

Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans

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Capitalization

Section titles were capitalized according to the APA style given in <https://capitalizemytitle.com/>.

Purpose

This study leads the reader through Paul's letter to the church in Rome. This letter is often studied at great length with many references to other parts of scripture and discussions of theological concepts. This study of the letter, however, attempts to keep things simple by mentioning the themes.

Translations

Various English translation use various words. This study will quote from:

CSB: The Christian Standard Bible, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers.

<https://csbible.com/>

NET: The New English Translation, Copyright © 1996 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C.,

<https://netbible.org/>

Outlines that can help...

A short and long outline by Dr. J. Vernon McGee:

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mcgee_j_vernon/notes-outlines/romans/romans-outline.cfm

And another overview study from bible.org:

Daniel B. Wallace

<https://bible.org/seriespage/6-romans-introduction-argument-and-outline>

The Beginning

Chapter 1

Paul writes a letter to the church at Rome. The church is mostly Gentiles.

Paul writes about Jesus the Christ. By human lines, Jesus was a son of David. By Godly lines, Jesus is the Son of God.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. — CSB

Paul prays that he could visit this church in Rome. Paul has tried to arrange a trip but has been prevented. Paul desires to be with the Gentile Romans as he ministers to Gentile believers everywhere he goes.

A Section of Bad News

About the middle of chapter 1 begins a long section that extends to late in chapter 3. This section is full of bad news. Mankind separated itself from God by sinful actions. Though some people seem to be more sinful than others (them not us), we are all sinners and we are all short of the glory of God. There is nothing we can do to improve our lot.

The Gospel, the Righteous, and the World

Paul first mentions the gospel—the power of God for salvation for everyone “from A to Z.” Then Paul mentions the righteous—those who live by faith in God.

While the righteousness of God is revealed from faith, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all those who reject righteousness.

The unrighteous suppress the truth about God which is plain to see right in front of everyone who has ever lived. God’s divine nature is shown in all creation. No one has any excuse for not seeing, touching, tasting, hearing, and living in God’s creation.

There are no excuses. People see God daily, yet some have rejected God and turned instead to themselves. They are wise in their own eyes, but actually fools. Instead, they worship lizards and dragons.

God’s reaction was, “Fine, go your own way.” The unrighteous engage in every kind of sin. Several specific sexual sins are mentioned.

In general, God allowed them to fall into their disgraceful passions and to a corrupt mind. Emotion and intellect both lead to depravity for the unrighteous. Paul gives many examples of the result. The unrighteous act in a disgraceful manner, they applaud others who do the same.

Salvation, in general terms, is being delivered from harm. Salvation, as it pertains to God and man, is bringing man back to God and breaching the distance between man and God caused by man's sin.

Per above, the gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone.

Take Care, You Aren't That Good Either

Chapter 2

Right after discussing how the unrighteous deserve to die for their many types of sins, Paul warns everyone about judging the unrighteous. Don't judge; you do the same as those you judge. All who are unrighteous (even a little unrighteous now and then) are judged and punished by God.

God's kindness, restraint, and patience (CSB) are intended to lead all to repentance. God repays each for his actions in life. The path to punishment is occupied by those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth. Once again, does a person follow God or follow their own thoughts?

Are you depending on your status as a person? Forget it. Take care, because

There will be affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does what is good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For there is no favoritism with God. — CSB

God's judgement is based on the gospel through Jesus Christ. If a person sins in one circumstance or another, the result is the same.

Paul gives a special warning to Jews in the church and uses the Jewish practice of circumcision as one Jewish practice. Jews cannot fall back on their special heritage. Given that heritage, Jews tended to teach others about it. That is a good thing, but if they teach, they must do what they teach and not the opposite. Some Jews, who taught one thing and did the opposite, set such a bad example they caused some Gentiles to blaspheme God.

There are those who make a physical show of following God, but inwardly they follow their own desires. There are those who inwardly follow God despite not appearing to be a follower of God. Following God

... is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter. That person's praise is not from people but from God. — CSB

Circumcision was an obligation for Jewish males. The uncircumcised were to be cut off from the people as stated in Genesis 17:14. It became a symbol of the Jews rightly following the law given through Moses. Every time it is mentioned in Romans it is shorthand for following a set of laws that apply to the physical world in an attempt to achieve a spiritual goal. That spiritual goal can only be achieved by God and is given to mankind by grace.

We Are Not Better Off

Chapter 3

Paul continues his special warning to the Jews. The Jewish heritage carries honor in that God chose them to show the world righteousness via their law from God. Many of the Jews were unfaithful, yet God still dealt with them.

There is a backwards sort of logic that follows the idea that being unfaithful magnifies the faithfulness of another person. Hence, being unrighteous magnifies the righteousness of God. No. That is simply a bad idea. Stay away from it.

Both Jews and Gentiles are under sin. Paul quotes many of the Psalms (well known to the Jews) about the sinfulness of mankind. Throughout history this has been the case.

The old law was perfect; mankind was sinful. Being full of sin separates mankind from God. That separation cannot be crossed by adhering to a set of laws because the separation is just too wide. The law showed the separation and mankind's failure to follow the law.

Some Good News for a Change

Finally, Paul writes some good news. There is hope for fallen mankind. That hope is by faith—seeing what is unseeable. That saving faith, i.e., salvation comes in Jesus Christ.

Faith in Jesus Christ

Here is the doom of us all, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (CSB)

Finally, given all the doom for mankind, Paul writes some good news.

Here is the hope of us all,

“The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe ... they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” — CSB

There it is—a summary of Paul's letter and the gospel. We cannot work our way into God's presence. Therefore, God opens the door and lets us in at no charge. The entrance fee was paid by Christ Jesus.

Take Care, You Aren't That Good

We cannot boast; we aren't that good. Being just in the eyes of God comes through faith. In a sense, these attributes of faith make faith a type of a system of laws.

Consider Abraham and Faith

Chapter 4

Paul reminds the Jewish readers, who will explain this to the Gentile readers, of Abraham. God promised Abraham things that Abraham could not see. Abraham was the physical ancestor of the Jews. Abraham, however, did not perform physical works that led to God's acceptance of the Jews.

Abraham first believed. It was the belief or faith of Abraham that brought righteousness.

Abraham was circumcised, but the circumcision came after Abraham lived by faith and was credited as righteous. It was and is the faith that justifies and saves. This is true for us today as well.

For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ... This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace... — CSB

This righteousness by faith was not one thing performed by one person. This example applies to all persons at all times who believe in God—the one true God who raised Jesus from the dead. This Jesus was delivered to the authorities to be executed for our crimes (sins). Jesus was raised from the dead for our justification.

To justify is to show or prove to be right or reasonable. In a biblical sense, it is to declare or make righteous in the sight of God. It is not possible for sinful persons to justify themselves to God. Since all persons are sinful, none of us can justify ourselves to God. Justification comes only from God.

Peace, Grace, and Reconciliation

Chapter 5

Because of this justification by faith, we have (1) peace with God, (2) access into God's grace, and (3) reconciliation. These give us hope in our current afflictions. This is just like the hope Abraham had. That was called "hoping against hope." (CSB).

There is good reason for this hope. Jesus died for us while mankind was lost, i.e., a good person sacrificed for bad people. If Jesus—the good person—would do such a wonderful thing for bad people, just imagine what Jesus does for reconciled people, i.e., people who have been justified. Jesus Christ lives for us now.

A note about hope: it is a confident expectation that something will happen. It is not a wish, which may be characterized as "wishful thinking" as in, "I wish I win a billion dollars in the lottery."

One Trespass and One Righteous Act

Sin entered the world and separated mankind from God. That entrance came from the trespass or sin of one man—Adam. Sin occurred before God gave the law through Moses.

The one righteous act came via Jesus. That act brought the grace of God. The good news is that the grace of God has multiplied far more than sin. Sin cannot overcome God's grace.

If by the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. — CSB

Focus on these words: those who receive grace reign in life through Jesus Christ.

Recall just above that Jesus lives for us now. In grace, we also live with Jesus Christ, right now as well as in eternity.

Alive to God in Christ Jesus Instead of Slavery

Chapter 6

Note the phrase from Chapter 5, “But where sin multiplied, grace multiplied even more...” (CSB) It seems that with more sin comes more grace. Hence, let’s sin more!

Paul addresses this concept with a resounding, “No!”

Christ died, was buried, and rose from the dead. We died to sin, were buried in baptism, and have risen to live with Christ. Since we died to sin, we can no longer serve sin. The idea of sinning and sinning is completely against the nature of having risen from the death of sin to live with Christ.

Paul uses the analogy of slavery and freedom. The life a person lives is like a master to that person and the person is like a servant or slave to that type of life. If, for example, a person loves and serves others, the person is a servant to love and service.

A somewhat silly example could be ice cream. Do I serve the god of ice cream, i.e., am I a glutton? No, I am not a slave. Ice cream does not rule my life.

Therefore, I do not live a life of sin. Because, as Paul clearly reminds us,

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
— CSB

This verse summarizes the entire letter. We are dead to God because of our sins. There is no hope. God, however, gives us eternal life because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Marriage as an Example of Life and Death

Chapter 7

Paul continues the theme of a new life after death. Paul uses marriage as an example of how the law changes when a person dies.

“...don’t you know that the law rules over someone as long as he lives?” — CSB

The law binds a woman to her husband as long as he lives. When the husband dies, however, the wife is free to marry another man. Death brings a new life with a new law.

Just as death changed the married woman’s status, our death to sin changed our status as we now live in Jesus Christ. We are in a new situation.

“You belong to him who was raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.” — CSB

In the past, while we were living a sinful life, we were dead.

“But sin... was producing death in me...” — CSB

The Flesh and the Spirit

At this point, Paul begins a section that runs from chapter 7 verse 14 through chapter 8 verse 27 that discusses the flesh and the Spirit. The message is clear: we are bound by the weakness of the flesh. The Spirit of God can rule in our lives and save us.

This life in the flesh here on the sinful earth is full of trouble. I desire to do good but do bad instead. I do the opposite of what I want to do. I am a wretched person. Thank you, God through Jesus Christ, for pulling me out of this situation.

Chapter 8

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.” — CSB

Since God has pulled me out of my wretched situation, I am now free from condemnation. I am now “not guilty.”

This is a new law. The law of the Spirit of Jesus Christ rules my life. The law of the flesh is death. Jesus Christ came in this wretched flesh, lived in the flesh, and died once for everyone. We are now in the Spirit and no longer in the flesh.

The wretched state of the flesh no longer applies to us. We are full children of God with all the rights and privileges of heirs.

It is not only mankind who suffers, but also all of creation suffers in this bondage of the flesh. Flesh decays because of sin. This is not what God intended.

“...the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children.” — CSB

We have hope. God’s Spirit is with us and helps us in all things. Paul uses prayer as one example of the Spirit helping us.

Conquering the Weakness of the Flesh

The Spirit, God, and us work together for those of us who love God.

“We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God...” — CSB

We are God’s elect. Who can keep us from God? Neither any one nor any thing.

We are conquerors. Paul cites many examples of this and that. None of those things can separate us from the love of God. Given that permanent closeness to God, what have we to fear?

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” — CSB

It’s Not the Flesh, It’s the Spirit

Chapter 9

Paul continues the discussion of the flesh and the Spirit. Now, Paul uses examples from Israel's history.

First, Paul mourns his people—the Israelites. They have pride in their past as the covenants to all mankind came through them. Jesus Christ also came to earth through the children of Israel, a.k.a., Jacob.

Paul emphasizes, however, that it is not the physical lineage that counts—it is the spiritual lineage.

“...it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but the children of the promise are considered to be the offspring.” — CSB

Paul reminds the Israelites of their history in that it was not always the firstborn who was blessed as everyone expected. Abraham's first son, Ishmael, served his second, Isaac. Isaac's first son, Esau, served his second, Jacob.

Is this fair or just? God has no injustice. God shows mercy to whom God wishes. Consider how God used Pharaoh's stubbornness to bring a nation out of bondage.

Again, was that fair or just? We cannot ask God that question. It is God's place to be God. That is not my place (even though I wish it were).

Paul quotes several Old Testament prophets about the future of Israel. The future was not always (not often) bright. Nevertheless, God promised a future for a remnant of Israel.

Righteousness by Faith

Here is the conclusion of the matter. This summarizes all the talk about the works of the flesh, the works of the law, the Spirit of God, and faith in God:

“Because they (Israel) did not pursue it (righteousness) by faith, but as if it were by works.” — CSB

Righteousness and salvation are impossible if we depend on our works. These come from God as a gift of grace through faith. This sounds simple; it is difficult to accept.

Chapter 10

Paul further emphasizes this by summarizing “the message of faith:”

“This is the message of faith that we proclaim: If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”
— CSB

Israel's Rebellion

Paul has a section of text that discusses Israel's rebellion against God. This section is from chapter 10 verse 14 through chapter 11 verse 10.

The section begins with a question, then there are a few parenthetical verses about belief which is proceeded by hearing which is proceeded by preaching. And how can someone preach to the lost without being sent?

Israel, however, heard the message of the sent preachers (prophets in those days). Paul refers back to text in Deuteronomy and Isaiah stating how Israel was guided to God but was “disobedient and defiant” (CSB). Some Gentiles heard the word and believed.

Chapter 11

God did not and still has not rejected Israel. Paul reminds the Jews of the time of Elijah when God preserved a remnant of faithful Israelites. The same was happening in Paul’s time as God was preserving a remnant chosen by grace:

“In the same way, then, there is also at the present time a remnant chosen by grace. Now if by grace, then it is not by works; otherwise grace ceases to be grace.” — CSB

The rest of Israel, the majority that was not the remnant, was hardened. Later, Paul describes this as a partial, not a complete, hardening.

Paul again refers back to the text in Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms of Israel’s spiritual insensitivity. Their spiritual senses of sight and hearing failed them.

This ends the section on Israel’s rebellion.

Israel Will Return to God

Paul writes about Israel returning to God in the remainder of chapter 11.

Paul describes Israel as having stumbled but not falling to the ground. Several times, Paul writes about how Israel’s stumbling brought Jesus and salvation to the Gentiles. This is a complex line of thinking.

There is the example of cultivated plants. Some branches were removed from a cultivated plant and wild branches were grafted onto the plant. Despite the new status of the Gentiles, Israel is still the life-sustaining root of the plant.

The grafted-in Gentiles are warned to not boast of their new status. Remember, God removed the original branches due to rebellion; God will not hesitate to remove the branches that were grafted onto the root.

Paul returns to the thought of the hardening of hearts of Israel. This is the line of thought of stumbling but not falling to the ground.

“A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved.” — CSB

Paul refers back to the text of Isaiah that predicts a good future for Israel.

Paul comes back to the basic of the gospel. God's grace is "irrevocable" (CSB). God's promise to the Jews will not be cancelled. Yes, the Jews rebelled and turned away from God in disobedience. But,

"For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may have mercy on all." — CSB

Again, we have all sinned against God and are unrighteous. God, however, makes us righteous through mercy and grace.

Because of God's mercy, Paul writes poetry praising God with text from Isaiah and Job. Who has the mind of God? No one. Who gives to increase God? No one. Glory be to God.

Therefore

Chapter 12

We now have perhaps the greatest "Therefore" in history. The word "Therefore" indicates a logical consequence or conclusion drawn from preceding information or arguments.

In the preceding, Paul has stated how man disobeyed God and is unrighteous. There are no works of the flesh than man can do to become righteous. Man's proper response is an expression of faith. God makes man righteous through the gift of grace.

Given this, Paul urges us to live by a set of Christian ethics.

A Living Sacrifice

"Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God." — CSB

This is basically the rest of Paul's letter to the Romans. We are to renew our minds so that we will know the will of God and live by it.

The will of God for each person is different in the details. This is because God created each person as an individual to be different. All the parts of the body of Christ, i.e., the church "do not have the same function." (CSB)

"Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good." — CSB

Paul lists many things we can and should do daily as living sacrifices. The number and breadth demonstrate the breadth of the will of God. This great variety is all under the will of God. The above quote is from the Proverbs.

Obligations to Others

Chapter 13

In our lives here on earth, we are obliged to other persons, i.e., we owe things to others. Paul uses the example of earthly governments—a necessity for an orderly and peaceful life even if quite annoying at some times and just plain evil at other times.

"Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God." — CSB

We are obliged to follow the laws of earthly governors. There are many “yes, but what if” and “I won’t do such-and-such if so-and-so declares a law.” Paul realizes this and writes this at a time when a foreign army has conquered and is occupying his homeland. Still,

“Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor. Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” — CSB

In God’s will, what we primarily “owe” one another is love. Love is, “the fulfillment of the law.” (CSB)

Paul summarizes the earthly life in God’s will with, “Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime...” (CSB)

We Belong to the Lord

Chapter 14

Continuing the theme of fulfilling all law via love, Paul spans chapters 13 and 14 with,
 “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. Welcome anyone who is weak in faith, but don’t argue about disputed matters.”
 — CSB

I often “desire” to argue about things to show that I am right. Being right gives me a feeling of superiority. That is a pitiful desire that forgets the condition of all of us: lost and unrighteous without God’s grace.

Sometimes we “fuss” about what day it is. We belong to God; we live for God. Days and meals pass away and are nothing compared to this life in God. Why do we judge and despise one another? That is not the will of God. Looking back to chapter 12, we read, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good.” (CSB)

Paul continues the theme of “do what is right” instead of “don’t do what (some consider) is wrong.”

Part of promoting peace comes in the form of the stumbling block. We are not to set a trap for a fellow believer. “Aha! You said you would never partake in such-and-such. That is just what you are doing!”

Again, we have all sinned and stumbled. It is easy to find me stumbling again. I don’t need anyone else’s help. Helping someone else stumble by setting a trap is against God’s will.

“So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.” — CSB

Paul encourages faith in God. Live by faith; believe in the saving power of God.

Pleasing Servant

Chapter 15

“...so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice.” — CSB

Paul switches from “do not judge others” to “please others.” The above verse, which comes at the end, gives the reason why we are to be pleasing servants. In that way, we glorify God. Instead of judging a weaker person, we are to carry their weaknesses.

We are not to say, “Look at me! I am mature and strong and no longer have problems with the temptations that snare so many!”

We are to ask, “May I walk beside you for a while?” and if invited, we walk along beside the weaker person and engage them so they will not notice the temptation and will not wander from the path of right. Recall how Jesus, much stronger than us in every way, welcomed us and guided us along the right path.

Paul quotes from several places in the Old Testament about how God has invited the Gentiles to join the Jews in a special relationship with God. If groups as far apart as Jews and Gentiles can come together, surely followers of Christ can as well. Our disagreements are tiny when compared to those of the different cultures of Jew and Gentile.

Paul concludes with joy, peace, and hope—not food, drink, and holidays. This is the encouragement we should take with us daily.

Goodness and Knowledge

Paul tells his audience in Rome that they are good and smart people. He encourages them to teach one another and outsiders by what they say and what they do. These are the same teaching methods God has used to teach the Good News. This is especially true for teaching the Gentiles. Paul ends with a quote from Isaiah about how the ignorant will see and understand.

Traveling

Paul includes his plans for travel. He wants to visit the believers in Rome. There are, however, other places he must visit first. Paul requests prayers for physical safety and spiritual acceptance. He notes that some fellow believers differ with him on physical and social matters.

Greetings and Warnings

Chapter 16

Paul mentions 29 individual persons he knows in Rome (most are mentioned by name). This letter, although beneficial to all Christians since the time of Paul, was not written as a dissertation to teach esoteric concepts. Paul dictated these words to dear and personal friends.

Paul warns these dear friends about people who will attempt to divide them. These dividers will use the stumbling blocks Paul mentioned earlier. They will introduce judgements and cause people to splinter into groups based on food, drink, days, and the like.

The End

Paul concludes with things he has said earlier. Notably,

“The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.” — CSB

and

“...to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ—to him be the glory forever Amen.” — CSB

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