Romans

A Study Guide

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L1 - Romans - Introduction

The occasion: Near the end of his 3rd missionary journey, Paul is in Greece, planning to proceed to Jerusalem (Rom 15:22-29). As mentioned in 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9, he will deliver money donated for the church in Jerusalem. See also Acts 20:3-6 and 2 Cor 13:1, 10. He was probably in Corinth when he wrote this letter, about 57 AD.

The church at Rome was most probably founded by Jewish converts to Christ, returning from Jerusalem after Pentecost. The church would have originally been primarily Jewish, meeting in synagogues. About 49 AD, the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because “they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus” – referring probably to disputes between Jews and Christians as to whether Jesus was the Messiah. See Acts 18:2 regarding the expulsion of Aquila and Priscilla. The likely consequence would be a major shift in the church membership to become primarily a Gentile church, meeting in their homes. Soon after Claudius’ death, in 54 AD, some of the Jewish Christians returned (e.g. Aquila and Priscilla, as seen in Romans 16:3). There were consequently tensions and disputes between the Gentile majority and these returning Jews.

Major Issue: Relations between Jews and Gentiles, such as indicated in Romans 14:1 - 15:13, where Paul talks about dietary rules, observance of special days, and accepting, rather than judging, one another. Also see Romans 16:17-18, regarding those who cause dissensions.

Theme: The gospel (Rom 1:1, 9, 15-17; 15:15-16, 20-21), and its equal application to Jew and Gentile as one people.

Outline:

1. Opening and Theme Statement [1:1-15]
2. Doctrine [1:16 – 11:36]
   1. Faithfulness of God [1:16 – 4:25]
   2. God’s People in Christ [5:1 – 8:39]
   3. God’s Promises [9:1 – 11:36]
3. Christian Conduct: God’s Calling [12:1-15:13]
4. Closing [15:14 – 16:27]

References

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**The Opening --** **Romans 1:1-15**

Romans 1:1-7 is in the “standard” form for the beginning of a letter: identifying the author and the recipient, and stating a greeting. What is non-standard here is the exceptional length: seven verses, all in one sentence.

1:1 -- Paul identifies himself as

1. a bond-servant of Christ Jesus
2. an apostle

The term “bond-servant”, or “slave”, is taken from OT usage, where e.g. Moses, Joshua, Elijah and David are often referred to as “servants” of Yahweh. It indicates complete and absolute devotion to the one being served. In an equivalent manner, Paul is a “servant” of Christ Jesus.

Secondly, he has been called as an “apostle” – i.e. one who has been especially sent out on a mission. It is this commission that establishes his authority in the church, giving him both the right and the duty to address and instruct the churches. This applies particularly to the church at Rome, since it had not been established by one of the apostles. It was therefore appropriate for him to write to them, and for them to take heed.

He further defines his apostolic calling as being “set apart for the gospel of God”. The gospel, meaning literally “good news”, encompasses all that has been newly revealed in and through Jesus Christ. The proclamation of the gospel began with Jesus’ public ministry (see especially Luke 4:18), and was continued by the apostles. In Jesus’ early preaching it pertained to the arrival of the Kingdom of God/Heaven; but it was later realized that the central manifestation of the Kingdom, and the central content of the gospel, is in the cross and the resurrection. The good news is that Christ crucified and resurrected fulfills all the promised blessings of the Kingdom, and ushers in a new age, a new covenant, a new creation. All things are made new.

This gospel is the over-arching theme of the letter to the Romans. We may even describe the book of Romans as the “Gospel according to Paul”. The Gospel according to Mark, generally considered the first of the four gospels, was probably written for the church at Rome shortly after they had received this letter from Paul. Mark introduces his book as “The beginning of the gospel …” It may be thought of as a follow-on to Paul’s letter, serving as a kind of prequel. Mark’s beginning-gospel serves as the historical background for Paul’s gospel. Taken together, they provide a complete account: the works and sayings of Jesus, the events of the cross and resurrection, plus the doctrinal explanations from Paul. Mark tells us what Jesus did, Paul tells us what it means.

1:2 -- This gospel furthermore fulfills the promises of scripture (1:2). Paul frequently connects the gospel with OT scripture, as do all the NT writers. This establishes the continuity with the Old Covenant. The new replaces and supersedes the old, but not in the sense of contradicting or destroying, but by confirming and fulfilling. This is as Jesus had taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-20).

L2 - The Opening, continued -- Romans 1:1-15

Romans 1:3,4 -- The gospel concerns, or is about, His Son – i.e. the Son of God. Paul speaks of Him as being born, as a descendant of David (i.e. the Messiah), concerning (or according to) the flesh; and He was appointed the Son of God, in the resurrection, concerning (or according to) the Spirit. In Jesus’ earthly life, He had emptied Himself, He became flesh (John 1:14), living in solidarity with mankind, sharing our burden of corruptible flesh. This is an important and essential part of who He is, but it is only part of the story. He also, in the resurrection, and by the Spirit, manifests the full power and glory of the Son of God.

1:4 -- Most English translations say He was “***declared*** the Son of God…”. The word translated here as “declared” is *horizo*. Everywhere else in the New Testament *horizo* means to determine, appoint, decree or constitute. This idea of appointment is more than just a statement of fact. It is effectual in giving actual power and authority to the appointee. This is consistent with the doctrine expressed in Acts 13:33 – *“… He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘You are My Son; today I have begotten You.’”* This references Psalm 2:7, where the Lord issues a decree to install David as King. See also the reference to this Psalm in Hebrews 1:5; 5:5-6. In Hebrews 1:4-5, it is said that He inherited a more excellent name, indicating an appointment. Similarly, in Hebrews 5:5-10, the Psalm 2:7 quote is paralleled with the Psalm 110:4 quote of His appointment to be High Priest. And His designation as High Priest is then explained to be as a result of His obedience.

If we then accept that He was **appointed** as Son of God, then the resurrection not only reveals or declares that He is the Son of God, but it also conveys to Him the full power of the Son of God, having achieved victory over death, just as the appointment of a king gives him the power to reign. We see in the Gospels several previous occasions where He was revealed as the Son of God. But, because of the resurrection, He now reigns as the Son of God. He has been exalted (Phil 2:9-11), and He henceforth has all power and authority, in heaven and on earth.

He was appointed as Son of God “by the resurrection from the dead…”, according to NASB. The preposition translated as ‘by” is *ek*, generally indicating a causal relation. It was because of the resurrection…. The phrase “from the dead” is the word “*nekron*”, which is a genitive plural, which should be translated “of the dead” (plural). It is not referring only to the resurrection of Jesus, but rather to the general resurrection of all who belong to Him. This is consistent with the statement in Rom 4:25 – “He was raised because of our justification”, and also in 1 Cor 15:16 –“if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised”. It is therefore more accurate to say that He was appointed to be the Son of God as a result of the resurrection of the dead, i.e. our resurrection.

In order to better understand this rather amazing statement, we should consider two basic doctrines of the Christian faith:

1. The close bond of unity between Christ and His people
2. The work of the Spirit, in eternity, to establish relationships that transcend time.

Therefore (as in Romans 6:3-5; Gal 2:20; Phil 3:10), His death and our deaths, His resurrection and our resurrection, His glorification and our glorification are eternally linked in interdependency. It is because of our unity, in the realm of the eternal, that one can say He was raised because of our justification (Rom 4:25) and that He was glorified because of our resurrection (Rom 1:4).

1:5-6 -- Paul received the grace (favor) of apostleship, to bring “obedience of faith”. His mission is to result in both obedience and faith, inter-related and interdependent. Faith is not a one-time event. It must be maintained, as a continuing faithfulness, which is manifested in obedience. Paul’s task of bringing people to faith is therefore not complete until it produces also the fruit of obedience.

His mission is also particularly to “all the Gentiles”, which gives him the right and the duty to reach out to the Romans (“among whom you also are…”). And, it is all “for His name’s sake”. Proclaiming the gospel exalts the name of Jesus the Christ, revealing to the world who He really is, His true character and significance, the full meaning of His name.

1:7 -- The letter is addressed to the “beloved of God”, “called as saints”. They are special before God, called out to be His own chosen people, consecrated for His purpose. This hints at the theme to be developed later, that these Gentiles, in Christ, have the same standing and status as the children of Abraham had under the old covenant.

1:8-9 -- A prayer for the recipient is a common feature of letters of that time, and it is certainly found in most of Paul’s letters. He is thankful for them, and mentions them “unceasingly”, which means frequently and regularly.

1:10-13 -- In particular, Paul has desired to visit them, so that he can “impart some spiritual gift”. This is not meant to refer to a special “gift of the Spirit”, but rather to a more general spiritual edification and blessing that can help to strengthen them and build them up. He then clarifies that the benefits and edification would be mutual – that he would also receive encouragement from them. This mutuality of blessing is always the case in ministry, but Paul probably wants to emphasize it in this situation in order to make them more receptive to him. Since this was a church that he had not established, he is more cautious than usual in asserting authority. He then explains that he had often wanted to visit them but had been prevented. This may be a kind of apology, in that some of the Roman Christians may have felt that he should have already visited them by now.

1:14-15 -- Paul is under obligation to all (Greek & barbarian, wise & foolish), so he is therefore also eager to preach the gospel at Rome. That is, he has a duty to teach and exhort, to further build them up, in line with verse 11. Preaching the gospel is not restricted to the initial phase of evangelism (conversion and church-planting), but also encompasses the continuing establishment and edification of churches.

L3 - Revelation of Righteousness -- Romans 1:16-32

1:16 - 17 -- Here are four subordinate clauses that provide the rationale – the logical chain -- for Paul’s obligation to preach the gospel (of verse 14):

1) because he is not ashamed of the gospel, which is

2) because it has the power of salvation, because

3) it reveals God’s righteousness, which is confirmed by

4) scriptural text of Habakkuk 2:4.

These verses present the main points that will be made regarding the gospel, which is the primary theme of the letter. It asserts that the gospel has saving power, because it reveals God’s righteousness. The negative form of the statement, “not ashamed…”, is probably due to the frequent negative response of those who hear, as indicated in 1 Cor 1:18, 23 (foolishness to Gentiles and a stumbling block to Jews). Similar barriers to receiving the gospel today are scientism (making natural science into a “religion”) and political agendas.

“Salvation” refers most generally to deliverance from all evil. In the present, we have a partial experience of salvation, but ultimately, in the resurrection and the new creation, it will be a total salvation. The full gospel message pertains to the eventual consummation of all things in Christ, in the new creation. The gospel has the power to bring us in as participants, incorporating us into the kingdom, and the power to bring it to fulfillment. The basis for receiving this deliverance is “belief”, a criterion applicable equally to Jew and Gentile, without distinction. This is a major theme of the letter, addressing one of the biggest issues faced by the church at Rome.

The “righteousness of God is revealed …”. The word for righteousness is “*dikaiosyne*”, and the related verb form is “*dikaiosoo*”, which is usually translated as “justify”. In the Greek world, ithad mainly a legal meaning, of being “right” or “just” before the law. It is used of a judge who judges fairly and in accordance with the law; and it is used of a criminal defendant who is acquitted, declared to be “not guilty”, before the law. Similarly, the verb form means to legally acquit. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament in use during the first century (the LXX), it is most often used to describe God’s covenant faithfulness; and that would be the best way to interpret “righteousness” here in Romans 1:17. This is not a righteousness from God, as in the NIV translation, but is rather the covenant-faithfulness-righteousness of God.

It is in accordance with scriptural prophecy that God’s righteousness would be revealed [Psalm 72:1-4; 85:8-13; Mic 7:9; Isa 46:13; 51:4-8; 61:10-11]. It pertains to His faithfulness not only towards the covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:5,6,18; 17:1-8; 22:15-19), but also the implied covenant between the Creator and all creation, from the beginning. The righteousness of the Creator is revealed when all the promise and potential attending the “goodness” of creation, the joy of life, and the image of God in mankind, will ultimately be fulfilled. The act of creation itself constitutes a covenant with the creation that it’s intended purpose shall be realized, that the work He began will be completed. God’s righteousness is His being true to Himself; and it is of supreme importance to us that this be the case, and that it be revealed to us.

The word “revealed” is “*apokalupto*”, meaning to uncover; it is the same as in John’s book of the apocalypse, or revelation, of Jesus Christ. It is a lifting of the veil, to reveal the deeper meaning of things, in light of their eschatological (end times) fulfillment. This is not just a revelation in words, but it is actually a present manifestation and historical actualization of God’s eternal purpose. It is an invasion of the kingdom, presenting a glimpse of the future perfected kingdom – a partial experience of the new creation within the existing age. See e.g. Luke 17:21; Acts 2:16-21; Rom 8:16; 2 Cor 1:22.

The revelation of this faithfulness occurs “from faith to faith”. The word for faith, *pistis*, is oftentimes best understood as “faithfulness”, the continuing exercise of faith as a way of life. Both here and in a similar phrase in Romans 3:22, it most likely has this meaning. The originating faithfulness is that of Christ crucified. Jesus’ faithfulness was validated by the resurrection, and so is the covenant faithfulness of God the Father. In the cross and the resurrection, the Father glorified the Son, and the Son glorified the Father. His revealed faithfulness then leads us into our own faithful response, which completes the fulfillment of God’s righteousness. Also, the preposition “to” is a translation of “*eis*”, which most often has a sense of moving into something. So a more clear translation of “from faith to faith” is “from faithfulness into faithfulness”. This revelation of righteousness proceeds from the faithfulness of Christ into our own faithfulness.

“The righteous shall live by faith” -- this is quoted from Habakkuk 2:4 --

“Behold, as for **the proud one**, his soul is not right within him;

But the righteous will **live by faith**.

In this structure (antithetical parallelism) “live by faith” is opposed to “the proud one”. In the preceding context of Habakkuk, we see that the proud ones are the Chaldeans, and their character is summarized in Hab 1:11 -- “They whose strength is their god”. So living-by-faith is the humble reliance upon the true God, as opposed to the prideful and idolatrous reliance upon one’s own strength. This is consistent with the later teaching in Romans 4, that in the way of works, there is cause for boasting, versus the way of faith, wherein there is no boasting.

When the word righteous (“*dikaiosyne*”) is applied to people, within the Old Testament context of covenant, it refers to the people who are in covenant relationship with God, having the legal status and standing of being included among the people of God. Those who hold this status of “righteousness” before God, the status of being “His people”, are characterized by a humble trust and reliance upon Him, which is the nature of faith and faithfulness.

In the Habakkuk passage, the context is the announcement of judgment against Judah and the Chaldeans. They shall be utterly destroyed. The promise that the righteous will **live**, by faith/faithfulness, is therefore speaking about their deliverance from this judgment. It speaks of their salvation from the coming wrath of God. It is therefore proper to assign a similar meaning in the Roman letter. The righteous (those belonging to God’s covenant-people) will be saved (delivered from God’s wrath), by their faithfulness. This is thus a natural lead-in to the next section, on the revelation of wrath.

1:18-28 -- The remainder of the first chapter expounds on the wrath and judgment from which God’s people (the righteous) must be saved. The gospel revelation of God’s righteousness is not complete without a revelation of His wrath against unrighteousness. The essence of evil is its opposition to God’s purpose as Creator and Redeemer. It is therefore only in the destruction of evil that God’s righteousness is revealed. A God who never judges evil would not be righteous, nor would He be the savior of His people. Furthermore, an understanding of judgment is a necessary prelude to the later discussion of salvation. A proper understanding of the Gospel of salvation requires a prior understanding of what we are to be saved from: i.e. both the evils of unrighteousness, and the righteous judgment that will ultimately destroy all evil. As a side note, we must above all understand that God’s wrath is not in opposition to His love. God is love, all that he does is because of love, and His wrath, especially, is an act of love.

His wrath is justified, in verses 18-23, in that it is a response to willful sins, committed by all of humanity. They are sins of disobedience and rebellion against a knowledge that all mankind has at their disposal. Paul consistently maintains that this is the category of sin that brings condemnation (not sins of ignorance or accident). Those who do not have access to any special revelation, through prophecy, nevertheless have available to them the general revelation through the natural creation. See e.g. Psalm 19:1-6. They are not condemned by ignorance, but by willful refusal to honor God and give thanks.

The first phase of the judgment is that when people reject knowledge, their thought processes become corrupted and perverted. It can be understood as a natural consequence: he who rejects clear thinking regarding God, will lose the capacity for clear thinking regarding all things. The more specific kind of foolishness, by which they manifest their rejection of God, is that they exchange His glory for the images of idolatry. This is a quote from Psalm 106:19-20, speaking of the Israelites at Sinai making and then worshiping a golden calf. People who reject God still worship, but their object of worship is the creature rather than the Creator.

1:24-31 -- This section presents three categories of rebellion against God, and three consequences (stated as God “giving them over…”). In verses 24 and 25, God gives them over to impure lusts, because they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. Sexual immorality and perversion, particularly, have been historically associated with and consequent to idolatry. Verses 26 and 27 present a more specific case of corruption. God gives them over to degrading (homosexual) passions, because they exchange natural sexuality – that which was the intent of creation -- for that which is contrary to the creative intent of nature. Sexuality is intended as the means by which life is fruitful and multiplies. Homosexual behavior is a defiant mockery of that intent. Verses 28-31 then present a much wider scope of sins committed by those who are given over to a depraved mind. This is the result of their refusal to acknowledge God. They don’t necessarily commit explicit idolatry, but they live as if there is no God, like the “fool” in Psalms 14:1 [“The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God’”].

1:32 -- This verse presents an even deeper level of willful depravity. When they give hearty approval to others who sin, it is not excusable as weakness or irresistible passion, but is rather a cool-headed (and cold-hearted) desire to promote evil.

L4 - Without Partiality -- Romans 2:1-29

2:1-2 -- This section (verses 1-7) is not meant particularly as a critique of the Christians at Rome; it is written in the style of a *diatribe*, addressed to an imaginary opponent, as a means of arguing a doctrinal point: namely that any who consider themselves superior to those described in 1:18-32 are nevertheless guilty of many of the same sins (particularly from the list in 1:29-31). The self-righteous condemn themselves, for they too are guilty, and deserving of judgment.

2:3-5 -- They should not misinterpret God’s patient forbearance. He is not hesitating due to uncertainty about judgment; He is rather providing opportunity to repent. This is the same warning as in 2 Peter 3:9. The same thought is expressed in Habakkuk 2:3, speaking of the coming judgment against the Chaldeans:

*“It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay.”*

These verses are also quoted in Hebrews 10:35-39, in an exhortation to perseverance in faith. His patience, allowing time to repent, does not imply any kind of uncertainty about ultimate judgment.

2:6-11 -- Verses 7-8 are parallel to verses 9-10. The former pertain to what people seek, and the latter to what they do. Both attitudes and deeds will determine their destiny. He will render to each according to deeds [Proverbs 24:12]. This is not a salvation by works, but it does mean that overall obedience is a definitive indicator of who belongs to God (status of righteousness). This is in keeping with Jesus’ teachings on judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). It is not a matter of living under the law, but of living in a relationship of obedience to God. It is the distinction between a life of serving Him versus the pursuit of selfish ambition. It is obedience to the law of love. And this standard applies equally to Jew and Gentile, without partiality. Note how Paul applied this standard to himself, in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 and 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

But there is a distinction in that both the judgment and the blessing are to the Jew first, then the Gentiles [compare Acts 3:25-26; 13:46-47]. This privileged status of the Jews does not mean they receive special consideration regarding personal salvation, but it does mean that they were entrusted with a special mission, with special responsibilities. They were called to be His Servant. For those who are faithful, this means an extra measure of glory and honor; for those who are not faithful, an extra measure of tribulation and distress [see Isaiah 42:6-7; 49:6; Amos 3:2]. The stakes are higher for the Jews, because of what was entrusted to them. It is an example of the general principle that more is expected from those to whom more has been given (Luke 12:48). It was also appropriate that those who had received the promises would be the first notified of their fulfillment.

2:12-16 -- There are two reasons given here why Jews, although they possess the Law, have no special claim to salvation:

1) Salvation does not come merely from possessing the Law, but by obeying it.

2) The Gentiles, who do not by nature possess the law, nevertheless “have the law written in their hearts”.

The NIV translation has:

*“…when the Gentiles, who do not have the law, do* ***by nature*** *things required by the law,…”.*

An alternative translation, that corresponds more closely to the Greek, is:

*“…when the Gentiles, who do not* ***by nature*** *have the law, do the things of the law…”.*

The phrase “by nature” in verse 14 also occurs in Rom 2:27 -- “*He who* ***by nature*** *is uncircumcised…*”, and later in Rom 11:24 -- *“an olive tree that is wild* ***by nature****…”*. In both these instances, it is used to describe the heritage and ancestry of the Gentiles. It is likely to have a similar meaning here: that the Gentiles did not possess the law in accordance with their heritage and ancestry, in contrast to the Jews.

The Gentiles nevertheless have the “requirements of the Law” written in their hearts. Since having the Law “written in the heart” is a fulfillment of new covenant prophecy (Jere 31:33) and is a work of the out-poured Spirit (Ezek 36:26-27; Rom 8:1-17; 2 Cor 3:2-8), these Gentiles must be Christians.

Both Jews and Gentiles have access to law, by nature (heritage) or “in their hearts”, respectively. Both, however, are judged on the basis of obedience, not possession. Jews and Gentiles therefore have equal standing in regard to personal salvation.

2:17-24 -- Here, Paul addresses the Jewish people as a whole, describing their special status, and how they have been equipped for their special mission, in that they have the Law. Their “boasting in God” is a celebration and rejoicing in being chosen as His people. In itself, this is a good thing: rejoicing in their calling, as in Jeremiah 9:23-24. It corresponds to our “boasting in Christ” under the new covenant [Rom 15:17; Gal 6:14; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17].

However, as a people, the Jews had not lived up to the demands of their calling, and had failed in their mission. Even though most Jews as individuals had not committed the particular sins listed here, these were representative sins among the Jews that damaged their reputation and credibility as a people. It is similar to the approach in Rom 1:24-32, where the sins that are highlighted were not committed by all Gentiles, but they were representative of the general sinful state of the Gentiles. Instead of being a light to the world, by honoring God, the Jews had dishonored God through their disobedience. [Psalm 50:16-21; Jeremiah 7:8-11; Ezekiel 36:20-23; Amos 5:18-24]

2:25-29 -- Similarly, their circumcision was of no value, because of disobedience. The true mark of being one of God’s people is obedience, i.e. “circumcision of the heart”, not of the flesh. What is definitive is the inner reality rather than the outward signs. And this inner reality does not come about by being physically circumcised, nor by possessing the written Law, but by the indwelling Spirit. [Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4]. This accords with what Jesus taught regarding righteousness and the Law [Matt 5:20-48].

Paul further adds that those preoccupied with the outward signs of holiness (such as circumcision and works of the Law) are seeking approval from men, while the pure of heart seek approval from God.

L5 - All Humanity is Guilty -- Romans 3:1-31

3:1-8 -- The advantage of the Jews, primarily, was that they were “entrusted with the oracles of God”. It is a privilege and honor for a servant to be given such an important responsibility, and a joy to contribute to such a lofty purpose. The term “oracle” particularly conveys the idea of a message to the nations, to all peoples.

Does the disbelief and unfaithfulness of the Jews put an end to God’s plan? Will it prevent Him from faithfully accomplishing what He had promised to Abraham (blessings to all nations)? The answer is NO. God will accomplish His purpose, in spite of the failings of His chosen people.

God will, in fact, make use of the unfaithfulness of the Jews as a means to accomplish His purpose. Is God then unrighteous in judging Israel? By no means. Scripture has many examples of God using the unrighteous to accomplish His purposes: Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, even Judas Iscariot. But He is still just in executing wrath against these more-than-willing instruments of evil [e.g. Matthew 26:24].

3:9-18 -- Paul asks “Are we (the Jews) better than they (the Gentiles)”? The answer: “No, not at all”. This is a likely follow-up from Romans 2:1 – *“you who judge practice the same things”*. To say that all are “under sin” is much more than simply saying that all have committed sins. Paul is saying that we are enslaved to sin, where “sin” is personified as a master. He then quotes from Psalms and Isaiah [Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Isaiah 59:7f; and Psalm 36:1] to build the case that we are all under this bondage to sin. This section of quotes is bookended with parallel opening and closing lines, each beginning with the identical words “*ouk estin*” (there is not):

3:10 – “…There is none righteous, not even one;”

3:18 – “…There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

These are the summary statements that capsulize the main point of the section, while the intermediate quotes provide more specific supporting examples.

3:19-20 -- The Law (i.e. Torah) is applicable to those who are “in the law” (i.e. the Jews). And the consequence is that “every mouth is closed”. This expression refers to a defendant before a court of law, who has nothing to say in response to the accusations against him. He is manifestly guilty, and can only silently submit to the verdict.

The Law has no power to save, it only gives us a knowledge of sin. And this is more than just knowing or being convicted of particular sins. It is the more profound knowledge of utter sinfulness, a sickness in the heart, the bondage to sin noted in 3:9. Those who have been given the Law, and have been educated and trained in it all their lives, and yet stand accused as disobedient, cannot claim ignorance as an excuse. They discover for themselves that they are utterly corrupt, helplessly enslaved to the power of sin.

3:21-22 – This section (3:21-31) opens with “But now…”, indicating things have changed from the past to the present. It is a new era. “The righteousness of God is manifested”, as had been stated in 1:17, but explained more fully at this point. It is manifested “apart from the Law”, since it has been demonstrated that it could not be fulfilled or manifested through or in the Law. Instead, His righteousness is manifested in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

It should not be the NIV -- *“…righteousness* ***from*** *God through* ***faith in*** *Jesus Christ…”*.

It should rather be – *“… righteousness* ***of*** *God through the* ***faithfulness of*** *Jesus Christ…”*

As previously noted, the word for faith, *pistis*, can mean “faithfulness”; and that is the appropriate translation here. And the grammar indicates that it is faithfulness of Jesus Christ. God’s righteousness is revealed and manifested in the perfectly obedient faithfulness of Jesus Christ, especially on the cross.

His righteousness is manifested for all who believe, i.e. for the benefit of all who have faith in Him. This restates the same doctrine as was introduced in 1:17 – “from (His) faithfulness to (our) faith/faithfulness”.

There is a radical change and discontinuity between “in the Law” and “in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ”; but there is also an important continuity in that this gospel of salvation in Christ was witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. It is a new revelation, but it is consistent with the old covenant: it was foreseen by the scriptures of the old covenant, and it was from the beginning God’s intended means for fulfilling the Law, the Prophets, the covenant, and His promises.

3:23 -- In this context, the main point about the universality of sin is that both Jews and Gentiles are in the same situation: no distinction. Although usually translated as “all have sinned…”, the verb “sinned” is actually in the aorist tense, which would be better translated as “all sinned..”. It points to a definite one-time past event, which should probably be understood as the sin of Adam (i.e. the fall). We all sinned (in Adam), as is later discussed in Romans 5:12-19. But the second phrase, stating the consequence, is in the present tense: “…and are falling short of the glory of God”. We all continue to fall short of God’s glory, the image in which and for which we were created, until the day of resurrection and the new creation.

3:24 -- This is the first use of the verb form of “justify” (*dikaioo*). This pertains to a legal declaration of righteous, i.e. acquittal and forgiveness. It is re-emphasized that our justification is a gift, by grace (unmerited favor), and the concept of “redemption” is here introduced. This means that a price is paid, like a ransom, to deliver us and set us free. He has paid the price to set us free from enslavement to sin and the kingdom of darkness.

This recalls the exodus, Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage, which serves as the type for the redemption achieved in Christ crucified. Our redemption is initiated by God the Father, paid by both Father and Son, and received by the Father. It is a transaction totally within the triune Godhead amounting to a terribly costly payment, as a pure act of God’s love. It was certainly not a case of the Son trying to “win-over” an unwilling Father. It was the necessary means to deliver us, while maintaining God’s integrity, which is essential to maintaining the integrity of His creation. As we see from Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane, there was no other way. It was totally an act love by both the Father and the Son, as affirmed in John 3:16.

3:25-26 -- Paul here introduces the doctrine of propitiatory sacrifice. The word for “propitiation” is *hilasterion*, which had the general meaning of a sacrifice to appease the wrath of a god. But the more specific meaning relevant here comes from its use in the Greek OT (Septuagint) to refer to the “mercy seat”, or cover, of the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies. It was the place where the blood was applied each year on the day of atonement. Therefore, propitiation is the place of atonement and stands for atonement itself. The instructions for atonement are given in Leviticus 16:2-16, which is the type for the atonement in Christ on the cross. The point that it was a “public display” is in contrast to the old-covenant atonement, which was strictly private: no one but the high priest was permitted to enter the holy of holies.

The meaning of “atonement”, can be seen in the English parsing: “at-one-ment”, i.e. becoming re-united or reconciled to God. So “propitiation” is the place and the means for becoming reconciled to God. A more general meaning of propitiation is the appeasement of God’s wrath, by executing judgment on a substitutionary sacrificial victim. This further involves the “expiation” of sin, i.e. taking away or covering sins [as in Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 1:18; 38:17; 43:25]. As with redemption, it is by the initiative of the Father, as an act of pure love of both Father and Son for the world.

The propitiation was accomplished by shedding of blood [see Rom 5:9; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20; Hebrews 9:22]. This explains the crucifixion as Jesus’ being a substitute for us, to take away our sins, and thereby to reconcile us to God. It was not a case of the Son reconciling the Father to us, but rather the Father and Son reconciling us to Him [Rom 5:10-11; 2 Cor 5:18-19; Col 1:19-20]. It is the fulfillment of the suffering-servant Messiah:

*“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried…He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed….The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him….My Servant will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.” --* Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-11

As had been presented in Romans 1:18-32, the manifestation and execution of God’s wrath against all unrighteousness is a necessary aspect of His righteousness. This is accomplished by means of a sacrificial substitute, a propitiation. By the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus, justice is rendered against all unrighteousness, while at the same time we are saved both from sin and from God’s wrath (against sin). He is therefore both “ …just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”.

3:27-30 -- Two conclusions are drawn regarding this means of salvation:

1) there is nothing for us to boast about, since it is God’s work (Father and Son), not ours; 2) It applies equally to Jews and Gentiles, on the same terms (faith, not “works of Law”), because He is one God, of both Jews and Gentiles.

3:31 -- Paul continues to present a balanced attitude toward the Law. Faith does not nullify the Law, but it establishes, or fulfills the ultimate purpose of the Law. This accords with the statement in 3:21, that the gospel revelation is “witnessed by the Law and the Prophets”. This same point was made by Jesus: “…I did not come to abolish [the Law], but to fulfill.” [Matthew 5:17]

L6 - Family of Abraham - I -- Romans 4:1-8

4:1-8 -- Chapter 4 further explains the teachings presented in 3:27-30 by referring to the life and the faith of Abraham. An understanding of Abraham’s faith and consequent justification is crucial because it was to him that the promise was made that all peoples would be blessed through his “seed”. To understand who inherits the promise and how it is received, we need to understand how Abraham was justified, and who are his true descendants.

4:1 -- A strictly literal translation of this verse would be: *“What therefore shall we say to have found Abraham the forefather of us according to flesh.”* In an attempt to make this understandable, English translations have re-arranged it in various ways. The NIV, e.g.:

*“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?”*

The NASB retains “according to the flesh”, but provides about the same interpretation:

*“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?”*

A better translation, which fits better with the overall argument of Romans 3 and 4, has been proposed by some scholars (such as N. T. Wright):

*“What shall we say then? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?”*

A slight modification that seems to fit even more coherently into the immediate context:

*“What shall we say then? Have we found Abraham, our forefather, [to be justified] according to the flesh?”*

As Paul often does, he is presenting a false statement for consideration, in order to argue against it. All Christians, Jew and Gentile, are to consider Abraham as their forefather, in the figurative sense of following after him, so they may be the heirs of his promise. As “descendants” of Abraham, our means of justification before God should be the same as Abraham’s. The question Paul poses here is whether Abraham’s justification was “according to the flesh”.

The phrase “according to the flesh” pertains generally to the merely human: based on human will, plans, methods and effort. It is therefore at best inadequate, and at worst sinful. In Romans 1:4, Jesus is identified as son of David according to the flesh, which does not indicate sinfulness, but it does indicate that it is an inadequate description of Him. It is not the full story.

In Galatians 4:29, Ishmael is described as born “according to the flesh”, while Isaac was born “according to the Spirit”. The phrase in this context indicates the role of human will and effort, as opposed to the way of the Spirit, which is by faith. This example is used to explain the distinction between seeking justification by works of law or by faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 2:16). So there is a parallel:

According to the flesh versus the Spirit

By the works of law versus faith

The same interpretation is appropriate in Romans 4. The question of whether Abraham was justified “according to the flesh” is equivalent to asking whether he was justified “by works” -- also, whether Abraham’s true descendants are justified by works.

4:2 -- The next phrase parallels the preceding verse:

vs. 1 -- *“…Abraham, our forefather, [was justified] according to the flesh…”*

vs. 2 -- *“For if Abraham was justified by works…”*

This parallelism reveals the correspondence of “according to the flesh” to “by works”, consistent with Paul’s usage in Galatians.

Verse 2 then provides the next link in the chain of reasoning: if Abraham was justified by works, then he has something to boast about. And Paul says that is totally unacceptable (not before God). The premise here is that justification must be fully credited to the initiative and the grace of God, freely given. It cannot in any way be based on anything that we provide that could be a cause for boasting.

This is fundamental to the nature of God, and of man, and the concept of creation. God is love, everything He has done is from love, and we exist and have life and hope only because of Him and because of His love. This principle cannot be compromised by claiming that we can somehow bargain with God, or ever deserve or earn anything more that what He freely gives. This is the fundamental premise, and the necessary conclusion is that no creature can be justified by works, including Abraham.

4:3 -- Here is the scriptural support:

*“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”*,

quoted from Genesis 15:6. This is similar to the doctrine introduced in Rom 1:17, that “*the righteous shall live by faith”*. But here, with Abraham, the issue is not how the righteous shall live (or be saved from wrath), but how one enters into the state of righteousness -- i.e. how does one attain a right standing and relationship with God. The word translated as “believe” is “*pisteo*”, which has a much richer and deeper meaning than implied by “believe”. It is much more than intellectual assent or agreement to a proposition. It is much more than an assertion that “God said it and I believe it”.

The object of this belief/trust/faith is not just what God says, but it is God Himself. To believe, in this sense, is to enter into a relationship of trust, entrusting ourselves to Him. Grammatically, it would be more accurate to say: *“Abraham gave God his trust”*. In other places, the original language of scripture makes an even stronger statement of relational commitment. For example, in John 3:16, the phrase “*whoever believes in Him…”* should be more accurately translated as *“whoever believes into Him…”*. That means that belief moves us into Christ, to a relationship of being in Christ. This parallels the meaning of being *“baptized into Christ”* (Rom 6:3). Both belief and baptism are means of entering into Christ. This indicates how the scope and depth of meaning in the word “*pisteo*” surpasses what is implied by the translation “believe”.

This belief (giving God his trust) was credited, or reckoned as righteousness. The word for credit, or reckon, (*logizomai*) was a bookkeeping term, for entering a credit in an account book. It is an official recognition of an entitlement. In this case, it is the entitlement to be in a state of righteousness before God. The precise phrase is better translated: “reckoned for him into righteousness”. This is another example of how the translator’s attempt to avoid an awkward sounding English phrase obscures the meaning that is in the original. It was Abraham’s entrusting himself to God that allowed him to enter into this status of righteousness, or right-standing before God. In turn, it is that righteous standing that makes a real relationship with God possible and thereby all the blessings of life that flow from Him.

The gift of “righteousness” is a gift of relationship – the privilege of being admitted into God’s presence, as one of His people, as His child. Such a gift cannot be forced upon a person, it must be freely and willingly received. The willingness to receive any significant gift entails accepting a relationship of indebtedness and obligation. And when the gift is a relationship with God, it entails total dependence and submission. To freely and willingly accept this requires the highest level of trust. Belief is therefore not an arbitrarily imposed precondition. It is a necessary aspect of the act of freely receiving the gift.

An analogy would be an orphan who is old enough to give willing consent for adoption. If the orphan accepts such a valuable gift of relationship by prospective parents, it is by a profound act of faith. His acceptance of the gift indicates that he has placed his trust in the would-be parents. Similarly, when a woman accepts a marriage proposal, the acceptance of what is offered is an act of trust. In either of these cases, the offer is a free gift. It does not depend upon the recipient doing anything to “earn” the gift. And although faith/trust is required in order to freely accept the offer, and to enter into the relationship, that faith/trust is certainly not regarded as a kind of “work” that one could boast about. In the same way, accepting the free gift of justification requires that we willingly place our trust in God. But that faith, the trusting, can in no way be regarded as a “work”, or as anything we would boast about. To the contrary, it is the ultimate act of humility before God to accept His gift. And how can we boast about humility?

4:4-5 – Here is the summary explanation: for one who “works”, what is received is not a gift, but is due payment. But for one who believes, it is a gift. The state of righteousness is a relationship with God, which can only be that of a creature, who has nothing to offer, receiving everything from the Creator, as an unearned and undeserved gift. That is the only honest and real relationship a creature can have with the Creator.

4:6-8 -- Another example of reckoning (or crediting) righteousness, without works, is quoted from Psalm 32:1-2, where David speaks of the blessing of forgiveness of sin. Although Psalm 32 does not speak of “reckoning righteousness”, Paul considers this “not reckoning sin” in Psalm 32:2 as being essentially equivalent. The same word is used there for reckoning (or crediting, accounting) as is used throughout Romans regarding the reckoning of righteousness. Forgiveness of sin is the flip-side (the negative form of expression) for reckoning righteousness. They both amount to the same thing, for making us right with God – a legal and covenant status that gives us access to God, so that He can then work within us to transform and to save.

L7 - Family of Abraham-II -- Romans 4:9-25

4:9-12 -- Paul now addresses the issue of circumcision, pointing out that Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised. The circumcision was not a precondition of his justification, it was only a sign, or a seal, of his justification. The consequence of this is that he is spiritually the father of all who have faith, whether they are circumcised or not. Under the new covenant, faith is decisive, and circumcision is irrelevant.

As a side note, some Christians teach that since baptism is analogous to circumcision, it is therefore no more than a seal or sign of prior faith, as indicated in Rom 4:11. The comparison of baptism to circumcision is based on the following from Colossians:

*“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of your sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”* -- Col 2:11-12

The point of these verses in Colossians, however, is to compare baptism with a circumcision that is a *“putting off of your sinful nature, not..by the hands of men but…by Christ”.* That is a description of “circumcision of the heart”, not a physical circumcision. It is physical circumcision that Rom 4:9-12 addresses, and says is irrelevant. But circumcision “of the heart, by the Spirit…” is totally different, and is commended in Rom 2:29. One might compare the sprinkling of water on an infant with the circumcision of a Jewish infant – both are mere physical signs that point to a hoped for faith, but in themselves have no real value. But a baptism that is a voluntary act of real faith has all the significance and value of “circumcision of the heart”.

4:13-15 -- Here, we see that Law was not the basis of the promise, just as it was previously stated (Rom 4:6) that works are not the basis for crediting righteousness.

The promise of “inheriting the world” is inferred from Genesis 17:4 --

*“… you will be the father of a multitude of nations…”*

and Genesis 22:17-18 –

*“…your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed…”*

For God to faithfully uphold this promise, He could not later add new and different conditions that Abraham’s descendants must also observe the Law. That would mean that faith is no longer adequate, and it would break the promise.

Paul also points out that the Law, rather than being the means of justification, actually brings forth wrath, in that it leads us into willful violation. As he had said in 3:20, it gives us the knowledge of sin, and he later says that the Law causes transgression to increase (Rom 5:20; 7:7-13).

4:16-22 -- Verse 16 summarizes the main points of his argument. The promise is received by faith, in order that it be:

1. In accordance with grace (i.e. a free gift, which excludes boasting)
2. For all the descendants – many nations – not just those under the Law (the Jews)

The God in whom Abraham placed his trust is the One who

1. Gives life to the dead
2. Calls things that are not, as though they were

This is the content of Abraham’s faith, which was the kind of faith that enabled Abraham to accept the promise. Considering his age, and Sarah’s, it was a promise that could only be fulfilled by the God who gives life, and who gives absolute assurance of things that are yet to be (compare Hebrews 11:1, “assurance of things hoped for”). He hoped against hope – i.e. placing his hope in God, when there was no hope from this world for its fulfillment.

Furthermore, he did not waver, but became stronger in faith as the years passed. Hebrews 11:8-19 shows what this means by listing crucial acts of faith throughout his life. It is essential to faith that it persevere as faithfulness. And Abraham’s faithfulness was credited into righteousness.

4:23-25 -- This all occurred, and was written, for our sake. In this age, the promise is fulfilled in those who place their faith in the One who raised Jesus from the dead.

Paul then (verse 25) inserts a brief statement of the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection, which is the content of Christian faith:

1. He was delivered over because of our transgressions
2. He was raised because of our justification

The above is the NASB translation. The NIV translation has “for our sins” and “for our justification”. This is a possible, but ambiguous translation, in that “for” can be either “because of” or “for the sake of”. The Greek word, *dia*, has the same ambiguity: it can mean “for the sake of”, but more frequently means “because of”. The first phrase in verse 25 is best understood as “because of” our transgressions. It is a fulfillment of the suffering servant prophecy of Isaiah 53:4-5. As a substitutionary sacrifice, He took upon Himself our sins, and bore the penalty. He was delivered over, and died on the cross, because of our sins.

By parallelism, it would then be preferable to translate the second phrase as “raised because of our justification”. His resurrection proves that the sacrifice was accepted by God, and therefore effectual. It was a validation of Jesus’ faithful obedience, that He was indeed the Messiah and Son of God, and hence proves the basis for our justification.

But His resurrection might also be considered as the proof of our own actual and realized justification. His victory over sin and death was not a victory for Himself only, because He was not alone on the cross. It was a victory for all who would become united with Him, in His death [Rom 6:3-7] -- a victory over death for all of us, and hence proof that all who are in Him have in actuality been justified.

L8 - Peace and Hope -- Romans 5:1-11

5:1-2 -- *“…having been justified by faith, we have* ***peace*** *with God…”*

A consequence of justification, is that it brings “peace with God”. The word “peace”, in the New Testament, has the same richness of meaning as the Hebrew “shalom” in the Old Testament. It is not just the absence of strife, it is a comprehensive state of well-being and blessing. When the enmity between us and God is removed, it opens the doors to receive all His blessings. It recalls the Aaronic blessing:

*“The Lord bless you, and keep you;*

*The Lord make His face shine on you,*

*And be gracious to you;*

*The Lord lift up His countenance on you,*

*And give you peace”* -- Numbers 6:24-26

When He makes peace with us, He smiles upon us, meaning that we have His favor. The establishment of His peace is part of the gospel in the kingdom prophecies:

*“How lovely on the mountains*

*Are the feet of him who brings good news,*

*Who announces peace*

*And brings good news of happiness,*

*Who announces salvation,*

*And says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”* -- Isaiah 52:7

Paul alludes to this prophecy in Eph 6:15 -- *“shod your feet with the… gospel of peace…”* , and Luke records the announcement of peace at the birth of the Messiah:

*“Peace on Earth to men on whom His favor rests…”* -- Luke 2:14

It is in Jesus Christ that we have peace:

*“…in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”* -- John 16:33

This peace has three stages of development:

1. The objective relational status established in Christ, associated with justification.
2. The subjective experience of peace, as we allow Christ to reign within us, associated with sanctification. This experience grows with the assurance of hope.
3. The total realization of “peace on earth”, throughout the new creation, when Christ returns. This is the final realization of our hope.

The peace that is spoken of in Romans 5:1 is the first phase of the promised peace of God.

5:3-5 -- Hope arises from proven character; for that is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work within us. Developing character shows that we belong to God, that He is transforming us and making us into a new creation.  This establishes our personal experience of hope. Equivalent New Testament teachings are as follow:

*“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons….It produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”* -- Hebrews 12:7, 11

*“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its perfect results…”*—  James 1:2-4

*“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren…”* -- 1 John 3:14

*“We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him…”* -- 1 John 3:19

Our hope is based on both objective and subjective evidence:

1) Objective evidence, in the Gospel message, gives assurance of God’s righteousness, of Jesus as the Messiah, and of the resurrection. Hebrews 6:18-19 points to the promise to Abraham as the firm objective basis for our hope. Rom 5:5-9 emphasizes the role of God’s demonstrated love in giving us objective proof.

2) Subjective evidence gives a personalized hope — the assurance of being personally included among the heirs of promise. This is primarily based on His work within us, which is the subject of Rom 5:3-4 and the other verses listed above. The presence and the fruit of the Holy Spirit give us this evidence (Rom 8:9-11,14-17; Eph 1:13-14).

In verse 5 -- *“the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy*

*Spirit…”* -- Paul is speaking of God’s own love for us, which the Holy Spirit reveals to us, and convinces us of. By the Holy Spirit we know that God loves us, by what He has done through Christ on the cross, and what he continues to do within us personally. This is given as the reason that hope does not disappoint. The knowledge of His love, as developed in the following verses (6-11), gives us assurance that our hope will be fulfilled.

5:6-11 -- God’s love is by His initiative, and purely of grace, in that we are undeserving. Natural human love is directed towards those who somehow “merit” our love. God’s love for us, however, is unconditional. Since He so clearly demonstrated His love to us, to reconcile and justify us, we can have that much more confidence in His grace to follow through and in the end to save us. We do not need to worry about being “good enough” to win and keep His love.

Paul says here that we have been “reconciled”, which is equivalent to making peace. This is a reconciliation of us to Him [2 Cor 5:18-19], not Him to us. See also Col 1:19-20 and Eph 2:16-18, where reconciliation is identified as the process subsequent to the initial phase of peace-making. In Ephesians 2:16, “put to death the enmity” is the parallel equivalent of making peace (in Col 1:20), which in turn corresponds to “propitiation” [Rom 3:25]. We can therefore presently exult in God, as we experience the reality of peace and reconciliation.

This section has the following structure, with the equivalent concepts of “peace” and “reconciliation” forming the bookends:

Rom 5:1-2 -- have **peace**, and exult …

Rom 5:3-4 -- Proven character gives present subjective assurance of personal **hope**

Rom 5:5-9 -- God’s demonstrated love proves, objectively, the **hope** will be fulfilled

Rom 5:10-11 -- have been **reconciled**, and exult in God.

L9 - Christ as the Second Adam …. -- Romans 5:12-21

5:12-14 -- These verses present Adam as the one through whom sin and death entered the world, and that he is in certain ways a “type” for the Messiah.

1. Sin entered into the world through one man [Adam]
2. Death, through sin, spread to all, because all sinned
   1. Now before the law, sin was in the world, but it is not taken into account (*logizomai*) without the law
   2. Nevertheless, death reigned over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam’s transgression (*parabasis*)
3. Adam was a type (pattern) of Him who was to come

Both death and sin are universal, and arise from the one man, Adam.

In verses 13 and 14, Paul briefly addresses a difficulty in the argument: those who did not live under the law did not commit the kind of sins that should be “counted” against them Nevertheless, he says they were all under the reign of death, demonstrating their solidarity with Adam.

To better understand this, we should first see that Paul considers two kinds of sins:

1. Transgression (*parabasis*), which is a willful disobedience against an express command, and hence willful rebellion against God. It is crossing over a clearly defined and known boundary. One example is the command to Adam to not eat from the tree of knowledge. Another example is the law given through Moses. These transgressions are counted (or imputed) against us.
2. Simply missing the mark (*hamartia*), but without violating a known express commandment. Sins of this kind are supposedly not counted against us.

However, those who were not under the law actually have committed the same basic sin as Adam: obtaining a knowledge of good and evil, becoming wise, “like God”. This knowledge is primarily the capacity for self-consciousness, which inevitably leads to self-condemnation, and then to what Freud called the death instinct. This opens the door to every kind of willful sin, and its wages are death.

This original sin has spread to all mankind -- not genetically, but culturally. The only distinction from Adam’s sin is that it is done as a normal part of childhood development, without receiving a prior warning or command forbidding it. It is therefore not regarded as a “transgression” against God. But it is nevertheless the same sin with the same consequences. It is counted against us because it leads us to transgress our own self-conscious standards, and we count it against ourselves, by self-condemnation.

Another difficult question pertains to the reign of death. Is it physical, spiritual or both? Life is maintained only by the continuing abiding presence of God, through the Spirit. Whenever there is a separation or alienation from God, there will be consequent decay leading to death. To a certain extent this occurs throughout nature, in that the creation pursues a course of relatively independent development. This kind of autonomy was established by God the Creator, who decreed that the species should be fruitful and multiply, thus implying a cycle of death and renewed life via reproduction. But the transgression of Adam, in acquiring knowledge of good and evil (self-consciousness), produced a more severe break with God -- a profound alienation. It set up a barrier between the human spirit and God’s Holy Spirit, a willful defiance, which results in spiritual death. As Paul said in 1 Cor 15:56, *“the sting of death is sin”.*

It is the universal reign of this spiritual death that proves our universal solidarity with Adam, and hence in his sin. This is why “all sinned” (verse 12), in agreement with the summary statement of verse 19: *“…through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners…”*

Paul’s teaching regarding our solidarity with Christ (the anti-type) is then compared and contrasted to this solidarity with Adam (the type).

5:15-19 -- Verses 15-19 make the comparison between what we received from Adam and what we receive from Jesus Christ:

1. from Adam: Transgression, from one, many died

* judgment (from one transgression) resulting in condemnation
* therefore death reigned

1. from Jesus: By grace, from the One, the gift abounds to many

* free gift (from many transgressions) resulting in justification
* therefore we will reign (in life through Jesus Christ)

Type: Through Adam’s disobedience, many were made sinners

Anti-type: Through Jesus’ obedience, many are made righteous

Jesus’s role as the “2nd Adam” is also suggested by the designation “Son of Man”: the new representative of mankind, with Whom we can all unite in solidarity.

5:20-21 -- Paul then makes a further observation about the Law, and closes with a summary statement. The consequence of Law is that transgression increased. This increased intensity of sin, due to the Law, is also taught in Galatians 3:19 and Romans 7:13. But grace abounds all the more. Verse 21 has the following parallel structure:

Sin reigned in death.

Grace reigns through righteousness, into eternal life through Jesus Christ.

This verse continues the theme of a transfer of power. Previously, sin reigned (and death reigned, as in Rom 5:14, 17), but now grace reigns (as in Rom 5:17 where we reign in life through Christ). It is in the realm of death that sin presently reigns, where it reveals its power. But God’s grace has defeated death, delivered us from the realm of sin, and brings us into the realm of righteousness and life. This is described elsewhere more specifically as being set free from the fear of death:

*“…that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”* -- Hebrews 2:14-15

It is this fear, and consequent self-deception and denial, that makes us slaves. The victory of the resurrection releases us from this fear, and therefore from the bondage.

L10 - Baptized into Christ -- Romans 6:1-23

6:1-2 -- Paul poses another rhetorical question: “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” This is a question that one might raise in response to 5:20, which gives the assurance that grace abounded where sin increased. The answer, of course, is no, because we have “died to sin”.

6:3-7 -- He then reminds the Romans of the meaning of their baptism: that it was a baptism into Christ. We have therefore been buried with Him, through baptism, into His death, and shall also be raised with Him into the new life of the resurrection (see also Colossians 2:12). Paul makes the same point in Galatians, that we were baptized into Christ:

*“ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* –Gal 3:27 [NASB]

The word “united” in “united with Him” (verse 5) means “grown together”, as when the trunks of two trees grow around each other. We similarly grow to become intertwined with Christ.

It is through baptism, and our consequent intertwined unity with Christ, that we were transferred from the realm of sin and death, in Adam, and into the realm of grace and righteousness, unto life, in Christ (the second Adam). This is a situational change, a change of status and citizenship, so that we are no longer subjects of the powers of this world and this age, but we belong to Christ in His kingdom, of the age to come.

This is further described, in verses 6 and 7, as the crucifixion of the “old self” with Him. The meaning of the “old self” is the self that was bound to Adam. To say that the old self was crucified, is to say that our bond of solidarity with Adam was broken. We were thus delivered from the realm over which sin reigns, dying relative to sin, and thereby set free from the power of sin.

Our change of identity is basically a change of relationship. This follows from a more

general scriptural principle that our personal identity is determined largely by relationships. There is an analogy to this in marriage: the identity of a bride is changed, to become to some extent determined by her husband. Or, in adoption, the new identity of the child is largely determined by the new parents. Similarly, one who becomes united with Christ, will be known as a “Christian”. Paul, for example, identified himself first of all, in the first verse of Romans, as the bond-servant of Christ. Who we are is determined by whom we belong to and whom we serve.

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Regarding Baptism

In the first-century church, the meaning, value and efficacy of baptism was understood and accepted by all Christians. That is why there was no need to explain or defend it in the New Testament epistles. It is mentioned only by way of example and illustration to support other teachings, as is the case here in Romans 6.

Today, the situation is different. Baptism has become controversial. There are those who think of it as a kind of “work”, which therefore could not be essential to salvation. There is also the attitude that any formalized “ritual” can have no actual effectiveness, it can be no more than a sign of something that has already taken place.

One way to address these modern confusions about baptism is to regard it as a form of prayer: dramatic prayer. In baptism, we act out our supplication to God and our commitment to Him by speaking to Him with our entire being – body, mind and spirit. And it is effective in the same ways and for the same reasons that prayer is effective. When done with a pure heart, it is the means of making the bond with God that enables His Spirit to work within us and for us. Like prayer, it enables Him to respond to us and to be our help. If performed as an empty ritual, it is no more effective than an empty ritualistic “prayer”. But if performed in sincerity, by faith, it is as effective as the prayer of the righteous offered in faith.

Furthermore, baptism is no more a “work” than is verbal prayer. Speaking the words of a prayer, whether aloud or silently, is indeed something that we “do”, which can require considerable time and effort. But it is not a “work”, in the sense of earning favor. Exactly the same pertains to baptism. It is a humble supplication for and acceptance of God’s grace, according to faith. The necessity of baptism is the same as the necessity of faith and prayer. The blessings freely given by His grace can be received and applied to our lives only when we cooperate by opening ourselves up to receiving them – by faith, by prayer, and by baptism.

One special point about baptism, which distinguishes it from ordinary prayer, is that it is given to us as a single pre-specified prayer, in a pre-defined form. It addresses the single need that we all have, and seeks the one and only answer, applicable to all, for there is only one way to salvation. As Paul said in Ephesians 4 – *“there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,…”*  This lack of individuality or spontaneity in no way detracts from the personal sincerity of the baptismal prayer. It rather demonstrates and establishes the unity that we have as one body, in Christ.

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This is also an appropriate time to introduce another point. To better understand the structure and flow of Romans, we should recognize that it presents the process of justification and salvation according to the pattern of the Exodus:

1) The bondage of Israel in Egypt is equivalent to our bondage under the realm of sin.

2) The Passover sacrifice corresponds to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross   
(1 Cor 5:7 -- *“Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed”).*

3) Applying the blood of the Passover lamb identified God’s people, just as our acceptance of Christ by faith identifies us as God’s people (i.e. justification)

4} The crossing of the Red Sea corresponds to baptism. They were baptized into Moses, as we are baptized into Christ (1 Cor 10:2 -- *“They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea”*).

5) After crossing the Sea, they were liberated from the power of Egypt, as we are liberated from the power of sin

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6:8-11 -- Verse 8 parallels verse 5, as below.

v5: *“if we have been united with [Him] in His death…we will also … in His resurrection”*

v8: *“if we died with Christ … we will also live with Him”*

Verse 5 speaks of being united with Him in His death and resurrection, while verse 8 presents our own consequent death and life, with Him. This is the nature of our unity with Him: that because of His death, we have died, and because of His resurrection, we live. The same doctrine is also found in Galatians:

*“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”* – Gal 2:20

The death has been completed, which is emphasized by the statement that we were “buried with Him…” in verse 4. But the new life is presently on-going, extending into the future.

In verses 9 and 10, the point is made that Christ is never to die again. His resurrection was not simply a restoration of mortal life, as was the case with Lazarus. Jesus’ resurrection was of the new creation, with an incorruptible body that shall never die. It was an absolute and final victory over death, setting Him free from the reign of death (see 5:14). His death was a death to sin, in that although the old body was subject to the effects of sin – the new creation body is not. In His new life, He lives solely to God.

Verse 11 then presents the therefore, of what we should do. We who belong to Christ, and are united with Him, living in Him, should **count** ourselves to be like Him: dead to sin, but alive to God. This is what Paul had said about himself in Galatians 2:20. The word for “count”, or “consider”, is the same Greek word (*logizomai*) as used in Romans 4:3, 9, 22-24, where faith is “counted” as righteousness. Just as God relates to us who have faith by regarding us as righteous, we should relate to ourselves by regarding ourselves as “dead to sin and alive to God”. In short, we should look upon ourselves the same way that God looks upon us.

We should consider who we are and where we are. We are no longer in Egypt, no longer under the reign of sin and death. As represented in baptism, the old life of bondage is behind us; we are now united with Christ, forever dead to sin and alive only to God. That is how we should henceforth “count” ourselves. This change of attitude, how we think about ourselves, is the essential step toward changing our actual lives and behavior, which is the subject of the next section (Rom 6:12-23).

6:12- 14 -- Even though we have been delivered from the realm of sin, we are still subject to it’s influence; we are no longer a slave of sin, but we are still tempted and still have the habits of serving sin. The meaning of the deliverance is that God has now given us the power to resist and overcome:

*“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way to escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.”* -- 1 Corinthians 10:13

Since we are now delivered from the bondage, since we are now empowered with free choice, we are called upon to make that choice: to no longer serve sin. We now have the ability to choose how we use our “members”, which refers not only to physical parts of the body, but also to all of our capacities and abilities. We should use them as instruments (or weapons) to serve the purpose of righteousness. Applying the analogy with the exodus, the Lord led His people out of Egypt when they passed through the Red Sea, but there was the remaining task to remove Egypt from the hearts and minds of the people.

6:15-19 -- “Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace?” This is essentially a repetition of the earlier question in 6:1. Alternatively, shall we sin because He will always forgive? Paul’s answer: “May it never be!” Other similar teachings are:

*“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”* -- Galatians 5:13

*“Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.”* -- 1 Peter 2:16

As Jesus taught, the essence of “freedom” is not to be self-serving (in accordance with personal desire), but to be in accordance with integrity – i.e. of the truth:

*“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free….Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”* -- John 8:31,32, 34

*“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”* – John 8:44

To serve Him who is the truth preserves our integrity, and that is what it means to be free. To serve him who is a liar compromises our integrity, and that makes us a slave.

6:20-23 -- These verses summarize the main point of why we should live in accordance with the new realm rather than the old: serving sin, under the old regime, leads to death; serving God, under the new regime, leads to life. This is the choice presented by Moses:

*“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.”* -- Deuteronomy 30:19

L11 - Living Under the Law -- Romans 7:1-25

7:1-4 -- This first verse begins with: *“Or, do you not know…that the law….”* This refers back to Romans 6:14-15 –

*“For sin shall not be master over you, for* ***you are not under law*** *but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are* ***not under law*** *but under grace? May it never be!”*

In chapter 6, Paul tells us how we should live, since we are “**not under law”**. Now, in 7:1-4, he further develops the argument of **why** we are not under the law. It is because we have “died” to the law. He uses the analogy of being released from the bond of marriage when one’s spouse dies. Because of the death, the “law” of the marriage bond is broken, and no longer has jurisdiction over the survivor. The surviving spouse is free to re-marry. Similarly, we have died, in Christ, and are thereby released from the jurisdiction of the Law. Because of this we are liberated from the bondage of Sin. We are now under a system of grace, by which we are free to serve righteousness, i.e. to become bonded to the risen Christ.

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul says essentially the same thing about dying to the Law, and living in Christ:

*“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”* -- Galatians 2:19-20

Another equivalent teaching about being released from the Law is found in Colossians:

*“…having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”* -- Colossians 2:14

The legal debt that we previously had, under the law, has been canceled and taken away. The power of sin to accuse us, using the law, was thus put to death on the cross.

7:5-6 -- Paul here presents the contrast between law and grace:

Under the Law (verse 5):

Serving in the oldness of the **letter**

Bearing fruit **for death** (due to sinful passions aroused by the Law)

Under Grace (verse 6):

Serving in the newness of the **Spirit**

Bearing fruit **for God**

This contrasts both the method of serving (by the letter vs. by the Spirit), and the results (for death vs. for God). The situation identified in verse 5 -- being under the law, while we were “in the flesh” – is further described in the remainder of chapter 7. The situation identified in verse 6 – under grace – is described and explained in chapter 8.

7:7-13 -- Paul raises another question: “Is the law sin?” This section then explains why the answer must be an emphatic NO. He then restates the idea that the Law seems to be in alliance with sin: *“But I would not have known sin, except through the Law”*. This is not referring to a merely intellectual knowledge about sin; it is saying that we would not have experienced the real meaning of sin, within ourselves, and the full destructive power of sin, except through the Law. He is speaking again about how the Law makes sin more utterly sinful within our own experience.

A representative example is the law to not covet. Sin uses this law to awaken and arouse a more serious and more intense level of coveting. It changes the sin from a simple “missing the mark”, into a willful transgression against God. The former level of sin is “dead”, in that it is not counted against us (see Rom 5:13). But the Law makes the sin come to life in its condemning power, in it’s power to count against us, and to bring death.

Paul then explains, however, in defense of the Law, that its intent was to bring life. It is sin that brings death, by using the Law and by deceiving us. The Law, in itself, is holy, righteous and good. The Law is not to blame for death. It is sin, working through the Law, deceitfully, which is the cause of death. A similar defense of the Law is found in Galatians:

*“Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”* -- Galatians 3:21-22

The purpose of the Law, as described here, is to reveal sin for what it is, and to serve as a “channel” through which sin can more fully express itself, by producing it’s wages of death. There is a more general principle behind this: that God allows sin to flourish, to bear its full fruit of destruction and death, because ultimately that is the means for destroying sin. When evil is allowed to play itself out, it will eventually self-destruct. It is given enough rope to hang itself. More particularly, when the deadly power of sin is manifested on the cross, in the body of Christ, it is thereby defeated and destroyed.

7:14-20 -- Paul then considers the status and role of the individual living under the Law, a personalized view of the situation of old-covenant Israel. In contrast to the Law, which is “spiritual”, the person under the Law is of the flesh. This is again the contrast between “according to the flesh” and “according to the Spirit”. As discussed in chapters 5 and 6, one who is according to the flesh, i.e. one who is “in Adam”, is in bondage to Sin.

In verse 15, he says such a person does not really know what he is doing. He wants to do certain things, but is unable to do them. He wants to avoid certain things, but cannot avoid doing them. This is a description of one who genuinely accepts the Law and wants to practice it, one who is truly repentant, but yet unable to carry it out. This is explained by saying that sin dwells in him, and it is sin that causes him to transgress the law. To say that sin dwells in someone is thus a way of saying that the person is in bondage to sin.

7:21-23 -- In the mind, one fully accepts and submits to the Law of God, the Law that is according to God’s intention. But there is the other Law that is used by sin, dwelling in the “members of the body”, making him a prisoner, waging war against the Law of the mind.

7:24-25 -- So the question: how can one be set free from this wretched situation? Paul then injects an exclamation of thanksgiving to God that there is an answer: Jesus Christ. But this is followed by a final summary statement of the problem: “with my mind I am serving God, with my flesh I am serving sin”. Thus concludes this section on what it means to live under the Law (or “in Adam”), in bondage to the indwelling power of sin.

L12 - Living By the Spirit -- Romans 8:1-17

8:1-4 – Here is now the answer to the wretched dilemma of 7:14-25, expanding on the hope offered in 5:17, 21. ***Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*** It is a hopefulfilled “in Christ Jesus”, which means it is for those who are “clothed” with Christ, having a relational status of righteousness before God, and who dwell within His reign, as citizens of His kingdom.

The condemnation was not primarily a condemnation from God; it was the condemnation from Sin -- through the self and through the Law, but from Sin. Satan had always been the chief accuser (Revelation 12:10). And in Romans 8:34 the question is raised “who is the one who condemns?”

The “therefore” points forward to verse 2, which begins with “for” – i.e. verse 2 is the basis and reason for verse 1. In verse 2, there are two “laws” identified:

1. Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus
2. Law of sin and of death

The first “Law” sets us free from the second “Law”. These correspond to the two “Laws” of 7:23 and 25, “law of my mind / of God”, and the “law of sin”. These “laws” are often interpreted as the “principle” of the Spirit of life, or the “principle” of sin and death. It is probably better, however, to understand that Paul is still, consistently, speaking about The Law, i.e. the Torah of Moses. This would be consistent with the teaching of 7:7-25, where on the one hand the Law is described as good and holy and spiritual, intended by God to bring life, and is recognized as such by the mind. But, on the other hand, the Law is weak, through the flesh (8:3), and was used by Sin to bring death. This is saying that the effect of the Law depends upon whether it is under the control of Sin, as it was under the old covenant, or under the control of God’s Holy Spirit, as it is under the new covenant. It is in both cases the Torah of Moses, but it served a destructive purpose under the old reign of Sin and death, whereas it serves a life-giving purpose under the reign of the Spirit. Under the old reign (chapter 7) the Law of sin, in the flesh, prevailed over the Law of God, in the mind. Under the new reign (chapter 8), the situation is reversed: the Law of the Spirit of life liberates us from the Law of sin and death. It is by the power of the Spirit that the Law is fulfilled, that its intent is realized, that it becomes written upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

Paul further explains that the basis for this is God’s sending Jesus to condemn sin in His flesh. The substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus, as a sin offering, was the means by which God condemned Sin. It was not a judicial punishment or condemnation of Jesus. Jesus died by willingly allowing Himself to be subjected to the deadly condemnation from Sin; and that was the means by which Sin itself was condemned. God condemned Sin, in Jesus.

As a consequence of this liberation from the reign of Sin, the Law can be fulfilled. It is fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Or, to use the terminology of Romans 6:19, in those who present their members as slaves to righteousness, rather than as slaves to impurity.

8:5-8 -- Here is the contrast between being “according to the flesh” and being “according to the Spirit”. To be “according to the flesh”, or “in the flesh”, is to have a mind-set that is pre-occupied with the things of this world. It is a way of thinking that is subject to the deceptions of Sin, in solidarity with Adam, yielding a way of life that serves Sin and death. Such a mind is hostile to God, and is not even able to submit to God’s law (which is the situation 7:14, 23). But to be “according to the Spirit”, or “in the Spirit”, is to have a mind that hears and submits to the Spirit. When Sin is in us, Sin reigns; when the Spirit is in us, the Spirit reigns. These are the two walks, one leading to life, the other to death.

8:9-11 -- These verses explore the meaning of being in the Spirit and having the Spirit in us. The parallel phrases in verse 9 are:

In the Spirit (not in the flesh) if the Spirit dwells in you

If not have the Spirit of Christ then does not belong to Him

The second phrase states the opposite of the first phrase, and presents it in reverse order (Chiastic structure). The “Spirit dwelling in you” corresponds to its opposite: “not have the Spirit of Christ”; and being “In the Spirit” corresponds to its opposite: “does not belong to Him”. Our ability to submit to the reign of the Spirit (to be in the Spirit) depends upon the Spirit dwelling within us (Spirit exercising His power from within us). It is our choice to allow Him to dwell within us, but it is only by His consequent indwelling power that it becomes possible for us to be in Him (to actually submit in obedience).

The body is dead, i.e. condemned to die, because it has been corrupted by Sin. But the power of Christ in us makes our spirit alive (see Gal 2:20). Furthermore, the Spirit will “give life to your mortal bodies”, which is a way of describing the resurrection.

8:12-17 -- We are therefore obliged to live according to the One who gives life (the Spirit), not to that which gives death (the flesh). Our obligation is to the one who gives what we should want to receive, i.e. life. Verse 13 tells us again that the wages of sin are death, and the gift from God is life (as in 6:23).

All who are in the Spirit are the children of God. To be an adopted child is contrasted to the old relationship to Sin, which was a relationship of slavery and fear. As God’s children, we enjoy a special kind of trust and intimacy, without fear, that enables us to cry out to Him: “Abba! Father!” It is only by the indwelling Spirit that we have this kind of confidence and closeness to the Father. And this is what gives us hope. As was seen in Romans 5:3-5, we have hope (as heirs) due to the Spirit’s revelation of God’s love; and it is a hope that is strengthened, and built up into an inner sense of peace and assurance, through tribulation and suffering: *“if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him”.*

Paul is always careful to maintain a balance between 1) the confident hope that we can have in God, by His power, and by His grace; and 2) our obligation to choose to serve Him, and the necessity of continued faithfulness. Paul never says to simply “Let go and let God”. What he says is more like “Let God, but hold on”.

L13 - The Hope that Triumphs over Tribulation -- Romans 8:18-39

8:18-22 -- Paul had said (verse 17) that our hope and destiny of future glory in Christ depends upon our abiding with Him through the sufferings of this present age. He now says it is well worth it: there is no comparison between the present sufferings and the future glory. Paul then reveals the cosmic scope of our future glory. It entails the entire creation. In addition to our personal resurrection bodies, the entirety of the heavens and the earth will be radically transformed into a new creation. This is what is described in Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:10-13 and Revelation 21 and 22. What can be compared to that?

When Adam, who had dominion over the world, fell to the power of sin, then the entire creation was also handed over to sin, and was subjected to the curse (Genesis 3:17-19). In like manner, when mankind in Christ is glorified in the resurrection, the entire creation will be delivered and redeemed. Its transformation will be similar to that of our bodies in the resurrection: from the corrupted to the incorruptible. This is the hope of all creation, just as it is our hope. And meanwhile, the entire creation “groans” with a suffering like that of childbirth, in that it is not worthy to be compared with the wonder and glory of the outcome. This suffering in childbirth also recalls the original curse (Genesis 3:16). See also John 16:20-22, where Jesus compares present sufferings to the travails of childbirth.

8:23-25 -- And we, too, groan within ourselves. By the Spirit, we possess the firstfruits, the down payment or pledge, and we eagerly await the inheritance: our full adoption and glorification as the children of God, in the resurrection. The meaning of hope is that we can have assurance of what is not yet realized. Regardless of how much suffering and how much darkness there is in the present age, we can endure it and persevere if we hold on to the hope. We can have assurance of God’s love and power as we look back to the cross and to Jesus’ resurrection, and we can have assurance of the resurrection in the coming day of the Lord. But in the intervening suffering and darkness of this age, we must be sustained by hope. All the frustrations and dissatisfactions of life are symptoms that we have a destiny that is as yet unfulfilled; but with hope, we eagerly await an assured fulfillment.

8:26-27 -- This perseverance of hope must be sustained by prayer, and prayer is furthermore instrumental in realizing the hope. In this the Spirit helps our weakness. Our main “weakness” is that we often have very little understanding of what to pray for. As we pray both for ourselves and for others, we seek deliverance from evil, but often have very little idea of precisely how that should be accomplished – of what specifically is God’s will. It is in this that the Holy Spirit speaks on our behalf. He understands the desires of our hearts, and translates them into effectual specific prayer, in accordance with God’s will. When we are in distress, and have no idea what to ask for, all we have to do is present our “groans” to God. We can then trust His Spirit to understand and intercede.

8:28-30 -- Regardless of the situation and the circumstances, when we pray to God, through the Spirit, He will answer effectually. He is able to intervene, to work things out, so that the final outcome will be good. In the end, His righteousness will be totally revealed and fulfilled, and all that we hope for in Him shall be realized. There are indeed constraints in the details - honoring the free will of mankind and the integrity of all creation - but He can nevertheless ultimately accomplish everything that matters, all that He has promised.

The focus is on His final purpose, and associated with that, our ultimate destiny. Paul presents here a sequence by which God accomplishes His purpose in us:

1. He foreknew us
2. He predestined us (to be conformed to the image of His Son)
3. He called us
4. He justified us
5. He glorified us

For God, being eternal, these are all one integrated act. But for us they are revealed and experienced in a time sequence. He knew us, from the beginning, which pertains not just to intellectual knowledge but a full personal and intimate knowledge, as the term is used in Old Testament scripture. His love for us, and caring for us, is from eternity. As a logical consequence He established that our ultimate intended destiny is to be conformed to the image of His Son. Our hope and our fulfillment has always been, from eternity, solely by conformity to Christ, which also means being in Christ (see Ephesians 1:3-7).

The next step, His calling us, is the first part of the sequence that we are consciously aware of. Through His word, through the Spirit, and through His people, He reaches out to us in many ways, and “calls” us to Him. Those who respond in faith, He justifies – i.e. giving us the status of righteousness, by which the Spirit can dwell within us, liberating us from sin. There is a distinction here between calling and justifying, analogous to what Jesus said about calling and choosing:

*“Many are called, but few are chosen.”* -- Matthew 22:14

His calling is universal and indiscriminate. He is like the sower who scatters the seed onto all kinds of soil. He is unwilling that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). But the choosing, the justification, is only for those who respond in faith.

Finally, in the resurrection, He shall glorify those who persevere in faith and hope. This is stated as a past tense (glorified), because in the mind of God it is accomplished, and also because it is already accomplished in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Christ it is a realized glorification, which is effectual for everyone who is or shall be “in Christ”. The entire sequence of God’s foreordained salvation, from foreknowledge through glorification, is in Christ. Hence no individual is either deterministically included or deterministically excluded. His salvation is available for anyone who chooses to be “in Christ”.

8:31-39 -- The preceding section shows without question that God is “for us”. Since that is so, how can anyone be against us? In fact, there are many who are against us, but the point is that nothing and no one can prevail against us. Since God did not spare His Son, He will surely give us anything and everything that we need. In this context, this means everything we need to defend against our enemies, and to prevail against whoever might be against us.

The next question is “who will bring a charge against God’s elect?” God himself has already declared us to be righteous. He has determined to interact with us as if we were righteous. Given that, it is futile for our enemies to bring charges against us.

Paul then asks, “who is the one who condemns?” The condemnation has actually already taken place, on the cross, in Christ. He condemned sin in the body of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:3). And His resurrection proves the once-for-all victory over all condemnations against anyone who is “in Christ”. The risen, victorious, glorified Christ is now at the right hand of God, as our representative. There is therefore now no condemnation.

And finally: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” It is the love of Christ, and our position of abiding in Him, that guarantees our justification and our deliverance from all condemnation. Therefore, the only remaining question is whether anyone can separate us from Christ. Paul then gives several examples of tribulations, the worst things that this world can attack us with. He then asserts that in all these things “we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us”. That is to say, His love guarantees that He will not forsake us. He will stay with us through all these things. In His incarnate life on earth, especially culminating in the crucifixion, He has shown that He accepts and participates in all the sufferings and tribulations of mankind. He bears all the griefs and sins of everyone who chooses to abide in Him. And as He conquered all these things, so do we, in Him.

The closing summary, then, is that there is no power in heaven or on earth – primarily the spiritual “powers and principalities” – that can separate us from God’s love, the love that is manifested in Christ Jesus. This is equivalent to the promises that Jesus had made:

*“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out…. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.”* -- John 6:37, 39

*“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and* ***no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand****.”* -- John 10:27-29

For us to truly experience the liberation and the joy of living under the reign of Christ, to inwardly have assurance that we are not condemned and that we shall in the end be raised into glory, we must have some understanding and perspective regarding present tribulation and about the enemies who wage war against us. That is what Paul has presented in this section of chapter 8. These are the major points to know about tribulation and about our enemies:

1. Our tribulations are not worthy to be compared to the future glory
2. When we appeal to God, in the “groanings” of prayer, His Spirit intercedes
3. God has a plan, established from the beginning, which He will surely accomplish – that His eternal purpose will be fulfilled in our glorification, in Christ
4. Since God is for us, to supply all our needs, none can prevail against us
5. Since God has justified us, no one can bring charges against us
6. Since God has condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus Christ, no one can condemn us
7. No form of tribulation, nor any power or principality, can separate us from His love

L14 - Concern for Israel -- Romans 9:1-29

9:1-5 -- Following the celebration of the Christian hope in chapter 8, and our assurances of its fulfillment in the midst of tribulation, Paul now reveals his greatest grief: the situation of his fellow Israelites. Alongside the joy of God’s salvation for the elect, there is the deep sorrow on behalf of the lost – and for Paul, this is especially on behalf of his kinsmen. He would gladly give himself as a substitute for them in judgment, if possible, just as Moses had offered for his people (Exodus 32:30-32), or as a parent would do for a child. It is not only because of his personal relationship, but because of their unique and special role in God’s plan of salvation-history. God’s salvation was supposed to be especially for Israel, and was accomplished through them in the coming of the Messiah, but they rejected it. This is the irony and the sorrow expressed in John 1:11 – “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.”

9:6-13 -- It is also of critical importance to Paul to maintain that God’s word has not failed. He therefore refers to scriptures that demonstrate that not every one descended from Israel is part of the “true” Israel, nor are all Abraham’s descendants his “true” children. Isaac and Ishmael were both children of Abraham according to the flesh, but only Isaac was a child “of promise”; therefore only Isaac and his descendants were heirs to the promise. Similarly, both Jacob and Esau were children of Isaac according to the flesh, but only Jacob and his descendants were chosen to be the “true” children of promise. This choice of Jacob over Esau especially demonstrates that God’s election does not depend upon human merit; it rather depends simply upon God’s own sovereign grace. It is therefore fully consistent with God’s word that many, or even most, Israelites would find themselves excluded from the “true” Israel of promise. God’s word has not failed.

9:14-18 -- The next question, however, is whether God is just in his “choices” of who shall be the true heirs of promise, or who shall be saved. Paul then presents two more scriptural references pertaining to God’s choices. In the quote from Exodus 33:19, the Lord tells Moses that He will reveal Himself by making “My goodness pass before you”, and that He would “be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” This indicates that God is gracious according to His own free choice. He acts on His own initiative, according to His free and sovereign will, not in response to our supposed “entitlement”, whether by birthright or by works-of-law.

Another example, on the negative side, is God’s choice of Pharaoh: hardening him into a fierce enemy of God’s people, to provide the opportunity for God to reveal His power. And so there is again scriptural precedent to show that “He has mercy on whom He desires, and he hardens whom He desires.”

All of this is not to say that God is arbitrary in His choices. We accept by faith that there are sound reasons for His choices. There are “rules to the game” -- but He is the One who makes the rules, not us. And it is not for us to demand explanations.

9:19-23 – The question remains, however, as to whether this is just. If God chooses some to serve a good purpose and others to serve an evil purpose, how can any person be held responsible? At this point, Paul does not presume to defend God; he instead asks what right do we have to question God’s judgments and choices. This is the same response as in Job, where the Lord says: “Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?” [Job 40:2].

He asserts that the potter has the right to make whatever kind of vessel he wants from the lump of clay: either a vessel for honorable use or for dishonorable use. There is no injustice in this. God’s wrath is never unjust, because we all deserve wrath, as a matter of justice. This was the point of the first three chapters of Romans. Secondly, God’s choice as to who will receive mercy is totally up to His free and sovereign will. Dispensation of mercy is not a matter of justice, it is a matter of the sovereign free will of the one who shows mercy. The concept of “justice” provides no basis for questioning how He shows mercy.

The Lord “endures with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.” He allows sinners the opportunity to continue down their path of sin, to magnify their sins, to give full and ultimate expression to the true nature of sin. God allows this so that He can more decisively judge sin. This is the same principle as found in chapter 7, where the law served the purpose of making sin utterly sinful, and it is the same principle by which the power of sin and death reached its ultimate upon the cross, and was thereby defeated. It may also be an application of Jesus’ parable of the wheat and tares [Matthew 13:24-30], where the tares are allowed to grow to maturity before being gathered up and burned.

The salvation of His people, the glory to be bestowed upon vessels of mercy, can occur only when the vessels of wrath become utterly sinful, leading to their utter destruction.

9:24-29 -- And the vessels of mercy are not only from the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles. Regarding the inclusion of Gentiles, Paul quotes from Hosea. Although the context of Hosea pertains to the Israelites in exile, Paul interprets the prophecy in a more general way as applying to all those who had not previously been “My people”, or the “beloved”: hence, the Gentiles who would respond to His calling.

The second point is that only a portion, indeed only a small portion, of Israel will in the end be saved. Quoting from Isaiah 10:22, “it is the remnant that will be saved”. Also, in Isaiah 1:9, if it were not for the “seed” that was left, the entire nation would have been totally destroyed, as Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, he shows that the word of God has not failed, but is indeed being fulfilled.

Our situation today is different from that of the Romans, in that we are not in a church composed of both Gentiles and Jews, surrounded by a community of Jewish non-believers, many of whom were close relatives of the Jewish Christians. But we share similar concerns. We all grieve over the destiny of loved ones who have never accepted Christ, and we have at times questioned how a righteousness God could judge them. In this larger sense, what Paul says concerning the Israelites and concerning God’s righteousness speaks to us all, and can be a help to us all, as it was for the Christians at Rome.

L15 - Christ is the Goal of the Law -- Romans 9:30 - 10:21

9:30-33 -- The basic reason is given here for the exclusion of most of Israel from the new people-of-God, and the inclusion of many Gentiles: 1) Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained it, by faith; 2) Israelites, who pursued “a law of righteousness”, did not attain it, because they pursued it by works. This refers back to the same point that had been made in Romans 3:28, and further developed by referring to Abraham’s justification, in Romans 4:2-3, 13. Although righteousness is the intent, the goal, of the Law, it cannot be attained by works-of-law; it is attained only by faith. And the object of this saving faith is revealed by the gospel to be Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected.

The Israelites pursued righteousness by trying to obey the Law. And they were so intently focused on this path that when they encountered Jesus, they would not accept Him as the Messiah. Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, was a “stone” placed on the path. God’s intention was that they place faith in Him, and build upon Him as the cornerstone, thus fulfilling the intent of the Law. But instead, they simply stumbled over this stone, continuing down the path of “works-of-law”, which led them further away from righteousness and salvation. Paul then backs this up with quotations from Isaiah 28:16 and 8:14.

On the other hand, many of the Gentiles who had little or no knowledge of the Law, gladly received the gospel. The fact that they were not so intently focused on what they thought was “the right path” enabled them to humbly receive something new.

10:1-4 -- The problem of the Israelites was not a lack of zeal for God or zeal for His righteousness. The problem was that it was not according to knowledge. This had also been Paul’s situation (Philippians 3:6-9). The kind of knowledge that was lacking was the deeper understanding of God’s way and His intent. They had a great amount of factual “knowledge”. They knew very well the “letter” of the Law. But they missed its deeper meaning. They missed its teachings on the way of faith as opposed to the way of works, and they missed its teachings on the suffering-servant Messiah. Their extensive factual and superficial “knowledge” made them arrogant and hence blinded them to the new revelation that was in Jesus Christ and His gospel. And, in rejecting Christ, they rejected the One who is the end (i.e. goal) of the law for righteousness, and therefore failed to attain to this righteousness.

10:5-8 -- Paul refers to Leviticus 18:5, which says that the one who does the law shall live. That is true, but impossible to accomplish (see Romans 7:14-25). Our only hope for attaining righteousness is by faith, as indicated by the reference to Deuteronomy 30:12-14. The original meaning in Deuteronomy is the accessibility of God’s word: that it is not up to human will and effort to find the words of wisdom and life, but that God has graciously taken the initiative and given us His word. Paul applies this principle, under the new covenant, to God’s gracious gift of the Word, Jesus Christ. It is not by human effort and will (ascending into heaven) that we find salvation; God has given us a Savior. Nor is it by human effort and will that we overcome death to attain life (descending into the abyss); God has raised Jesus from the dead, and we share in that resurrection. His saving power is available to us (near you), as the word of faith. This word is written in our hearts, by the indwelling Spirit, whereby we fulfill the Law, and thereby live (Romans 8:4)

10:9-13 -- Paul sets forth confession and belief as two aspects – or perhaps two phases - of the believer’s response to the gospel:

1. confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord
2. believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead

Belief is the basis for present justification, as in Romans 3:28. And confessing Him as Lord is a continuing faithfulness, which is the basis for ultimate salvation.

The further point, repeating what Paul had said in Romans 3:22, 29, is that this salvation by faith is available to all, i.e. to Gentiles as well as to Jews. In support of this, he quotes from Isaiah 28:16 and Joel 2:32. The meaning of “call upon the name of the Lord” is not that “all you have to do is call…”. It is not a shallow lip service (as in Matthew 7:21), but a full and genuine faith. The real emphasis and point is that “whoever shall call…will be saved”; it’s about the inclusion of all tribes and nations.

10:14-17 -- In these verses Paul gives the sequence of events leading up to this saving act of “calling on His name”:

1. The sending of preachers
2. Preaching the gospel
3. Hearing the gospel
4. Believing in Christ
5. Calling on His name

A noteworthy point is that it is not by angelic messengers, nor by independent “soul-searching”, nor by dreams or visions, that a person receives the word of salvation. It is through the agency of God’s people, the church – including those who preach and those who send the preachers. The living and effectual activity of God in this world, by His Spirit, is totally within and through His people, the church.

On a more specific and personal note, Paul is speaking of his own essential role as a preacher of the gospel, and the essential role of the churches in sending him. This is particularly relevant, since Paul will be asking the Romans to help send him on to Spain (Romans 15:24).

10:18-21 -- But has the world heard this gospel? Paul quotes from Psalm 19:4 to show that it has. The point is not that every individual has heard, but that the gospel has gone forth to all the nationalities of the known world. It has burst forth through all national and ethnic barriers, thus demonstrating the principle. Did Israel understand this? He quotes from Deuteronomy 32:21 and Isaiah 65:1 to show that the scripture prophesied that God’s saving word would go forth to all nations. And he follows this by a quote from Isaiah 65:2, which speaks of the disobedience and obstinance of Israel. There was ample scriptural evidence for Israel to know that the fulfillment of the promises and the covenants would extend to all nations, but would be realized for only a small portion of Israel.

L16 - Salvation of All Israel -- Romans 11:1- 36

11:1-6 -- In view of the pessimistic assessment of Israel in 10:21, Paul raises another question: “God has not rejected His people, has He?” He then follows with an emphatic denial, and supporting arguments. Paul first offers himself as an example of an Israelite who has not been rejected. He then affirms that God certainly has not rejected His people **whom He foreknew**. God’s foreknowledge indicates His original good intention for His people, which means that the God who is faithful and unchanging would not at a later time reverse Himself and reject them.

He then refers to 1 Kings 19:10, 14, 18, where the vast majority of Israelites had turned away from the Lord, and Elijah thought he was the only one left who was faithful. But the Lord answers: *“I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”* Paul offers this as an example of the present situation, where there is still a remnant of Israelites that belong to the Lord, “according to gracious choice”. This is a positive observation: as long as there is such a remnant, God has not rejected His people.

11:7-10 -- The conclusion about Israel is 1) the small, chosen remnant obtained justification and salvation; but 2) the rest – the majority – did not obtain it, and were instead hardened (as in Romans 9:18). He then quotes from Isaiah 29:10 and Psalm 69:22-23 to show that this hardening is a fulfillment of scripture (establishing again that God’s word has not failed).

11:11-16 -- What was the purpose of Israel’s “stumbling”? It was not in order that they would fall. God’s intention has always been that no one should perish. But they did in fact stumble, or transgress, and God uses their transgression to accomplish something good: 1) opening up the promise to the Gentiles; and consequently 2) making the Israelites jealous, so that more of them might also be saved. Paul’s mission is primarily to the Gentiles, but he is hopeful that this mission will also result in bringing more of his own countrymen to salvation. It was a part of God’s plan to make use of Israel’s transgression, and His rejection of them, as the means for reconciling the world. But we should now also rejoice whenever an Israelite repents and becomes accepted by God, who gives life to the dead.

The offering of the “first of the dough” to the Lord is holy, and results in a sanctification and blessing upon all the rest (Numbers 15:19-21; Nehemiah 10:37; Ezekiel 44:30). Similarly, if the root of a tree is holy, then so are the branches. The holy root is probably referring to the patriarchs, especially Abraham; and therefore the branches, which would be Israel according to the flesh (physical descendants of Abraham), are also “holy”, in that they are set apart for a special purpose and mission (as previously described in Romans 3:1-2; 9:4-5). This sets up the metaphor of the olive tree in the following section.

11:17-24 -- As indicated in Romans 11:13, Paul is speaking at this point particularly to the Gentile Christians. One of his main purposes here is to instruct them to not be arrogant toward the Israelites (Romans 11:18), but to treat them with compassion and respect. The reason is that although the Israelites were broken off from the tree, and the Gentiles were grafted in, the root that supports them all is Abraham. The Gentiles owe their spiritual lives to Abraham and his faithful descendants, from whom came the Messiah.

As Paul has consistently maintained (Romans 3:27; 4:2, 16; 9:15-16; 10:6-8), we stand only by faith, and there is no place for boasting, for supposing we have earned God’s favor. Any branch, Jew or Gentile, can be broken off due to unbelief. And any branch, Jew or Gentile, can be grafted into the tree if they believe and repent. The main take-away points here are:

1) Gentiles that were “grafted in” should not be conceited;

2) The salvation of Jews, as individuals, depends totally upon their individual belief or unbelief (Romans 3:21-22; 10:11-13).

3) It is always possible for an individual to fall away; and it is always possible to repent and be restored. It depends upon one’s continuing belief, or unbelief.

11:25-32 -- Paul now explains a “mystery”, i.e. something previously unknown, but which has now been revealed. Part of Israel has become hardened. That is what happens to sinners when they are permitted to continue in sin – i.e. when judgment is delayed. And why does God delay judgment? So that the fullness of the Gentiles may arrive. This is the same principle as taught in 2 Peter 3:9 and Revelation 6:10-11. Judgment is delayed so that more people can repent, thus bringing to completion the number of God’s people.

As a result, “all Israel will be saved”. To be consistent with all that Paul has written, “Israel” in this verse must be the true Israel of God (see Romans 2:28-29; 4:16; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:7; 6:15-16; Philippians 3:3). It is the “Israel” that consists of all who place their faith in Jesus the Messiah, both Jews and Gentiles, without distinction. The delay of judgment, which is associated with the hardening of the Israelites of the flesh, provides time for all of the true Israel to be saved – for all those whom He foreknew to answer His call (Romans 8:29-30).

Paul again reminds the Gentiles of Israel’s special gifts and calling (compare Romans 3:1-2; 9:4-5; 11:16), and how they are beloved because of their fathers. The Gentiles should therefore share Paul’s compassionate and earnest desire for their eventual salvation.

The concluding summary explanation is that *“God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.”* The Lord’s forbearance, in delaying judgment, and His gracious respect for our free will, has two consequences:

1. Unrepentant sinners continue in their sinful ways, become hardened, and are used by God as instruments of wrath to demonstrate His power (Romans 9:17, 22).
2. Opportunity is given for more people to hear His gospel, and to repent, thus bringing the total number of God’s people to its predestined completion.

11:33-36 -- After this climactic summary, Paul can do no more than break out in praise for the riches of God’s wisdom. This section (chapters 9-11) began with profound grief and sorrow, and proceeded through many perplexing questions about God’s ways. Although there is much that is unsearchable and unfathomable, enough of the mystery has been revealed that we can set those questions aside, and submit to God with complete confidence in His wisdom and His love.

L17 - Reasonable Worship -- Romans 12:1- 8

12:1 – “Therefore I urge you…”: this is a transition in the teaching, from what we must believe (chapters 1-11), to how we should live (chapters 12-15). The exhortations and consequent behavior are motivated by God's mercies – by His grace revealed in the gospel.

True worship, corresponding to Old Testament sacrificial offerings, consists in offering our bodies, i.e. our entire selves. This amounts to whole-hearted obedience in all areas of life. It consists in loving God “with all your heart and soul and might”. It consists in love that is not in word only, but in deeds (1 John 3:18). This is “pleasing” to God, just as sacrifices of the old covenant were pleasing, if offered with a pure and sincere heart.

This is “reasonable” service to Him. It is first of all totally reasonable to give Him our entire selves. When we consider that our lives and our only hope are totally by His gracious gift, it is not reasonable to give Him anything less. Secondly, we should live for Him in a rational manner. He wants us to serve Him on the basis of knowledge and understanding, thoughtfully, using our minds. This is consistent with serving in the spirit of the law, instead of the letter, and with submitting to the law of love. Faithful and effective service, in the spirit, and according to love, requires thoughtful, rational service.

12:2 – Do not allow the world to pressure you to be conformed to its mold. Instead, allow God, by His Spirit, to transform you. We do not have the power to shape ourselves, but we are called upon to decide who or what will shape us. If we love the world, and submit to it, it will shape us into its mold, which is according to Sin. But if we love God, and submit to Him, then He will transform us to become His children, like Christ. And this transformation is by the renewing of the mind, which is consistent with the “reasonable” service. The foundation and starting point for change is in what we believe and how we think. When the mind is renewed, then transformation of the heart and of behavior will follow.

The consequence of a renewed mind is that we will “prove” God’s perfect will. This means to approve of His will. Our whole-hearted obedience demonstrates a whole-hearted approval. It is by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice that we say to God: “I totally accept and concur with Your will”. These first two verses present the same theme that was briefly introduced in Romans 6:12-14, and they establish the theme for the rest of the letter.

12:3-5 -- The first consequence of a renewed mind is to think soberly about yourself. Proper self-understanding is critical for right relationships. This sound judgment of self-understanding is to be in accordance with the “measure of faith” that He has given us. This is speaking of the justifying and saving faith that is the standard, or measuring rod, that determines our standing before God. As in Romans 11:20, “you stand by your faith”. Our self-evaluation is not in terms of gifts, or works-of-law, or accomplishment, but rather by our faith. That is the basis by which God declares us to be righteous, and it must therefore be the standard by which we assess ourselves.

A key element of self-understanding is to see yourself as one of many members of a body. Proper behavior, therefore, is to fulfill your particular function as a unique body part, and to know that all the parts belong to one another, working together as one body, in Christ.

12:6 -- The various members of the body have gifts that differ, according to grace. The differences are not only good, they are necessary, just as the differences among the members of the body are essential to the body. This is the same teaching as in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 14-21, where the point is that the differences should be no cause for feeling either superior or inferior to others. It is God’s will that we each have differing gifts, and they are given by His grace. Just as there is no place for boasting about works (Romans 3:27), there is no place for boasting about gifts. Our only boast is in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31).

There follows a list of example gifts, with statements of how they should be used. The first gift in the listing is prophecy, which is inspiration to receive and speak the word of God. He who prophesies, is to do so “in proportion to faith”. As in verse 3, the meaning of the measure of faith is the "measuring rod", or “yardstick” of faith. Faith, as the belief/trust in Christ, by which we all are justified and by which we all stand, is the standard that a prophet measures himself against. Prophecy should always be from and by faith.

12:7-8 -- Service, or ministry, is the same root word as for Deacon. Its general meaning is performing acts of humble, personal service, such as waiting at tables. Here, it probably refers more specifically to the particular office of Deacon, with special qualifications and special responsibilities. The one who has this gift and function should exercise it “in service”, which means both for the proper purpose of truly serving others, and doing so with the humble attitude of a servant. “He who teaches, in his teaching”. The distinction from prophecy is that there is no special personal revelation from God. To teach is to pass on and explain what has already been revealed, particularly in scripture. “He who exhorts, in his exhortation”. The particular meaning of exhortation is to urge, to persuade, to encourage. This is an aspect of both preaching and personal counseling. Those who have gifts of service, or teaching or exhortation should use the gift for its intended purpose; and there is also the idea of accepting our specialized roles. Whatever gifts you have, you should focus on them. God’s intent is for you to fully use and concentrate on what you have been given. That is the point of diversity.

“He who gives, with liberality”. Although it is expected that all Christians are to give, God has enabled some to do more. In the proportion that you have been gifted to do so, exercise it generously -- to the full measure of your God-given ability. “He who leads, with diligence”. This is probably referring especially to elders / pastors. It is a special calling and office that is to be exercised with diligence. They are not to take the responsibility casually, but they should apply to it all of their energy and attentiveness. “He who shows mercy, with cheerfulness”. Mercy is another activity expected of all Christians, but there are some who are gifted to excel in it. Acts of mercy are usually primarily material or physical, but their ultimate purpose is for emotional encouragement and for spiritual strengthening. That purpose is achieved only when the mercy is performed cheerfully.

In summary, whatever you have been given to do, do it with all your might, and do it for the right purpose.

L18 - The Way of Love -- Romans 12:9 - 21

12:9-13 -- “Love without hypocrisy”. This is a statement of God's perfect will (Romans 12:2), and can be regarded as the heading and theme of the remainder of chapter 12. It was widely known and accepted that the greatest commandments were to love God and to love one another. But the teaching and exhortation that is needed is to understand the full and proper meaning of “love”, and to put it into practice with sincerity and with practical substance. The teaching here in this regard parallels that of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, where love is defined and explained in terms of what it is and what it is not. There is also a larger parallel between Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 & 13, in that the discussion of gifts is followed by presenting the “more excellent way” of love.

Paul then gives specific examples of what it means for love to be genuine. Firstly, it abhors evil and clings to what is good (compare 1 Cor 13:6 – rejoicing not in unrighteousness but in truth). Genuine love is based on the understanding that sin is the great enemy and destroyer. One does not show genuine love by condoning or enabling sin. When one refuses to confront and exhort and correct a sinner, it is because of cowardice, not of love. Genuine love, for both the sinner and for the people impacted by the sinner, demands that we stand for truth and for righteousness, in ourselves as well as in others.

We are to be devoted to one another, since we belong to one another (Romans 12:5). This is what constitutes genuine friendship, or brotherly love (*phileos*). It is a committed and affectionate caring for one another. It is distinct from *agape*–love, but it must be included as part of *agape*.

Give preference to one another in honor; or “outdo one another in showing honor”. This should be regarded as more than just words or gestures that give honor. It also means treating one another with real respect, especially respect for their individual integrity, and the respect that is due to a child of God.

Be diligent and fervent in spirit. Do not be lazy, but be “on fire”. This involves both practical “labors of love” and a Spirit-filled emotional intensity as the driving force. Even when we may feel tired or depressed, our love for others should inspire and motivate us into action.

As is consistently taught in scripture, hope is the means of persevering. In order to carry out the labors of love, with consistency and faithfulness through tribulations, we must be sustained by hope, and we must be sustained by prayer.

Love is genuine only if it is willing to express itself by meeting physical and material needs. As James had said, *“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”* – James 2:15-16

12:14-21 -- In the preceding section, Paul dealt with loving one another within the church; but here, he addresses the more difficult demands of *agape*: to love your enemies. This accords with Jesus’ teaching in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:38-48). To bless those who persecute you, rather than cursing them, is one of the special new teachings of Jesus. It distinguishes the new covenant from the old. As the body of Christ, we continue His mission to seek and to save the lost, not to judge and condemn. In this age, the mission of the church, the true service of love, is in reconciliation, not wrath. So our prayers should in all cases be for God’s blessing. It is not our place to seek a curse upon anyone.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. We are to empathize, and we are to show that we do. This is regardless of whether the good fortune is undeserved or the ill fortune is well deserved; the practice of truly credible love demands that we share in the joys and the sorrows.

“Mind the same things towards one another”. This is closely connected with the previous verse. It means to share the same concerns. Do not have the attitude that what the other person is concerned about is unimportant: the haughtiness that is “above” the things that are important to others. It is a part of genuine love to care about the things that others care about. This is a principle that is generally understood in regard to showing love towards children, but the same principle applies to all people.

Do not return evil for evil. We cannot be effective in our mission unless we consistently express the love of Christ. If we return evil, the people of the world will see that we are no different from them, and that we have nothing to offer. They will know that our “love” is hypocritical. Furthermore, the standard of righteousness is to respect what is right in their sight. This is the same principle as being careful to not offend a weaker brother’s conscience (1 Corinthians 10:23-33). We are to give consideration and show respect for the convictions and moral standards of others, for it is the will of God not only that they come to the truth, but that they do so with personal integrity. This then entails doing all that is possible to “be at peace with all men”.

And, finally, it is not our place to seek vengeance. The time for that will be the “day of the Lord”, and He will be the one to execute it, for only He can do so with righteousness. What we should do, instead of seeking revenge, is to give food and drink to our enemies, as quoted from the Proverbs: *“If your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”* - Proverbs 20:22. The difficult question in this verse is how to interpret “*you will heap burning coals on his head”*. Based on the context, and all New Testament teaching, it cannot be anything vengeful or harmful. One interpretation often given is that it is an example of a gracious gift: that if a person is carrying a pan of coals on his head, that it is a gift of kindness to heap more burning coals into the pan. This, however, seems to be a rather strange specific example to illustrate the general idea of a generous gift. A more likely interpretation is that it is related to the heaping of burning coals onto the ore of a precious metal, as part of the process of smelting and purifying the metal. This is analogous to prophetic teachings that describe repentance and spiritual purification as a refining fire. The heaping of coals upon the head is then bringing about a purification and renewal of the mind, which is the redemptive fruit of undeserved (*agape*) love. It is by this kind of love that evil will be overcome by good.

L19 - Christian Duty -- Romans 13:1- 14

Romans 13:1-7 – In this section, Paul gives a special example of how Christians are to fulfill God’s perfect will in this world. We are to submit to governing authorities. This submission does not mean absolute, unquestioning obedience (see e.g. Acts 4:18-20; 5:29); but it does mean that we accept our role, and the role of governing authorities, in the social structure. We are to accept in general, and in principle, that there is a legitimate need for such authority, and that we have a duty to submit. Compare 1 Peter 2:13-17 for similar teaching.

The reason, first of all, is that these authorities were established by God. It is the will of   
God that human society be organized and structured to maintain order and peace. Governments “bear the sword” for this purpose. The alternative would be the unmitigated violence of anarchy: a jungle where only the strongest and most ruthless survive.

This is in accord with God’s establishment of family structure as the foundation for social order. It is His will that children submit to their parents (Eph 6:1-4), that wives submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22-24), that slaves submit to masters (Eph 6:5-9) and that we all submit to government authorities. This is not a claim that parents, or husbands, or employers, or government officials are always right and deserving, or that blind obedience is always right. But these structures are ordained by God, and our overall submission is essential for a just and civilized society.

If we love others, we will therefore be law-abiding (even including tax law, traffic laws and immigration law, e.g.). We will honor all contracts and covenants (e.g. making payments on time). When filing taxes, we will not under-report income, nor make false claims. When summoned for jury duty, we will comply, and not make up excuses. We are to render to all what is due.

Not only is this the way to avoid punishment, but it is the way to maintain a good conscience before God. Furthermore, it is the way for Christians to maintain a good reputation in the community. This is in accordance with the teaching of Romans 12:17-18. Anything less damages our testimony for Christ.

Romans 13:8-10 -- “Owe nothing to anyone…” does not forbid obtaining loans, but it means to meet all obligations: to not be in arrears or in default. But there is an exception: “except to love one another”. Love goes beyond legal or contracted obligations, and there is no limit to the love that we “owe”. This debt we have because of God’s love for us, which we can never pay off. It results in an unending debt that we have to Him, and therefore an unending debt that we owe to one another. We are to forgive, without limit, because He has forgiven us much more (Matthew 18:21-35). We are to show mercy, without limit, because we have received His unlimited mercy. We love, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Paul then explains why our obligation to one another is better expressed in terms of “love” rather than the commandments of the law. The world often misunderstands this to suggest that “love” substitutes for “law” in the sense of excusing us from the demands of righteousness: supposing that commandments can be ignored if we have a “loving” attitude and intention. That is certainly not Christian doctrine. Love, properly understood, comprehensively covers and includes all the commandments, and all of the intentions of the Law. As stated in Romans 12:9, love abhors evil and clings to the good. Love fulfills the Law not by requiring less, but by requiring more. Love does no wrong to others, and therefore fulfills the Law. This is in accord with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 22:34-40, and similarly in Galatians 5:13-15, 22-23.

This fulfillment of the intent of the Law is not only in the practical consequences for others and the moral motivation of the one who practices love. It also serves the witnessing function of the Law. One intended purpose of the Law given to Israel was that the surrounding nations would observe the wisdom and righteousness of that Law, in practice, and they would come to know the wisdom and righteousness of the God of Israel (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). Similarly, under the new covenant, when the world sees the love practiced by Christians, they will learn about God’s love. Christians who are faithful in loving others are lights shining in the darkness (Matt 5:14-16), revealing and expressing the glory of God. The Law, for the most part, failed to accomplish this, because of the failure of the nation of Israel (Romans 2:17-24). But among Christians, practicing Christian love, this intent is fulfilled.

Rom 13:11-14 -- The time for doing all of this is now. Do not procrastinate. The message here is similar to that of Romans 6:8-14. There has been a change of management in the universe: we are no longer under the reign of sin, but under the reign of the Christ. And here, Paul adds that there is a special urgency. Salvation, referring to the final deliverance in the Day of the Lord, is approaching ever more near. It is the same message as in Jesus’ parables (e.g. Matt 24:42-51), that we should be at all times ready, because we do not know when He will arrive. It may be delayed, but it is certain (2 Peter 3:9-10).

In these verses, the motivation for righteous living comes from looking to the future, whereas in Romans 6, the appeal is to look to the past (the cross, Jesus’ resurrection, and our baptism). Life in the present derives meaning and motivation both from a remembrance of the past, and a hope for the future. A negative attitude towards the past and future, as is characteristic of the world, is debilitating; but a positive and constructive view, characteristic of life in Christ, is empowering. It is the distinction between regarding the past with thanksgiving rather than regret, and the future with hope rather than fear.

Finally, we are to prepare ourselves for spiritual warfare, by laying aside the deeds of darkness and putting on the armor of light (compare Ephesians 6:10-17). We are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 4:22-24), and make no provision for the flesh. This, again, is similar to the previous teaching in Romans 6:12-19. It is only by committing ourselves to be in Christ, as our Lord, that we can prevail in the spiritual struggles and thereby fulfill His good and perfect will.

L20 - Respecting Conscience and Integrity -- Romans 14:1- 23

Romans 14:1-4 – Verses 1-4 of chapter 14 are the introduction and summary for this final doctrinal section of the letter (Romans 14:1-15:13). It is an appeal for the “strong in faith” and the “weak in faith” to receive, or accept, one another. It is an appeal for peace, harmony and unity in the church. The “weak in faith” are those who do not believe they should eat meat (verse 2), or drink wine (verses 17 and 21), and who observe special days (verse 5). The “strong in faith” are convinced that we have liberty in Christ, and that we are no longer bound to ritual dietary restrictions or to the observance of religious holidays.

It is likely that the attitude of the “weak” was based on a desire to maintain ritual purity in accordance with Jewish traditions. They could not trust that meat sold in the market place would be Kosher, they were concerned that wine might have been previously offered to pagan deities, and they felt compelled to observe Jewish feast days and Sabbaths. They had a genuine saving faith in Christ, but had not yet reached the mature understanding of the consequent freedom from ritual law.

Even though the “weak” were mistaken, Paul asks the “strong”, who were apparently in the majority, to receive and accept them. These differences should not be a barrier to fellowship. And it should be a genuine fellowship of mutual acceptance, not an occasion for passing judgment on one another.

Paul gives instruction to both sides: the “strong” should not have contempt for the “weak”; and the “weak” should not judge the “strong”. Many of the issues that can divide a church are of this nature. The side that is more strict (conservatives) tends to judge those who are liberated (liberals), condemning them for their sinful ways; and the liberals tend to regard the conservatives with contempt, despising them for being unsophisticated. Paul tells both sides to stop it.

The reason for accepting others is that God has accepted them. They are servants of God, they stand before Him, and only He has the right to pass judgment. You do not pass judgment on another person’s servant, nor on another person’s child.

Romans 14:5-9 – Another principle involved here is that “each person must be fully convinced in his own mind”. It is harmful to violate your own personal conviction and conscience. That violates your inner integrity, and obstructs your relationship with God. Doctrinal sophistication is not nearly as important as a pure heart.

Whatever a Christian does, is done before the Lord, and for the Lord; it is to the Lord only that he is ultimately accountable (2 Cor 5:15). It is the Lordship of Christ over each one of us that is critical. That requires that each one serve Him according to personal conviction and conscience. Submission to others on matters that offend your conscience put’s you into the position of serving men rather than God.

Romans 14:10-12 – Paul again speaks to both sides. “Why do you judge?” and “why do you despise?”. Each one will be judged by God, who is the only one qualified to pass judgment. And if we judge others, He will similarly judge us (Matt 7:1-2).

Romans 14:13-18 – The way to serve Christ is not by judging one another, but by helping one another, and especially by doing no harm. Paul is speaking primarily to the “strong” in this section. Even though they are correct about all foods being clean, they should not exercise that liberty if it causes harm to a fellow believer. It is possible for one who is weak to stumble, or even be spiritually destroyed, by either being led into eating meat, or by fellowshipping with those who do. If he thinks it is unclean, then to him it is unclean.

We must focus on what will build up one another, and what will build up the church, to establish the Kingdom. The prime concern is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, not issues of eating and drinking. This hearkens back to Romans 5-8, the section that speaks of the new realm of the Spirit, the realm of peace and joy. It is in serving and contributing to that realm that we serve Christ: a service “acceptable to God” (referring back to Rom 12:1).

Romans 14:19-23 – Therefore, pursue peace, and the building up of one another. Just as Jesus’ earthy mission was not to judge but to save (John 3:17); so it is with the continuation of His mission through the church. Here is a repetition of the points made in verses 13-15, but with a summary generalization to do nothing by which your brother stumbles.

Furthermore, it is our mission to declare that Jesus is Lord of all. A church riddled with divisions and strife undermines that message. But a church living in peace and harmony declares to the world that He is Lord of all peoples. Regardless of our differences, He unites us all, because He is our one Lord.

The chapter concludes with a re-assertion of the point in verse 5, that one must act according to personal conviction and conscience; anything else is sin. Some applications of this important principle are:

1. Accept restrictions to your behavior, giving up privileges and liberties, in order to not cause a brother to stumble. This is Paul’s admonition to the “strong”.

2. Submit to God according to your own conviction (conscience), rather than to man

3. We should teach, to change a person's convictions, before urging a change in behavior

   A. Within the church

   B. Towards outsiders; for example, we should be cautious about “political action”

4. Exceptions to item 3 are that the assertion of authority, in the absence of understanding, can serve two valid purposes, as long as it does not directly violate a person’s conscience:

   A.  Educational, for training in righteousness (a purpose of the Law, as in Gal 3:24)

   B. Supporting the ordained social order (family, work, government)

But submission to human authority where it clearly violates personal conscience is a sin before God.

L21 – Doctrinal Conclusion and Summary -- Romans 15:1- 13

Romans 15:1-6 – In this section, Paul continues his exhortation to the “strong”: they should serve the interests of the “weak”, and not themselves. This is an example of the more general principle that we should please others, for their good, rather than just pleasing ourselves. This “pleasing of others” is not a case of “pleasing men rather than God”. It is rather a righteous pleasing, within the will of God. It is for the genuine good of others, and for their edification, and for the edification of the church. It is the practice of Christian love, which rejoices in righteousness and truth.

For similar teachings on “pleasing others”, see 1 Corinthians 10:24 and Galatians 6:2; and especially Philippians 2:3-8, invoking the example of Christ. Another example is found in Matthew 8:17, where it is said that Jesus’ ministry of healing and casting out demons fulfills the prophecy from Isaiah:

*“He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases.”* – Isaiah 53:4.

Similarly (in Romans 15:3,4), Paul appeals to the example of Christ, quoting a messianic prophecy:

*“The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.”* -- Psalm 69:9.

This was fulfilled especially on the cross, as reported in Matthew 27: 39-41 (*“If You are the son of God, come down from the cross.”*). Jesus thus set the example of bearing the burdens of others; and as bondservants of Christ, and as the body of Christ, this continues as our ministry: to bear each other’s burdens.

Paul then points out the appropriateness of quoting scripture. It is there to instruct us, and more particularly in this case to provide encouragement, or consolation, that will strengthen our hope. When we see that these burdens were prophesied, as part of God’s pre-ordained plan, as part of the expected process of accomplishing His purpose, then we can endure with confidence. We can be assured that our toils and burdens will achieve His eternal purpose, and our hope will be realized. This is the comfort from scripture in the midst of tribulation.

In verses 5 and 6, we have the final summary exhortation: “to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus”. This does not require that they eliminate all differences of opinion (e.g. regarding eating meat and observing special days). It is rather that they focus on their one faith (compare Ephesians 4:4-6), and in sharing the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). This unity of believers, in Christ, requires the gift of perseverance and encouragement from God; and the purpose and outcome is that they shall glorify God with one voice (mouth).

Romans 15:7-13 – Paul then repeats the admonition to “accept one another” (as in 14:1), again referring to the example of Christ, who accepted us. As an example, he reminds them that Christ was a servant both to the Jews and to the Gentiles, without distinction. This is followed by quotes from Psalm 18:49, Deut. 32:43, Psalm 117:1 and Isaiah 11:10, which present the Messianic hope that Gentiles will join with Israel in praising and glorifying the Lord. This was Paul’s intent for the church at Rome, as he had said in verse 6: that they would glorify God “with one voice”. Whatever the ethnic differences and differences of opinions, God is glorified when the barriers of division are broken down (Ephesians 2:14) and His people are united in worship.

He then closes this section with a benediction: that they may be filled with joy and peace, and abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. He thus reminds them of what he had written in chapters 5 – 8: that having been justified, we have peace, hope and joy -- the assurance that we will prevail over all tribulation and over all adversaries, by the power of His Holy Spirit, and by His unfailing love.

Summary of Doctrine, Romans 1:1 -15:13

The major themes of Romans were presented in chapter 1, versus 16,17:

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous shall live by faith.’”*

The item here of primary importance is the **revelation of the righteousness of God**. That is the heart of the Gospel. God is, indeed, good. Secondly, the means of revealing His righteousness is by saving His people (in accordance with His promises), which is accomplished by the power of the Gospel. The third point is that this salvation is realized in those who believe. It is “from faith to faith”, meaning from the faithfulness (righteousness) of God into the faith (trust) of those who would be His people. The fourth point is that His people – those who would believe – are both Jew and Greek (Gentile).

The proper approach to truly understand Romans is not to take a self-centered perspective, preoccupied by the question: “how can I be saved, and go to heaven?” The right way to understand this letter is through a God-centered perspective and concern, asking: “How can I be assured that God is righteous, and what is my role in fulfilling His righteousness?” As Jesus had said, we must seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. And throughout Romans, we see this as Paul’s first concern. Individual salvation is secondary and subordinate to the revelation of God’s righteousness and glory.

God’s righteousness is revealed in wrath against all unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). All (Jew and Gentile) have sinned, and they have sinned willfully and knowingly, and their judgment is therefore just (1:18-3:20).

God’s righteousness is revealed in that He offers justification on the basis of faith (chapters 3:21-4:25). This justification is therefore available to both Jew and Gentile. This fulfills God’s promise to Abraham, in that Abraham’s true descendants are not according to genetics, but according to faith. In this way the promise to be a blessing to all nations is fulfilled.

God’s righteousness is revealed and fulfilled in Christ, the second Adam; and it is fulfilled in those who belong to Him, for those who are “in Christ” (chapters 5-6). This unity with Christ is both signified and established in baptism. As a consequence, those who are baptized into Christ are obligated to Him, not to Adam. We are under the realm of His grace, delivered from the realm of Sin, and the Law, and of Death. We are delivered into a new kingdom, where Christ is the King.

God’s righteousness is revealed in us by the power of His indwelling Spirit. Under the Law, we were enslaved to Sin and Death, and it was impossible to serve Him (chapter 7). It is not that God’s Law had failed, but that God’s chosen people, living under the Law, had failed. But the Spirit of life sets us free from sin and death, and enables us to fulfill God’s righteousness (chapter 8). In spite of and in the midst of all tribulations, God causes all things to work for good. In the face of all our enemies, He is victorious, and nothing can separate us from His love.

Even though most of Israel (according to the flesh) is lost, God’s promise has not failed (chapters 9-11), for there is a remnant that is saved. All of those who respond with faith to the word of the gospel, both Jew and Gentile, shall be saved. They are the true Israel of God, and this is how all Israel is in fact saved. This fulfills Gods promise, and thus reveals His righteousness.

We are therefore challenged and exhorted to offer ourselves to Him, as living sacrifices, in order to prove His good and perfect will (12:1-15:13). It is by our obedient participation in God’s plan that His eternal purpose will finally be fulfilled. It is by our harmonious working together as members of the body of Christ, that the mission and work of Christ continues through this age. And it will be by our continuing faithfulness, in accepting and loving one another, that God will in the end be glorified. It is through the witness of a united and loving church, a church where all peoples are united in worship, that His righteousness is revealed to all nations.

L22 – Closing -- Romans 15:14- 16:27

Romans 15:14-18 – Paul now shares some personal thoughts about his reasons for writing to the Romans, and more generally about his apostolic ministry. As in the opening verses of the letter, he is being careful to not offend the Romans by being overly assertive or authoritarian. He humbly, almost apologetically, commends them as being capable of admonishing and teaching one another. Nevertheless, he has written to them to “remind them on some points”.

He presumes to do so because of the grace given to him from God, to be a minister of the gospel, especially to the Gentiles. It is his God-given duty to thus be a “priest” of the Gospel. The Levitical priests were charged to ensure that offerings were without blemish, and to lay their hands upon the offerings to sanctify them, making them acceptable to God. Likewise, Paul’s intention has been to proclaim and teach the Gospel to the Gentiles, in order to sanctify them, and make them to be an acceptable “offering” to God. This is equivalent to his introductory comments in verses 1:1 and 1:5, as below:

*“Paul,… set apart for the gospel of God….through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles.”*

It is this leading them into the obedience of faith that sanctifies them, and makes them to be an acceptable offering (or living sacrifice, as stated in Romans 12:1). It is only in Christ Jesus that Paul can boast, i.e. only in Christ working through him that he claims any success in this priestly ministry of the Gospel. The result of obedience among the Gentiles is accomplished only by Christ working through him. Furthermore, his preaching of the gospel has been in the power of the Spirit. As he had previously written to the Corinthians,

*“My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”* -- 1 Corinthians 2:4

Romans 15:19-22 -- Paul then comments on his ministry of the gospel throughout the entire region of the Eastern Mediterranean, “from Jerusalem to Illyricum”. A guiding principle for him in this mission had been to go to places where Christ was not yet known: to lay new foundations for churches, rather than building upon the work of others. He cites Isaiah 52:15 as a rationale for this strategy, and says that this has prevented him from visiting Rome up to this time.

Romans 15:23-29 -- But now, he regards that phase of his ministry as completed. There are now three tasks before him:

1. To deliver an offering from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia to the poor among the church in Jerusalem
2. To visit the church in Rome
3. And finally, to preach the gospel in Spain

The collection and delivery of an offering is a fulfillment of the promise found in Galatians:

*“Recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John… gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. They only asked us to remember the poor – the very thing I also was eager to do.”* – Galatians 2:9:10

Not only does this offering fulfill a promise, serving the physical needs of the poor in Jerusalem, it also serves a spiritual purpose for the church: it is a means of strengthening the bond of fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. We should always be aware that the greatest value of sharing material wealth is the spiritual bond that it creates. As Jesus had said: *“where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* – Matthew 6:21

After delivering this offering to the Jerusalem church, he will proceed, by way of Rome, to Spain. He is also gently asking the Christians at Rome to help him in this, i.e. to collect an offering to support his mission to Spain. This is no doubt the particular need that prompted him to write this letter to Rome at this time.

Romans 15:30-32 -- Paul now makes an earnest plea: that they pray on behalf of Paul and on behalf of these plans. Paul clearly has a burden of concern: for his safety in Jerusalem; that the offering will be well received, thus having it’s intended spiritual fruit; and that he will find joy and refreshment when he visits Rome. There is no record regarding the success of the offering, but on the other two prayer items we can see that the prayers were answered, but in ways unexpected. The Lord provided for Paul’s safety, but only by being arrested by the Romans and subsequently rescued from an ambush (Acts 23:10-35). Paul also found his way to Rome, but as a prisoner, and by way of shipwreck. Did he find “joy” in Rome, as a prisoner? According to Philippians 1:3-20; 4:10-13, he did. These are examples of how God has His own ways of answering prayer.

Romans 16:1-16 -- In this section we have a commendation and a list of greetings. This is standard for his letters, but the list of people greeted here is exceptionally long. First, consider the commendation of Phoebe, in verses 1 and 2. She is described as a “deacon” of the church at Cenchrea, which should be understood here not simply as a servant, but as a servant-leader, one holding the office of deacon, as described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. This office may not have been as formalized as it became when I Timothy was written, but her role should be regarded as a special position of responsible leadership in the church. It is likely that she was somewhat wealthy, and that much of the help she had given was financial. Paul regarded her with considerable respect, and entrusted her with the delivery of this letter to Rome.

Prisca and Aquilla were Jews that Paul first met in Corinth. They were originally from Rome, but had been exiled by the emperor (Acts 18:1-3). They then accompanied Paul to Syria, and then on to Ephesus, where they remained (Acts 18:18-21). At some point, probably in Corinth, they had saved Paul’s life. Apparently they had returned to Rome after the death of the emperor Claudius. So, it is understandable that they would top the list of brothers and sisters to be greeted. They would be outstanding examples of those fully capable of admonishing and teaching in the church at Rome (see Romans 15:14).

Very little if any is known about the others in this list, but a few interesting points are

1. The majority were probably slaves or freedmen, based on their names
2. There are a large number of women who are singled out for special mention
3. References to house churches, and people who hosted them, indicate that the church at Rome consisted of about 5 house-churches. It is estimated from this that there was a total of about 100 Christians in Rome at this time (out of a total population of 1 million). This provides some perspective as to their rather fragile and humble beginnings.

Romans 16:17-20 -- At this point, Paul interjects a warning, regarding false teachers. It may seem strange to interrupt this closing section with such a warning, but it can be easily understood at a personal level. As Paul reflects on all of these individuals that he knows and personally cares about, he is reminded of the spiritual dangers they face. It is much like what a parent would say to a child in final parting words: be careful.

It is likely that this warning does not pertain to any particular known problem among the Roman Christians, but he knows from experience that such problems inevitably arise among churches. So he gives them advance warning. He also notes, in verse 19, that they are known for their “obedience”; they should therefore be “wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil”. The obedience he commends them for suggests an innocent and naïve vulnerability to being misled. Therefore, they need a warning to be on guard against those who would deceive. This is similar to Jesus’ instruction to His disciples:

*“I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves”* -- Matthew 10:16

Romans 16:21-24 -- He now sends greetings from his associates in Corinth. At the top of the list, appropriately, is Timothy, his true child in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2). Tertius, in verse 22, identifies himself as the scribe who actually wrote down this letter. It is also of interest to note that the church met in the house of Gaius.

Romans 16:25-27 -- In these final verses, instead of a benediction (which had already been given in 15:33 and 16:24), he closes with a praise-hymn to God. Instead of asking God to bless and establish them, he is praising God as the One who is able to do so. He further takes this last opportunity to summarize how God shall establish them. It is according to the gospel, which leads to the obedience of faith.