

# Romans

## Romans 1-3

Paul's letter to the Christians of Rome was written from Corinth, shortly after Paul had written 2 Corinthians, in the time frame of Acts 20:2-3, toward the end of the 3 months Paul spent in Greece/Achaia. He was en route to Jerusalem with gathered funds for the impoverished saints there, and in company with a number of men chosen by the churches to accompany the gift (see Romans 15:25-28). Paul knew several people in the churches in Rome (see chapter 16:3ff) but had never personally visited the churches in Rome (1:10-11), though he prayed often for the opportunity to go there. It is unlikely that any apostle had been to Rome yet, when this letter was written in 58 AD.

Paul identifies himself as a "slave/servant of Christ Jesus" in 1:1, a concept familiar to Israel from the days of Moses (see Lev 25:42), God's people whom he had redeemed were his slaves/servants. Paul is putting himself in category shared by Abraham (Gen 26:24), Moses (Numbers 12:7), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), David (2 Samuel 7:5) and Isaiah (Isaiah 20:3). And called to be an apostle, as were the 12 (recall 1 Cor 15:8-9 and 2 Cor 12:12).

A primary topic in Romans is what the gospel (good news) is, as in 1:1, 9, 15-17, 2:16...

Jesus' identity as Son of God and son of David is factual fulfillment of the prophecies in the Scriptures, 1:2-6, as is his bodily resurrection from the dead (a critical theme stressed repeatedly in this letter). Grace, God's favor extended to us by his generosity, is in 1:5, 7, 3:24ff, 4:16, 5:2:ff, etc., emphasizing over and over again how we are dependent on God's generous gift for our redemption and sanctification. Eternal life is an unearned and undeserved gift of God (Romans 6:23) for all of us who have sinned (Romans 3:23), which is all of us.

The power of God that saves us is invested in the good news (gospel) of Jesus. We encounter this saving power by faith (trusting in God) no matter who we are or where we come from (1:16-17). The faith described is dynamic, and living by faith is progressive as we perceive the unveiled

righteousness of God.

Two things are “revealed.” The one is the righteousness of God, seen through faith (1:7), and the other is the wrath of God (1:18) against those who refuse to believe/trust God.

Truth (1:19b, 1:25, 2:8) is to be acknowledged and believed, conformed to, and obeyed. Rejecting the truth about the Creator and the nature of the creation is the beginning of a downward spiral that has swallowed up the nations from Babel onward (note Deuteronomy 32:8-9, 17ff). Rejecting the design of the designer leads to God giving up the rebellious (1:24, 26, 28) to their own devices, which degrade further and further in breaking the barriers of relationships, fidelity, morality, and restraint, behaving worse and worse. Israel fell into this degradation, imitating the other nations (gentiles) of the earth, despite having the Law of God (Romans 2:12). The same downward spiral described in 1:18ff is still working today, in our world and our nation. The warning of 1:32 is still timely.

Whether one stands before God disobedient to his explicit commandments, or disobedient to one’s own conscience, everyone condemns themselves just by doing what they know they ought not, and failing to do what they ought to do (2:1-24). What matters isn’t circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Gentile, what matter is doing what God says (2:25-29), and everyone fails by their own standards, and by comparison with others.

So, seeing that God’s word is of great value (3:1-2), but that everyone has been unfaithful (3:4, 9-18, a series of citations from Psalms and Proverbs and the prophets, truth through the ages), the answer to the problem of sin (resulting in death) is not found in ourselves, but depends on God’s mercy and the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ (3:20-31). Many would like to diminish the import of 3:23, but it’s the reality of the human condition, we are each and every one failed sinners whose only hope is the gift of grace (3:24) in Christ, received by faith (3:25). Our best efforts at following rules, even rules given by God (3:28), will never be a remedy for sin. We must have justification by faith (3:30) to stand before God, no matter who we are or what our heritage. This is what the Law existed for, to be fulfilled in the work of Jesus Christ.

Romans 4-7

Having affirmed the basic facts and robust power of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the opening verses of chapter 1, and then demonstrating the debased condition of humanity enslaved by sin, Paul has written that everyone can be “justified by God’s grace as a gift,” that redemption from sin is in Jesus Christ who is the atoning sacrifice for all our sins, and that Christians “justified by faith” and not by “works of the law.” Paul will revisit the problems of trying to be justified by following a set of rules (whether given by Moses or innate in one’s own conscience as in 2:12ff). In chapter 4-5 Paul highlights Abraham and Adam as patterns and paradigms to make the case that justification comes by faith in what Jesus has done for us.

Citing Genesis 15:6, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (4:3), Paul asserts that this is the guiding principle throughout the scriptures, that trust in God is the one basis for not having one’s sins not counted against him. Take note the same verb in 4:3 (counted as righteousness) and 4:8 (not count sin). This is God’s choice and gift, not our achievement, whether a circumcised descendant of Abraham or an uncircumcised gentile. Abraham himself was counted righteous for his faith several years before God gave him the covenant sign of circumcision (4:10, Genesis 15:6, 17:1-14). Thus God’s crediting of righteousness by faith is not bound to circumcision, which came later, nor to the law, which came much later.

In fact, Paul teaches in these chapters that the law has a down side, in that it makes us aware of sin (7:7) and shows us that we are failures and deserving of punishment (4:15). Citing God’s promise from Genesis 17:5, that Abraham was made “father of many nations” (4:17), Paul taught that everyone who comes to God through faith in Jesus is an heir of Abraham (4:16) and that Abraham continued in faith, with hope, trusting that God would actually give the promised heir as a son through Sarah at their advanced age. Note the description of Abraham’s progress in faith and glorifying God in 4:20-21. Abraham’s living faith is the paradigm for us who “believe in him who raised up from the dead Jesus our Lord...” (4:24-25) so that our faith is counted as righteousness, rather than our sins counted against us (4:23-24).

Justification by faith brings peace with God as following rules never could (5:1, recall John 14:27, 16:33). Notice too the faith-hope-love connections in 5:1-5, and the work of the Spirit in v5.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 made the case that our weakness highlights

our need for Christ and the opportunity to be strong in him while frail ourselves. Similar ideas are here in 5:6ff.

God had a plan for the ages when he created the world, and “at just the right time” Jesus did his redemptive work through the cross (5:6). Remember Galatians 4:4, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son...”

The gospel depends on both the sacrificial death of Jesus and his resurrection from the dead, 5:8-10.

The first man Adam (the Hebrew word Adam is both his name and the word for a man, a human) brought sin and death into the world (5:12ff) for all humankind, and as a “type” (v14) he foreshadowed Jesus being the remedy for sin for all mankind. Again, Paul stressed new life in Christ, free from sin, is God’s gift, not our achievement (5:15-18). Notice the ruling authority attributed to death and conversely to “the free gift of righteousness” in v17. Cain was confronted with the warning that sin was a hungry beast crouching at his door (Genesis 4:7) and that he “must rule over it,” but he didn’t, sin and death reigned instead. Jesus has broken that cycle of bondage... but one thing or the other will rule in our lives, whether sin and death or righteousness and life, 5:21, leading into the way the gospel is enacted for each of us who believe in Jesus in chapter 6.

Romans 6 describes the time and means that mark the transition for a Christian from enslavement to sin and death to becoming a slave of obedience leading to righteousness. Being baptized into Christ is a sort of re-enactment for each disciple of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (6:2-4), the moment of new birth when God imputes forgiveness and gives the gift of the Holy Spirit. The imagery of baptism is intentional and not to be forgotten as we continue to “walk in newness of life.” This is the “born again” necessity for entering the kingdom that Jesus described to Nicodemus in John 3. The verbs describing baptism always make it clear that the one being baptized isn’t doing the work, neither physically (the dead don’t bury themselves) nor spiritually (we don’t forgive our own sins or give ourselves new life). The condemned don’t crucify themselves (6:6, recall Galatians 2:20), but those who are baptized in faith are crucified with Christ. Again, becoming one with Christ is his death, burial and resurrection is intentionally laid out for us in the designed pattern of baptism into Christ.

The transformation from dead in sin to alive in Christ is not merely symbolic. Everything has changed. “Death no longer has dominion” (6:9). We need to believe in that divine work of release and renewal (6:11). We are empowered to choose not to sin, no longer being its slave (6:12-14). Not being under law (adherence to a set of rules by which we can never be innocent) doesn’t mean there we have no more tendency to sin or that sin no longer matters (6:1, 15, recall 3:8). The new life God has given calls for obedience to his purposes, of our own volition. We are not created or re-created to be apart from God. Being made for divine purposes, we must choose to be servants of righteousness to and obey “from the heart” the teaching received through the Lords’ apostles and prophets (6:17). Sin rules over everyone because Adam started that reign of terror (5:12ff), and everyone becomes a slave of sin because they follow that same inevitable path of sin and death (6:16), but the pattern is broken by Jesus who did not sin and overcame death, and made it possible for us to share in his new life.

Romans 3:23 and 6:23 are key concepts in Romans, and moving from sin-guilt to eternal life depends upon the faith, redemption, new life, and obedience described in chapters 4-6.

Lest we conclude that “the standard of teaching” in 6:17 is just another set of rules to live by, Romans 7 is Paul’s long discourse on the core problem of rule keeping as the basis for righteousness. First, he uses an illustration from the law about being free from a covenant relationship. The covenant of marriage ends when a spouse dies, and the widow is free to marry again. Paul then asserts that we’ve been set free from the law (this has to be equally true for the gentile who is condemned by “natural law” and the Jew who had Moses’s law) by the death of Jesus. Jesus died, and Christians share in Jesus death (recall 6:1ff), and so are free from whatever law bound them. Not free for nothing, but free to be bound instead to Jesus who lives forever.

Notice the multiple references to “fruit” in these verses, 6:21-22, 7:4-5, and recall Jesus discussion of the true vine, John 15:1ff, and recall Adam’s original placement in the garden (paradise) of Eden, Genesis 2:7ff, to care for God’s garden. In Christ being caretakers of God’s garden with eternal life restored is accomplished, even though the attractions of the world are still around us (7:5-6). Serving in the “new way of the Spirit” is what Jesus promised in John 4:23f along with the water of life.

So, Christians have this conundrum of being dead to the world, but still living in it; obedient to righteousness unto life, but still seduced by the flesh's appetites for things of the world. Paul describes personally (7:7-25) why rules of law are not a sufficient answer to living by the Spirit while still in the flesh. Regulations define what is unlawful, but can't prevent us from doing what is unlawful. If the standard of righteousness were the vehicle code, no driver would be righteous, because no matter how well intentioned (or not), everyone violates the code sooner or later, whether on purpose or by lapse of attention. The only thing law can offer to a lawbreaker is penalties. No matter how much one wants to be right and justified, a lawbreaker is guilty and subject to whatever penalty applies. Overall, the penalty for sin, any violation of God's law, is death. No set of rules can fix the problem of violation/guilt resulting in penalties/death. A whole new approach, life by the Spirit in Christ, is the necessary solution, as we will never qualify for righteousness on the basis of obedience to any set of rules.

And so, we have a grand "thanks be to God" (recall 2 Corinthians 9:15) in 7:25, that even while the flesh draws us toward sin we can be delivered "from this body of death" (v24) "through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Leading into the "therefore" in 8:1 and the different sort of "law" giving freedom.

## Romans 8-10

Romans 8 is the climax of Paul's description of divine mercy and human failure. Chapter 1 opened with the substance of the gospel, and then proceeded to describing why there is a need for God's intervention through Christ. Chapters 2-3 made the case that there is a universal human need for justification by faith in Christ, because all humans sin and fall short of God's glory, and are therefore condemned apart from God's grace through faith. Chapters 4-5 looked to Abraham and then to Adam to establish the paradigms of the perpetual value God has placed on faith and the hopelessness of being enslaved to apart from the man Jesus Christ overcoming sin and death for our sake. Chapter 6 dwelt on the new life that comes through being united with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection when we are baptized, and so being under a new master, obedient to righteousness rather than sin, with the repeated assertion that this new life is a gift of God, not a wage earned by our service. Chapter 7 faced the dilemma of choosing to live a spiritual life while still in the flesh in

this world, with the final assurance that God's answer in Christ is genuine, despite the weakness of the flesh.

Chapter 8 continues from "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord..." in 7:25, with a "therefore." If you are in Christ, there is no condemnation, as restated in 8:31-39. In Romans 8 we have the longest discourse on the work of the Holy Spirit in and for believers after John 14-15-16. "The law of the Spirit of life" is not to be confused with a set of rules defining holy behavior and with penalties for violation, that is "the law of sin and death." This new "law" is what Paul wrote about in 2 Corinthians 3, the transforming work of the Spirit in our hearts, not commandments written on stone. Our mind, our heart, has been cleansed by God's son who dealt with sin to free us, and ought now to be focused on the things of the Spirit, to walk according to the Spirit (recall Galatians 5:1, 13-14, 16-24). It is unreasonable to expect those who have not been cleansed by Christ and have not received the Holy Spirit he poured out to obey God's law (remember chapter 1:18ff). In order to understand God's law we must first believe in Jesus and receive the renewal of the Spirit (8:5-8). The human condition is "in the flesh" while the Christian condition, though living in flesh still, is "in the Spirit" (8:9). The Spirit in the Christian is a mark of belonging to God and a guarantee of God's promises (8:9-11, and recall 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Galatians 4:6).

Romans 8 upholds God's utter faithfulness. The only "if" is "if you live according to the flesh.." in 8:13. If we pursue life by the Spirit of God, we will live, because God is trustworthy. Look at what he's already done (8:3, 15, 26, 32), and be assured of what he promises to do.

In the Old Testament "sons of God" referred to mighty spiritual beings who convened around the throne of God to consult with him (Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7), and Paul uses that term to depict everyone who is in Christ and has the Spirit of God (8:14-15, 19), destined for glory.

Notice some of the things the Spirit of God does in/for believers in Romans 8:2, 6, 9, 11, 15, 16, 23/26).

Living by the Spirit while in the flesh doesn't exempt the children of God from struggles in a sin afflicted world (8:18ff), but does assure divine help and the strength to prevail, anticipating the redemption of creation and a glorious new beginning when Jesus returns to complete the "adoption"

process at work in us. Hope is a great motivator and sustainer (8:24-25). In this context, 8:28, “all things work together for good...” is no assurance of easy answers to the labor pangs of this world, but an assurance that the worst of our experiences are in fact for our good in God’s will. God’s intention is that we should be like Jesus (8:29), and Jesus suffered in the flesh, only to be justified and glorified. We are called to the same.

The great guarantee summarized in 8:31-39, like 1 Corinthians 15:58, is a shout of victory in the midst of battle. Jesus has the right of prosecution when we are accused of sin, but he is our defense attorney and the judge, so the outcome for those who walk in the Spirit is assured. There is no power or event in heaven or on earth that can derail the victory of Jesus that Christians participate in, or the promise of eternity with God. Nothing in all creation is able “to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (8:39)

Chapter 9 shifts the topic from the human condition in sin and God’s redemption through Christ to the specific plight of the Jewish people who brought the Christ into the world and largely refused to follow the king sent by God. Many Jews became Christians, but many more rejected Jesus of Nazareth and many of them vehemently opposed the gospel. This was a conundrum for Christians then, and now. Was this a failure of God’s plan? Not at all, Paul asserts in chapters 9-11.

Paul’s comment about being accused for the sake of his Jewish kinsmen in 9:1-3 resonates with Moses in Exodus 32:31-32, and the Lord’s answer to Moses affirming his own sovereignty and justice is also echoed by Paul in the reasoning that follows here.

9:4-5 reviews things God did with and through Israel. Then 9:6-13 notes (as in chapter 4) that being “of Israel” really depends on faith, not just genetics. God in his foreknowledge makes choices that we can’t necessarily reason through or readily explain, but his choices are always right (9:14-18). God’s sovereign authority is always exercised rightly, whether perceive it or not, and his choices do not obviate human choices or responsibility (9:19-24). There is shaping, design, and purpose (like a potter with clay) in God’s work among us, and necessarily some of what is made will be for noble uses, and some for dishonorable. Elsewhere, Paul discussed the human striving sometimes called for to be transformed from the dishonorable to the honorable (2 Timothy 2:20-21). With Paul’s own



example of Pharaoh, we see a man who was full of himself and unjust, who is described in Exodus as “hardening his heart” half a dozen times before there is an instance where “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” Even then, the hardening was likely through circumstances and not through God distorting Pharaoh’s will. Nevertheless, God has a right to do anything he wants with what he has created, including humans, but he in fact offers mercy and patience and the call to new life.

Notice again the basis of righteousness before God in 9:30-33, as in the foregoing chapters.

Should Christians pray for unbelievers? Paul did, Romans 10:1. Notice the dilemma in 10:3-4, that by trying to establish one’s own righteousness one misses out on the real righteousness found only in Christ.

Romans 10:5-17 describes again what Christ has done, that must be accepted by faith, as fulfillment of the requirements of the law, which could be fulfilled in no other way. A series of citations from Deuteronomy and the Psalms and the Prophets again tie God’s eternal promises and his methodology through the ages to the gospel of Christ. People everywhere need to hear the word of God and believe it, and the church has a responsibility to send proclaimers of the good news/gospel (10:14-15). Paul is not here (or anywhere else) presenting a step by step list of things that produce salvation, he is affirming that hearing about Jesus, and believing, and confessing/calling on the name of the Lord are necessary to be saved. Part of his affirmation, in v18, comes from Psalm 19:4, which describes the heavens declaring God’s glory. As in Romans 1:18ff, there is obvious evidence of God in his creation, and no one is without excuse.

Repeatedly in chapters 9-10 Paul has alluded to the inclusion of the nations/gentiles through faith in Jesus, and the exclusion of flesh descendants of Israel who refused faith. That situation of Jew and Gentile in God’s household is the focus of chapter 11.

### Romans 11-13

Romans 11 continues the theme Paul took up in chapter 9, the unbelief of multitudes of Jewish people. He cited more than 2 dozen scriptures to demonstrate that the tragedy of Jewish unbelief and the message of salvation being extended to the nations (gentiles) was always foreseen by

God and revealed through his messengers. God is not capricious in this, he hasn't "rejected his people" (11:1), but as in the days of Elijah only a small percentage, a remnant, continued in God's grace (11:2-6). That remnant in Elijah's day was defined as people who had not bowed to Baal, and the remnant in the Christian epoch can be defined also by faithfulness in Christ, but the "I have kept for myself" phrase (11:4, 1 Kings 19:18) points to them being "a remnant chosen by grace" and not "on the basis of works" (11:5-6), as taught in the previous chapters of Romans.

So a chosen remnant (the elect) obtained what God promised, while others were hardened (recall the Pharaoh example in 9:17-18). Citations from Isaiah and Deuteronomy and Psalms (Rom 11:8-10) again support the premise of hard hearts being blinded to God's truth, which was a theme in 8:1-8, the mind set on the flesh cannot please God or understand the life of the Spirit, and elsewhere in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 or Matthew 13:14-15 and Luke 7:29-30. It's "God gave them up" in the same way as described in Rom 1:24, 26, 28.

God's people as a cultivated olive tree with deep roots runs (11:16-24) back to the Garden in Genesis 2-4, and the righteous one in Psalm 1, and numerous prophetic allusions and parables, including Jesus own "I am the vine, and you are the branches..." Surely one notion that is laid to rest in Paul's description of grafting and breaking off is the idea of never being able to fall away. Paul here reflects the message of Ezekiel 18, that everyone is responsible for their own decisions, and if the righteous turn away they will be lost, or if the wicked repent they will be saved. While we live we are not in an immutable relationship with God, though he is immutable in his love and faithfulness toward us.

Paul rejects and forbids any notions of antisemitism or hatred toward the Jews in these verses. He asserts that God's love for the physical descendants of Abraham is intact and includes gifts (11:28-29) God gave in his covenants with the patriarchs.

Paul uses a particular word in 11:12, the "fullness" Israel (from v7). He's referring to salvation. He used the same word in 11:25, "the fullness of the nations/gentiles," surely again in reference to salvation. The whole number of Israel that will be saved, and the whole number of the nations that will be saved. Paul's phrase in 11:25 is also found in Genesis 48:19, when Jacob was blessing the sons of Joseph and said of Ephraim that "his seed/descendants shall become a multitude of nations" except the Hebrew

word there translated “multitude” means, as noted in some English Bibles, “fullness.” Ephraim became the head of the kingdom of Israel from Jeroboam onward, and the name Ephraim became a synonym for Israel for 200 years (anticipated in Genesis 48:16). Ephraim and Manasseh would “grow into the multitude in the midst of the earth” (Genesis 48:16) and Ephraim’s offspring would be “the fullness of the nations” in Genesis 48:19. Paul knew those words, of course, and when he wrote of the “fullness” of Israel in Romans 11:12 and then the “fullness” of the nations in 11:25, it’s reasonable to reflect on what is necessary for “all Israel” to be saved in 11:26. Since the offspring of Ephraim (and Manasseh) were displaced by the Assyrians in 721 BC (see 2 Kings 17) and assimilated into the nations, the only way for “all Israel” to be saved is the gospel going to the nations, where the offspring of Ephraim had been scattered. The ingathering of Ephraim/Israel is only accomplished by the inclusion of the nations, and “in this way all Israel will be saved” (11:26, ESV). Deliverance is only through Jesus who fulfills the prophecy in 11:26-27 and the means of taking away sins was described in Romans 6 and Romans 10, in terms of grace and faith and new life, etc. The fullness of Israel requires the fullness of the nations/gentiles, as the offspring of Abraham are among the nations, and not all of them identify as Jews. Paul is not describing a time table or special sign or event, he’s talking about how God saves his people, all who really are his people, whether circumcised or uncircumcised. Previous statements in Romans, like 2:28-29, 4:16-17, and 9:6-8 still apply in recognizing who “all Israel” is.

Romans 12-15 transition from explanations of God’s scheme of redemption, and how that applies to the original Israel of God, to practical applications and principles for daily living and building up the church.

Since all things proceed from God and belong to him (11:36) and we have no “gift” to give God our maker (11:35), the requisite response (therefore, 12:1) is to give ourselves wholly to him in thoughtful service. Slaughtered animals have no value to God, but he loves us and a sacrificial life he does treasure. 12:2 takes the flesh vs Spirit thoughts of Romans 8 and directs us to intentionally be transformed, using the mind God gave us to make decisions consistent with his will to do what is right.

As in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul listed several gifts that the members of the body have to use for the good of the body, Romans 12:3-13. The lists are not exhaustive, but indicate various ways God works in and among his

people. Some gifts might be viewed as miraculous, others might seem like natural talents or personality traits or skills learned through study and practice, but all are to be utilized for the service of God and his people. God's grace (12:6) is always at work within and among his people, and should be put to work with enthusiasm and conviction, in genuine love. Serve the Lord and help the saints.

Echoing Jesus (and Solomon) we're taught in 12:14-21 to do what is right and good, no matter what others do to us. To treat people as we would want to be treated, when they are physically or emotionally needy, and even if they are treating us badly. Paul had plenty of opportunities to practice these virtues in his service of the Lord as he traveled about preaching the gospel, and we have plenty of opportunities and challenges in our own circles and daily experiences. Perhaps 13:17-18 and 21 need frequent rehearsal, with much prayer (v12).

### Romans 13

Following from "Do not be overcome by evil" in 12:21 the apostle commanded submission to human governing authorities. Governing authorities exist by God's will, and are not to be resisted. Paul wrote this when Rome was ruled by Nero and Judea was governed by Felix with Ananias as high priest. None of these were admirable or godly men, and each in turn abused his power in direct dealings with Paul. The commandment is not based on whether or not the governing authority is righteous, but rather is based on God's righteousness and his will for his people in this world. When Paul wrote in Romans 1:18 of God's wrath being revealed from heaven "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" we should connect that with 13:4, the ruler (even an unjust and ungodly ruler) is "an avenger who carries out God's wrath" (part of the outworking of 12:19). Authorities are servants of God, and it is to God they will give an account (13:6, and consider Psalm 82). These instructions in 13:1-7 are not dependent on the particular form of government or titles of governing officials in any particular nation or generation. The obligation extends even to being respectful (see also 1 Peter 2:13ff).

That paying respect is the prelude to the overall principle of always paying what we owe (13:8), knowing that the one debt we can never resolve is the debt of love. We always, as creatures made in the image of God, have a debt of love toward others made in his image, which is the

fulness of the law. One basic interpretation of what the Bible means by “love” is here in 13:10. You don’t commit adultery if you love, because that inevitable harms someone, etc.

What Paul taught briefly about morality and the battle for righteousness in 13:11-14 he later wrote about at greater length in Ephesians 4-6 and Colossians 3-4.

Notice that quarreling and jealousy are right alongside drunkenness and sexual immorality. v14 highlights the themes of chapters 7-8.

### Romans 14-16

The last several verses of Romans 13 were about walking in the light, wearing the Lord’s armor, and being strong in the Lord. The focus shifts in 14:1 to concern for brothers who are not strong, who are bound by opinions on things that don’t really matter. The guiding principle has already been stated, 13:9b-10, love your neighbor as yourself, love does no wrong to a neighbor. Chapter 14 endorses being welcoming for people who have concerns about matters of food and drink or special days. He is not at all in these verses talking about flirting with idolatry, eating meats presented as dedicated to an idol, which was dealt with in the letter from Jerusalem and in 1 Corinthians 8-10. The theme is not suggesting at all being tolerant of sin in the church. Nor is Paul suggesting the church should allow people who choose to follow a strict, perhaps a Jewish “kosher” diet, to dictate their choice as church doctrine that others must follow. The aim of all believers ought to be to please the Lord (14:4, 6-8), which includes accepting one another, even if there are opinions (14:1) that are disputable. The attitude of 14:20-21, to be willing to sacrifice things we like for peace with brethren, should prevail. This chapter does not endorse allowing opinionated people to compel the church to please them contrary to God’s word, but it certainly does endorse being willing to “put up with” differences of opinion, to treasure immature brethren while they grow and learn, and to recognize our own faults and limitations. The church and each of its members belongs to Christ, who purchased it, and not to any of us. We are to honor the Lord, not our own ego, and get along with brothers and sisters who are not “just like” us.

Note 14:4 and seriously consider how sometimes we’re careless about talking down brothers or sisters.

Note 14:8, Christ the center in life and death.

Note 14:10, universal judgement, as also in 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Note 14:13, don't cause a brother or sister to stumble, as also in Matthew 18:6.

Note 14:14, 23, things are not inherently unclean. Conscience is a limited guide, but conscience matters. Don't violate your own conscience.

Note 14:17, what the kingdom of God is all about.

Note 14:19, pursue what leads to peace and to mutual edification (upbuilding).

15:1-2 concludes the message of chapter 14. "We who are strong..." suggest each of us who hear this message should pursue it.

The purpose of the scriptures is indicated in 15:4, as also in 1 Corinthians 10. Hearing and knowing the scriptures is very helpful for Christian life and growth.

The Lord wants a unified, harmonious church giving him glory (15:5-6). We have a duty to keep that unity and harmonize with each other.

The unity embraces Jewish and Gentile believers, together in Christ, 15:8-12.

The Holy Spirit has a role in our righteousness, peace, and joy (14:17) and by his power we may abound in hope (15:13).

As in 14:19, so also in 15:14 the church is a one another organization, Christians building each other up, Christians instructing one another.

Humans presented in sacrifice to God are made holy (sanctified) by the Holy Spirit, 15:16.

As in 2 Corinthians 12:12 so also in Romans 15:18-19, Paul displayed the evidence of his authority in his work as an apostle (to the nations).

Paul's ambition to preach where Christ had not yet been preached (15:20) meant he wanted to go to the far reaches of the Roman world, to Spain (15:24), though a visit to Rome was also his desire. He anticipated help from the Roman church for such a journey (15:24).

The impending journey to Jerusalem was risky, with the biggest risk in

Jerusalem itself (15:25-28). Paul's concerns included both the hostility of unbelievers and potential rejection by the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem (15:31), the same issues addressed in Acts 21:17ff.

The desire to come to Rome worked out quite differently and took much longer than he anticipated, but he did find joy and refreshment in his reception by the brethren there (Acts 28:15).

Paul was writing from Corinth, and Corinth's sister harbor across the isthmus was Cenchrea. Phoebe was from there, and apparently carried the letter to Rome. Paul commended her as worthy of assistance by the brethren there. She is described as a servant of the church and a patron/benefactor of Paul and many others.

16:3-16 is a series of personal greetings extended to people Paul knew in the churches of Rome. Some of them he'd led to the Lord, as probably in 5b. There are both men and women in the list, some of them Jews, some with large reputations, some who had suffered or risked much for the sake of the gospel and the church. Several are commended for their labors, again both men and women.

Directions to greet one another as in 16:16 are repeated enough times that we ought to see the importance. Be diligent about warm and affectionate personal greetings/welcome of all the brothers and sisters.

16:16 is the one place the word combination "churches of Christ" is found in the New Testament. It's descriptive, not a proper noun, of who the churches belong to.

16:17-18 is the unhappy but necessary counterpoint to chapter 14. Don't let people teach doctrines that divide the church or hinder Christian growth and service to one another and to Christ.

16:19, we don't have to be intimate with evil to understand it is evil.

16:20 reflects back on Genesis 3:15, which applied to Christ and by assimilation applies to those who follow Christ.

Tertius in v22 is otherwise unknown to us. He served as Paul's scribe composing the letter.

Gaius in 16:23 is surely the same man as in 1 Corinthians 1:14.

Erastus in v23 is probably the same man mentioned on a plaque in the ruins of Corinth as a city official.

16:25, the mystery of the gospel is woven throughout the Old Testament, but the secret of God's work was only made known when Jesus came to fulfill the promises. Those prophetic words were, as Paul insisted, for all nations, by God's command.