

**THE LETTER OF PAUL
TO THE ROMANS
June 6, 2018**

Main Theme of the Letter – The Righteousness of God

Paul is clearly making Jesus the lens through which one may see the saving plan of God.

Chapters 1- 4

The God of Israel has been true to the covenant established with Abraham.
In the face of a sinful world God saved both Jew and Gentile.
The covenant is a sign of the faithfulness of God through Christ.

Chapters 5-8

The covenant addresses and resolves the sin of Adam.
In the Messiah God has done for all people what was done for the Israelites.
Led through the wilderness (and out of Egypt) they were brought to the present life by the Spirit.
Through Christ God made the whole world right once more.
His covenant love for us is expressed clearly through the death of Christ.

Chapters 9-11

The fall of Israel is the means by which salvation is extended to the whole world.
Paul (a Jew) is an example of one who can still participate in the covenant blessing.
God desires that more of the Jewish community will come to share in the new covenant.
Gentile Christians are warned against anti-Jewish arrogance.

Chapters 12-16

The new community must live as the true and renewed humanity (internally and externally).
It must reflect the intention that Jews and Gentiles are to come together as one worshipping body.
The greetings to different groups in the Roman church indicate this desire.

Historical Occasion for Romans

We do not learn its purpose until 11:11-32 and 15:7-13.

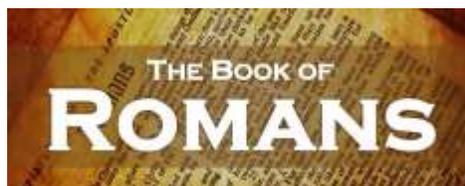
In Chapter 11 – Addresses Christian Gentiles who are facing non-Christian Jews.

In Chapter 15 – Addresses a community in which Christian Gentiles and Christian Jews find themselves in uneasy coexistence.

A large portion of Rome's substantial Jewish population had to leave the city in the late 40s.

The expulsion edict came from Emperor Claudius.

Upon his death in 54, Emperor Nero rescinded his decrees and the expelled Jews returned.



Chapter 1

Called – Paul introduces himself in terms of his vocation (in terms of the gospel).

He is a servant of Jesus Christ.

He is called to be an apostle.

His *call* is the moment when the gospel message first made its saving impact on him.

He is set apart for the gospel of God.

Gospel of God is at the heart of his self-definition and self-understanding.

Through the lens of the gospel the covenant plan and purpose of God have been revealed.

The gospel is the announcement about Jesus, the Messiah, and the Son of God.

It is clear that through Jesus Christ we receive the grace of God.

The gospel also brings about obedience of faith among the Gentiles.

Paul wants to be with them so he can share spiritual gifts with them (to strengthen them).

He also would benefit from being in their presence so they could mutually encourage each other.

He is eager to proclaim the gospel to them (and is not ashamed of its message).

In it the righteousness of God is revealed (through faith) (for faith).

Caesar was the current ruler of the world.

His position was challenged by the Jewish Messiah.

Paul comes to Rome with the gospel of Jesus to announce someone else's authority.

Paul is determined not to shrink from this calling.

The gospel message opens the eyes of people to see what God has been up to all along.

It enables Jews to see how the promises they had cherished have been fulfilled.

It enables Gentiles to see that there is one true God, the God of Israel, and the Creator.

When the actions of God are unveiled it is because God is faithful to what he has promised.

When it is received, it is received by human faith that answers to the revelation of God in Christ.

The obedience which exists in faith –

Obedience is a more prominent theme in Romans than elsewhere in the New Testament.

Obedience in Greek is a compound word from the verb – to hear.

To bring the nations into obedience would mean to bring them into the family of God.

The obedience Paul seeks (when he announces the gospel) is not good works but faith.

Faith is the human response to the faithfulness of God.

Truth – the wicked suppress the truth. They know God but they do not honor him or offer their prayers of thanksgiving to him. When they claim to be wise they become fools. They exchange the truth for lies when they worship and serve idols. Human life becomes fractured.

Thoughts on 1:26-27 and 1:28-32

As just noted, there are those who have exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

People worshiped other gods and did not acknowledge God as their Creator.

Paul develops a healthy list of behaviors that are called into question:

Sexual acts are condemned within the context of idol worship

Envy and strife and deceit and gossiping and being boastful (to name just a few)

Between the resurrection and the final judgment the world lives before the gaze of the judge.

The appropriate response would have been to worship God alone and offer our thanksgiving. Instead, human thought became futile and foolish and human hearts became darkened. Paul asserts that humans have an innate awareness that certain behaviors are dehumanizing. Those who behave in these ways are destroying themselves (and know it). They not only do these things but they also applaud those who practice them.

Chapter 2

We are all condemned.

The judgment of God (when it arrives) will leave all without an excuse.

When we judge others → we judge ourselves.

But Paul assures us that there will not be tribulation and wrath for all wrongdoers.

There will be eternal life for all who seek to do the right things in the right way.

One group works evil and the other does what is good.

God will judge Jew and Gentile alike (with complete impartiality).

The Gentiles may not have heard the Torah but the law was written on their hearts.

On the Day of Judgment God will judge the secrets of human hearts.

Nothing will escape scrutiny but (do not fear) God will be just.

This judgment will take place through the lens of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Jews cannot hide from the judgment by pleading their Jewish heritage.

The ethnic boast of the Jew is called into question by Paul.

He does not for a moment reject the specialness of Israel.

He simply questions whether those making the claim may have forfeited the right to do so.

The Torah was meant to be obeyed and not merely listened to (it is not a badge of privilege).

No human can hide from the judgment by relying on outward appearances.

Possession of the Torah enables the Jew to know the will of God (therefore no excuses).

It determines what is best to make moral judgments.

Instruction in the Torah enables the Jew to see to the heart of moral issues.

Given their possession of this knowledge, Paul wants to know what they have done with it.

The real problem is that Israel failed to bring God honor.

That was the purpose for which the Torah had been given.

Instead of honor, Israel brought dishonor to God.

Israel was not living up to what the Lord desired.

Their exile was still continuing in a theological, spiritual, and moral sense.

Circumcision is of value for one who keeps the Torah.

Circumcision means nothing for those who break the law (same is true of baptism).

Real circumcision is a matter of the heart.

Paul introduces those who (though uncircumcised) obey the Torah.

He states that their uncircumcision will count as circumcision.

Israel has failed to be the covenant people of the creator God.

Chapter 3

So what is the advantage for the Jew?

The failure of Israel put God in an awkward position (they were entrusted with his oracles). It called into question the point of being Jewish in the first place.

His basic answer was that the faithlessness of Israel could not nullify the faithfulness of God. The word for faith (pistis) is used for the first time in Romans 3 since 1:17. Faith encompasses trustworthiness and loyalty as well as trust and belief.

Paul now needs to emphasize that the Jews must be seen alongside the Gentiles.

We are all accountable to God.

We are all under the power of sin.

We are all under the law which silences us.

It is through the law that we come to have knowledge of sin.

Apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed.

It was attested to by the law and prophets

It is confirmed through faith in Jesus Christ → for all who believe

We are justified by his grace (as a gift)

God made Jesus a sacrifice of atonement (Leviticus 16:15-22)

Boasting is excluded by the law of faith.

The surface meaning of the chapter is that all who are under the law are condemned as sinners.

The subtext is stating – Yes, and in precisely this situation God will act.

Justify and justification belong to the same root word as righteous and righteousness.

Again Paul emphasizes that to claim that one's possession of Torah is sufficient will not do.

The Torah will simply remind you that you are a sinner like the Gentiles.

The works that demonstrated covenant relationship included –

The Sabbath, the food laws, and circumcision

Paul emphasizes the newness of the good news.

He stresses that this revelation has taken place apart from the Torah.

The revelation is witnessed to by the Torah and the Prophets.

The long-awaited faithfulness of God has been newly disclosed in the events of Jesus Christ.

What happened in the Messiah is the gift of God's grace which God initiated.

Redemption also happened in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

God is both just and the justifier.

The righteousness of God is revealed in God's giving of Jesus as the faithful Israelite.

The faithfulness of Jesus is demonstrated by his faithfulness unto death.

The self-giving faithfulness to death was the act of God to turn away the divine wrath.

This is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel events of Jesus' death and resurrection.

God has been true to the covenant and has dealt properly with sin.

God has come to the rescue of the helpless.

God has done so with impartiality towards Jews and Gentiles.

For Paul, works have to do with achievement.
Faith is the abandoning of one's efforts and then putting trust in God instead.
His whole thought is centered on the free grace of God.

On the one hand there is the Torah of works – that which defines Israel over against the nations.
The new category is the Torah of faith – indicates where the true people of God are to be found.
What now marks the covenant people of God is the law of faith alone.
If justification were through works of the Torah then God would be only for the Jews.
The faithfulness of God can only be fulfilled through the creation of a Jew-plus-Gentile family.
Paul quotes the fundamental Jewish confession of faith – the Shema.

Deuteronomy 6:4

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.

Conclusion: God will justify circumcised and uncircumcised alike on the basis of faith.
In this new covenant dispensation, the Torah is in fact fulfilled.

June 13 (Session 2)

Romans 4-6