intercession: (*Enteuxis* A petition)
(James 5:14-16; 1 Tim 2:1,2; Col 1:9-12)
To pray for others needs.

Interpretation: (*Diermeneuo* To explain)
(1 Cor 12:10,30, 14:13, 26-28)
To make known to the body the message of one who is speaking in tongues.

Knowledge: (*Gnosis Ginosko*: Taking in knowledge)
(1 Cor 2:14, 12:8; Acts 5:1-11; Col 2:2,3)
To accumulate and analyze information effectively.

Leadership: (*Proistemi* Stand before)
(Rom 12:8; Acts 7:10, 15:7-11; 1 Tim 5:17; Heb 13:17)
To instill vision, to motivate, and to direct people to accomplish the work of ministry.

Mercy: (*Eleeo* To feel sympathy with)
(Rom 12:8; Acts 16:33,34, Luke 10:33-35; Mark 9:41)
To minister cheerfully and appropriately to people who are suffering.

Miracles: (*Dunamis* Power)
(1 Cor 12:10,28; Acts 9:36-42, 19:11-20; Rom 15:18,19)
To obtain exceptional interventions of God's power that glorify Him and give evidence of His grace.

Prophecy: (*Propheteia Pro*: Forth, *Phemi*: To speak)
(1 Cor 12:10,28; Rom 12:6; Eph 4:11; Acts 15:32, 21:9-11)
To proclaim God's truth with power and clarity in a timely and culturally sensitive fashion for correction, repentance, or edification.

Service: (*Diakonia* To serve or support)
(Rom 12:7; Acts 6:1-7; 2 Tim 1:16-18)
To attach spiritual value to the accomplishment of practical and necessary tasks which support the body of Christ.

Shepherding: (*Poimen* One who tends herds or flocks)
(Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 3:1-7; John 10:1-18; 1 Pet 5:1-3)
To guide, care for, and nurture individuals or groups in the body of Christ as they grow in their faith.

Teaching: (*Didasko* To teach)
(1 Cor 12:28; Rom 12:7; Eph 4:11-14; Acts 18:24-28, 20:20,21)
To understand, clearly explain, and apply the Word of God to the lives of listeners.

ROMANS

Tongues: (*Glossa* Language)

(1 Cor 12:10,28, 14:13-19; Acts 2:1-13, 10:44-46, 19:1-7)

To speak with unintelligible utterances which may be a foreign language never studied.

Wisdom: (*Sophia* Insight into true nature of things)

(1 Cor 2:1-13, 12:8; Acts 6:3,10; 2 Pet 3:15; James 1:5,6)

To apply spiritual knowledge effectively.

Let's look at what the scriptures have to teach us about Spiritual Gifts:

Spiritual Gifts are to be used to SERVE OTHERS. (1 Pet 4:10).

God gives us Spiritual Gifts to EQUIP or PREPARE us for work in the church. Can you imagine sending out a construction crew without any tools. What could a carpenter do without his hammer, saw, and nails? Just so, God wants His workers to be equipped for the job. (Eph 4:12).

God gives Spiritual Gifts for the BUILDING UP of the whole body. There are two important thoughts here. First, God provides Spiritual Gifts for the building up, not for the tearing down. The second important thought here is that God provides us with Spiritual Gifts not for our own use and edification, but for the whole body. Spiritual Gifts are not to ensure the success of an individual, but to ensure the success of the entire church. (Eph 4:12).

God wants us to attain UNITY of faith and KNOWLEDGE of Jesus. He wants us to come together in a oneness of faith based upon a personal knowledge and acceptance of Jesus, the Son of God. He wants us to continue growing in the likeness of Jesus' actions. Go back to STEPS to Maturity for more on this subject. (Eph 4:13). STEPS to Maturity is another one of my classes. An abbreviated version can be found in my New Christian class.

Passages relating to spiritual gifts:

Ephesians 4:11-13

1 Peter 4:10

Romans 12:4-8

1 Corinthians 12: 4-7

ROMANS

12: 9 - 21 The remainder of this chapter gives general advice which is good for all of us to follow. What are your thoughts about each theses?

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I wouldn't expect an exact match. But it might be fun if time allows to compare the above advice to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

ROMANS

13: 1 - 7 Paul seems to be saying three things here: Obey the state government, don't rebel against it, and pay your taxes. Now, some of you are already saying "it doesn't say 'obey', it says 'submit'". You're right, but is there a real difference when used in this setting?

The real questions that we need to ask ourselves are these: Are we ever justified in not obeying? Is there ever a time when it is OK to rebel? Is it ever OK to refuse to pay our taxes? What are your thoughts on each of these?

ARE WE EVER JUSTIFIED IN NOT OBEYING?

We need to keep this whole section in perspective. Normally, when the government is functioning justly, and when the laws are not directly opposed to God's teachings; then we would not be justified in disobeying. But, when the government is not functioning justly, and when the laws are opposed to God's teachings, then we would not be expected to obey them. I am not talking about anarchy. This is much like the "a woman should submit to her husband". If the husband is asking the wife to do something sinful/immoral, then the wife should not obey her husband. So, what I am saying is that we do not need to obey when asked to do something sinful or immoral.

IS THERE EVER A TIME WHEN IT OK TO REBEL?

If you live in the U.S.A. then you know that our country came into existence when our founding fathers rebelled against the British King. Now, I am not a historian. But my belief is that the British King was not asking the American colonies to do anything that was immoral. But I also believe that they were justified in their decision to rebel. They did not believe they were being properly represented. Some Americans may believe that they are not being represented, and that they need to rebel against the government today. I do not agree. I may not agree with everything that the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court say and do, but I believe that we are represented. My personal choice for candidates may not always win the election, but I happen to believe that my vote counts and if the majority of voters see it different than me, then I need to accept their choice. Same basic thought with abortion clinics. I may personally disagree with abortion, but I believe it is wrong to bomb and burn abortion clinics. Peaceful demonstrations are OK, and voting for pro-life candidates is OK. Killing and destruction are wrong.

IS IT EVER OK TO REFUSE TO PAY OUR TAXES?

It was Jesus who said "give to Caesar what is Caesar's" when asked about a tax.

ROMANS

13: 8 - 10 Barclay says “It seems a thing almost unnecessary to say; but there were some who even twisted the petition of the Lord's Prayer, ‘Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,’ into a reason for claiming absolution from all money obligations. Paul had to remind his people that Christianity is not an excuse for refusing our obligations to our fellow men; it is a reason for fulfilling them to the utmost.”.

Well, I hadn't heard that one before. What I have heard is that the bible teaches that we should not borrow from anyone. Do you think that is true?

I don't think so. I believe that where possible, we should have no debts. That way, we don't have to pay interest. Think how much money you pay in interest each year. If you didn't have the debt, then you would be able to save and pay cash. The interest money would be available for vacations, for extra purchases, for tithes and offerings, etc. I believe that most people today can not buy a home without a mortgage payment - so having a mortgage payment would be one exception that most of us need to make. What about school loans? Do they make sense? Yes, if that is the only way you can get the education, and if the education will further your future earnings. What should you do if you are already in debt? Well, there are many good Christian finance programs out there to help you get out of debt. Last thought on this one: Morris says “Paul is not forbidding borrowing. Jesus permitted this (Matthew 5:42), and circumstances may well arise in anyone's life in which a debt is permissible. But Paul is saying that the believer should not leave debts unpaid; they should be settled promptly. The present imperative will have a continuous force: ‘Don't continue owing. Pay your debts.’” A monthly debt should be paid monthly on time every month. The exception being if you pay it off early.

The remainder of the passage deals with how we need to treat our fellow man. I like the idea that by simply having love for each other, we don't need to worry about any of the rest of it. If we have love for them, we won't steal, we won't cheat, we won't murder, etc.

13: 11 - 14 The early church expected Christ's 2nd Coming to be imminent. Of course, after 2,000 years we know that it wasn't. How do we reconcile that with our belief in the bible's being inspired by God?

There is no biblical truth that is affected by the early church's (or the gospel/epistle writers') misconception. The truth remains that we need to live each day as if it were our last, and we need to keep God uppermost in our thoughts.

Paul suggests that many sins are associated with the night. Why do you think that is true? What do you think of his list of sins? What do you think of his including dissension and jealousy in with the rest?

Is clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ the same as putting on the armor of light? (Yes!)

ROMANS

14: 1 The section starts off with the statement that we need to accept those that are weak. The NIV and Living Bible say to accept those whose “faith is weak”, while the KJ, NAB, RSB, and Simple English all say to accept those who are “weak in faith”. What do you think the difference is between these two possible translations?

The difference may be this - having a faith that is weak means that I have not yet developed a strong faith, and it may be hard for me to believe everything that I am being taught; while being weak in faith may mean that I am purposely weak in some area because my faith leads me to believe that is the proper action. This 2nd version seems more in accordance with the teachings that follow in the rest of the chapter.

Regardless of which interpretation you may believe is correct, we are being told to accept our brothers without passing judgment on any of their nonessential beliefs. One of our Christian Church motto's is "Where the bible speaks, we speak. Where the bible's silent, we're silent". Here are some others: "The bible is our only creed"; and "In essentials, unity; in everything else, liberality". I think this is the heart of what Paul is saying here.

The question that has remained unanswered to this very day is “to whom and to what was Paul referring to?” Was it the very points of view he refers to in the following verses? Did the Roman church have the same food issues that the Corinth church had? Is Paul dealing with differing views held by the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians as regards pure and unpure food, days of worship, etc.?

I'm somewhat inclined to relate this discussion with the Jewish Christian vs Gentile Christian, because so much of the letter seems to deal with this subject. But there are many others who view it differently.

In any case, this topic is still relevant to us today. As Barclay says “This problem is not confined to the days of Paul. To this day in the Church there are two points of view. There is the more liberal which sees no harm in many things and is well content that many an innocent pleasure should go on within the Church. And there is the narrower point of view, which is offended at many things in which the liberal person sees no harm.”

14: 2 - 6 Paul deals with two “issue points” here. In the first, he deals with the vegetarian vs meat eater issue. In the second, he deals with a subject that today we might call the Saturday vs Sunday day of worship issue. Both of these non-salvation issues have people who feel strongly about their viewpoint. Paul is reminding us all that we are not to look down or condemn those who hold opposing viewpoints on these issues. Each person holds their view based on reasons that they believe to be true. Paul reminds us that we have no place judging the other person for their views in these areas. His example of a master and house servant/slave remind us that is up to God to judge each person's position. I especially like Paul's reminder for all of us to keep in mind that whatever the person's views, as Christians they do it in honor to God.

ROMANS

14: 7 - 12 When I first read verses 7 - 9 I asked myself “why is this here and what does it mean?” I think that the key is that we belong to Jesus, and some day we will all stand before the judgment seat and answer for our own beliefs and behaviors. So, whether we are right in our beliefs or whether the “other guy” is right in his/her belief, it will all be up to God in the end. So for now we need to remember that it isn't our place to judge other Christians.

14: 13 - 23 This is one of those passages where I really wish I knew exactly what the situation was that Paul was addressing. Why? Because without that information it is hard to fully know how to interpret this section.

If Paul were addressing an issue where the Jewish Christians did not want to eat meat for fear that the meat had been offered to false gods and then sold in the marketplace, then it would make sense that at the common church feasts the Gentile Christian believer should not bring meat to share.

But what about today? There are vegetarians who do not believe in eating meat. Their reasons may range from diet to concern about how the cattle/chickens are raised and butchered. If a vegetarian believer joins my church, does this mean that the potlucks must now be meatless?

I don't believe that would be required. But that is what Paul seems to be saying. We need to keep in mind as we read this that Paul is addressing the stronger Christian in how to deal with the weaker brother/sister. Weaker means that they don't have a full understanding about the faith. So it isn't just a matter of a person who doesn't like something for some non-religious reason.

Take the case of a diabetic who must avoid sugar. That person knows that for him or her sugar is bad and must be avoided. They don't expect the rest of us to avoid sugar - though they probably would expect to find a small variety of foods and deserts that were sugarless.

Alcohol is another case in point. The Christian churches that I have attended do not allow alcohol to be served at functions held at the church: weddings, potlucks, etc. Now, the general reason given is that while a little alcohol in moderation may be OK, an alcoholic is not able to drink in moderation, and so we don't permit it at church because it might offend people and it might cause our weaker brothers/sisters to stumble. Now, I agree with this. But I also realize that it doesn't logically fit with everything I said above about this subject.

On the subject of alcohol, don't forget Paul's advice to Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach's sake. One view of this would be: see, it's OK. The other view would be: wine was much weaker then, so it's another matter entirely. A third view says that Paul was just following the standard medical practice that existed at that time.

Hopefully, some day I will revisit this whole section and rewrite it to be more clear and maybe even to better explain how it should be understood.

ROMANS

15: 1 - 6 I wonder if these verses are why some believers are so “dour” and grim-faced all the time. They think they are never to do anything fun as that would be doing something pleasing to self. Do you think that is what Paul has in mind here?

I don't either. Morris says that “This does not mean that we are never to do anything that we want to do, but that we are never to do what pleases us regardless of its effects on others.”

Barclay says “It is significant that when Paul speaks of bearing the weaknesses of others he uses the same word as is used of Christ bearing his Cross. When the Lord of Glory chose to serve others instead of to please himself, he set the pattern which every one who seeks to be his follower must accept.”

A good thought to keep in mind is that we are NOT being told to simply put up with whatever our weaker brother/sister may want to “throw” at us. We should “please our neighbor for his good, to build him up”.

15: 7 - 13 Barclay says “Paul makes one last appeal that all people within the Church should be bound into one, that those who are weak in the faith and those who are strong in the faith should be one united body, that Jew and Gentile should find a common fellowship. There may be many differences but there is only one Christ, and the bond of unity is a common loyalty to him. Christ's work was for Jew and Gentile alike. He was born a Jew and was subject to the Jewish law. This was in order that all the great promises given to the fathers of the Jewish race might come true and that salvation might come first to the Jew. But he came, not only for the Jew, but for the Gentile also. To prove that this is not his own novel and heretical idea Paul cites four passages from the Old Testament; he quotes them from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, which is why they vary from the translation of the Old Testament as we know it. The passages are Ps.18:50; Deut.32:43; Ps.117:1; Isa.11:10. In all of them Paul finds ancient forecasts of the reception of the Gentiles into the faith. He is convinced that, just as Jesus Christ came into this world to save all men, so the Church must welcome all men, no matter what their differences may be. Christ was an inclusive Savior, and therefore his Church must be an inclusive Church.”

Many of us have a slight problem with “The root of Jesse will spring up”. We think of roots as our ancestors, and so we're not sure how this could refer to Jesus. Some like to explain this away by saying Jesus predated Jesse (and Abraham too). I like what Morris has to say about this: “in Palestine drought would threaten the life of a plant, so that its root system would be its best guarantee of survival. The root came then to be used not only of the root itself but also of that which springs from the root.”

As we look back over this section, we realize that we are to accept one another, to bear with one another, and to build up one another with the aim of developing a spirit of unity. That unity will be a positive sign/witness to the non-believers.

ROMANS

15: 14 - 24 Paul is coming to the close of his letter to the Romans. Morris says “Paul’s great treatment of justification has ended.” and that “Now the apostle turns to matters like his reason for writing the letter, his travel plans, and sending greetings to people he knows.”

What three good things does Paul have to say about the church in Rome?

He said they were full of goodness, full of knowledge, and capable of teaching one another. If they were so knowledgeable, then why did Paul need to write to them?

Paul may be simply acknowledging that the Romans were already aware of much that he had just written. Possibly Paul added some points that they might not have been aware of, or maybe would not normally have thought about. Have you ever been familiar with a certain passage, and then had someone talk about a point that you had not seen there before?

There’s an interesting tie between Paul’s reference to himself as a “minister of Christ” and his “priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel”. The word translated minister is “leitourgos” which is often associated with worship and “church” duties or service. Tie this in with the idea of a “priestly duty” which results in Gentiles becoming an acceptable offering to God. Now, an Old Testament offering is normally thought of as something pure and unblemished. I don’t know about you, but I am certainly not unblemished. But Paul mentions the sanctification which occurs. We are made clean by the blood of the Lamb, and by living Godly lives we become sacrifices suitable to God.

Paul talks about proclaiming the gospel all the way from Jerusalem around to Illyricum. Just where is Illyricum? It would have included the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea. (Italy would be the western shore). This would include places visited by Paul on his 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys. This certainly covers the areas that Paul had reached. Why does Paul mention this?

Paul talks about his plans to visit Spain. If you look at a map, you’ll see that this would be a natural next major area for Paul to want to visit.

Did Paul make it to Spain?

We can’t say for sure. There is no New Testament book that talks of a visit by Paul to Spain. Acts ends with Paul in Rome. There is some speculation that after Paul was released from prison (or house arrest) that he did travel to Spain before being re-imprisoned and executed.

ROMANS

15: 25 - 33 Paul hopes to visit the church at Rome, and then to continue on to Spain. But first, he will be going to Jerusalem to deliver the contributions that several of the churches he had planted had taken up to help the Christian Jews in Jerusalem. Paul prays for safety and deliverance, but Acts tells us that this was not to be. Paul would be arrested and finally arrive in Rome - not to visit the church there, but to be imprisoned.

16: 1 - 27 Romans ends with general greetings, warnings, and prayers.

The first reference is fun. Paul commends to them Phoebe, a “diakonon”. NIV, King James, New King James, New American Standard, and many other bibles translate this as “servant”. The New American with Apocrypha translates this as “minister”. The Revised Standard and the New Jerusalem with Apocrypha translate this as “deaconess”. Certainly the Greek word (with male reference) is the one usually translated as deacon. Does this imply that Phebe was a deaconess? Maybe, maybe not. Each person and church must decide for themselves. Certainly, just because the male version is used for deacon does not make it mandatory for every use of the word to stand for an official church office. (Personally, with no college bible training, I think of Phoebe as a deaconess.)

Next comes Priscilla and Aquilla. Note that they own a home in Rome, and that there is a group of people who regularly meet there for worship. Do you think this was an early example of small groups in a church?