



Part 32: Good Faith Works

Word ALIVE



Paul to the Romans



Background Notes -

PURPOSE: To present Paul's letter to the church in Rome (when the central Church was still in Jerusalem). He appeals to Jewish and Greek converts to recognize their common savior in Jesus Christ.

AUTHOR: Paul is the schooled Pharisee and Roman citizen who God converted after he was persecuting Christians. He would become the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

DATE: Written around 78 as a preparation for his visit to Rome.

STYLE: Though listed first, Romans was written after Galatians, and has a more composed, thought out Christian theology that runs the gamut of Paul's theology, from the universal consequence of original sin, to the necessity of faith, to the predestination of God's people. The style is passionate, and he even regrets having to break from traditional Judaism, but is charged with the love of Christ.



Opening Quotes

“They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die – yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.” Rom 1:32

“Is God unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way) By no means!” Rom 3:5

“We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law... Do we then overthrow the law? On the contrary, we uphold it.” Rom 3:28

“Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom 5:1

“Just as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.” Rom 5:19

“If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” Rom 6:8

“I do not understand my own actions... Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Rom 7:15, 24

“When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit bearing witness that we are children of God, and if children heirs...if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we might be glorified with him.” Rom 8:14

“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.” Rom 8:28

“Love is the fulfilling of the law.” Rom 13:10

“Salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers.” Rom 13:11

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom 13:14

the BIG PICTURE		→ : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		→ : key covenants in our Father's plan	
12 Periods ▼	Plot ▼	Other books related to period ▼		stories in each period ▼	
BC	🌐 THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104	Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah's ark, Tower of Babel	
1850	👤 THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek	
1250	⚠️ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX		Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus	
1200	♣️ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua	
1100	👤 THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth	12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel	
1030	👤 KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov	Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple	
1000	👤 THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov,	Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile	
721 587	👤 BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar	Babylonians, "major" prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles)	
538	👤 THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job, Ecc, Songs	Cyrus, 2nd temple, 2nd Law, "minor" prophets, new writings	
163 63	👤 THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)	
AD	👤 JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection	
33 70	👤 APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv	Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ	



The Story of Part 32: Good Faith Works



Paul decided to write a letter to the Christian church in Rome before visiting them. Jewish converts to Christ were still trying to impose the Jewish Law on Gentile converts to Christ, and Paul decided to clarify that this was wrong. The distinction between a righteous and an unrighteous person was not whether they were Jews or Greeks, but whether they had faith in Christ. Jews had been hypocritically judging Greeks for practicing sinful lifestyles (sexual practices that deviated from natural sex between a man and a woman), while breaking the Jewish Law themselves. He pointed out that even Gentiles, in following their conscience, were adhering to God's law without knowing it. The point was clear: the law by itself did not make anyone righteous. Quoting Psalm 14, Paul applied the words "no one is righteous, not even one" not just to the "foolish unbelievers who ate God's people," but to the Jews themselves, who were supposed to be God's people to begin with! Sin, Paul explained, had spread to the whole human race through Adam's disobedience, and no one was exempt. That was the bad news. But now for the good news!

Just as all became unrighteous because of one man's disobedience, now all could become righteous because of another man's obedience. This man was the *second* Adam, Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross changed everything! Just as a woman whose husband died was no longer bound to him, so they could consider the written law dead, leaving them free to bind themselves to another. With sincere repentance, Paul found that the best efforts could not keep all the laws ("In my spirit I love God's law, but in my flesh I do what I hate"). But now, instead of being condemned by the law, God would accept the death of Christ as atonement, so that the sinner could be rescued from their "body of death"! In this way grace could not be seen as anything man deserved, but a completely free gift from God. This did not mean they didn't have to try ("Be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord"). But now they could live with the peace of God's *children*, calling him "Abba! Father!" Nothing could separate them from the love of God!

And now that the law was based on faith, the people of God was opened to the Gentiles. Abraham was the father of God's people not by blood, but by faith. As prophesied by Isaiah and Hosea, God would redeem the Gentiles and a remnant of the Jews. The new covenant was now fulfilled, not by bloodline and circumcision, but by Jesus' blood and baptism, by which we bury ourselves with Christ, with the hope that one day we will be raised like him. "I imagine," Paul says, "that our present sufferings will be nothing compared to that day!" And so, what started out as something that seemed unfair (inherited original sin) turns into something that seems too good to be true (God's free gift of salvation through Christ). "In hope we were saved."

Before ending his letter, Paul reminded them that as members of Christ's body, the Church, they were to love one another, suffering and rejoicing together. They were also to respect civil authorities and pay their taxes.

The letter to the Romans is probably the single most comprehensive treatise on Christian theology in existence. It is so influential that it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that a Church can be identified by its interpretation of this letter! Three doctrines contained within have been interpreted differently: the reach of original sin, the assertion (or denial) of free will in light of predestination, and the role of faith versus good works in salvation.

Because Paul quotes Psalm 14 in which God could find no one good, some Christians are at odds with the Church teaching of the Immaculate Conception (that Mary was exempt from original sin), and her subsequent assumption into heaven. But read in its entirety, Psalm 14 contrasts *evildoers* (among whom none are righteous) with a company of *righteous*, which Paul explains is now only a remnant of Israel who would be redeemed. Paul also speaks of glory, honor, and peace for "those who do *good*, Jewish and also Greek." His point is that because of sin, there was no longer any distinction between Jew and Greek, and that, thanks to Christ, there was again no distinction. The Bible mentions several examples of righteous people who walked by grace (Noah, Abraham, Enoch and Elijah – the last two even assumed into heaven). Mary was another, exempt from sin not by her own efforts, but by the anticipated merits of her son.

As for predestination, Paul seems to suggest that God forces people to sin (like when he "hardened the hearts" of the Pharaoh, the Jews, and the pagans) in order to bring people to Christ. This led some of the reformers to reject free will, suggesting that God predestines people to heaven or hell. But God "hardening" someone's heart is a literary way of saying that he allowed (not *excused*) the sin, with a higher purpose in mind. They still had free will. Thus Paul warns the Gentiles that if they become boastful, God can break them off as easily as he grafted them into his people! He also tells the Jews that they can still believe and be a part of God's promise.

As for faith and good works, Paul differentiates the *process* of salvation (Rom 13:11) from justification, by which a sinner receives God's gracious mercy, received by faith, not works of the law. But Paul does not teach justification by faith *alone*, for real faith is never alone, which is why he opens and closes his letter to the Romans appealing to the *obedience* of faith in Christ. In all of the debates about faith and good works, one thing is usually always agreed upon: good faith does work. 📖



Defending the Faith: Predestination & Free Will

“Romans teaches predestination (8:28-30), that our wills are totally depraved (7:14-24), that God gives irresistible grace to some but not to others (9:15-24), and that once saved, always saved (8:35-39).”

According to this view, those who go to hell have not been given God’s irresistible (in the literal, not loving sense) grace and therefore have been predestined to hell. This denial of free will can only be drawn from isolated passages taken out of context, for the Bible also clearly states that it is possible to receive grace in vain (2 Cor 6:1), fall from grace (Gal 5:4), forfeit grace (Heb 12:15), and even insult grace (Heb 10:29).

When Paul says that the Jews (and the Pharaoh) had their hearts “hardened” by God, or that they were “made for destruction,” he is not suggesting predestination to hell. He is saying, “So what if God brought those who would reject him to their own destruction for the sake of those who accept him?” (Rom 9:22) We know this because Paul already said that when the wicked did not see fit to acknowledge God, God subsequently gave them up to their passions and warped minds (Rom 1:24 ff). He also explains that “wrath of God” is just a *human* way (Rom 3:5) of describing how God is perfectly just in using the injustice of some to show mercy to others (Rom 11:33). And who are we to question God for doing this in the first place (Rom 9:20)?

But doesn’t an all-knowing God who knows someone’s choice before they make it mean they’re forced? No, because knowledge does not produce an event. An event produces knowledge. As the Catechism states, “To God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy. When therefore he establishes his eternal plan of predestination, he includes in it each person’s free response to his grace” (CCC 600). This is perfectly in keeping with the Bible, where Paul states that “all

things work together for good for those who love God” (Rom 8:28), which he then follows up with the mystery of predestination.

But didn’t Paul describe elsewhere how he felt sin inside him making him act against his own will (Rom 7:14 ff)? Yes, but while his *flesh* rebelled, his *will* did not. When someone’s *will* is opposed to God, and the sin is committed intentionally, it is a mortal sin, (see 1 John 5:16) which, if unrepented, would lose salvation. But the sin Paul experiences is not mortal, because it is not willed. Such venial sins should make us humbly grateful that we are saved not by our efforts, nor by our free but wounded will, but by God’s gracious mercy (Rom 9:16).

Should we then relax about sin, since grace saves us? See Romans 6:1 for Paul’s predictable answer! And if anyone feels tempted to blame God for sins: “Do not say, ‘It was the Lord’s doing that I fell away’. It was he who created mankind from the beginning, and he left them in the power of their own free choice.” (Sir 15:11-17) “No one, when tempted, should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’... God tempts no one” (Jam 1:13).

Luther, Calvin, and others earnestly denied free will possibly because they found the suggestion that man has a say in his destiny as an impingement on God’s sovereignty. But free will actually *manifests* God’s sovereignty – the fact that He can create creatures free to love him back or not. God only hardens the heart of those who reject his grace. Thus the Psalmist can say, “If today you hear his voice, *harden not your hearts!*” (Ps 95)



Expressing the Faith: Friend in You

If we choose not to harden our hearts but to let them break in two, the Healer takes up residence there.

*Life has got you down,
And there’s nothing anyone can do to turn it around.
You wanted to be free but all you got was misery.*

**Life don’t love you when you’re holding on
after you’ve let go
So what’s it matter who you are or what you do?
Baby, I know you want to end it all,
But please, before you do,*

***My friend, I know what you’ve gone through
But Jesus died for you
So keep in mind that although your heart is blue
Let it break in two, and you will find
A friend that lives in you.***

*Anything you want to know
Your heavenly Father gives you things you need
To help you to grow
When you feel you can’t go on no more
Just wait for him to open the door
And he’ll be with you when you’re riding high,
And even when you’re down,
So what’s it matter what you gain or what you lose?
Soon you’ll learn that a gift from God
Is an offer you can’t refuse
(chorus)*

**
(chorus) ... You’ll find a friend that lives in you.*

↗ **Next time: “The Love Letter”** ↖