

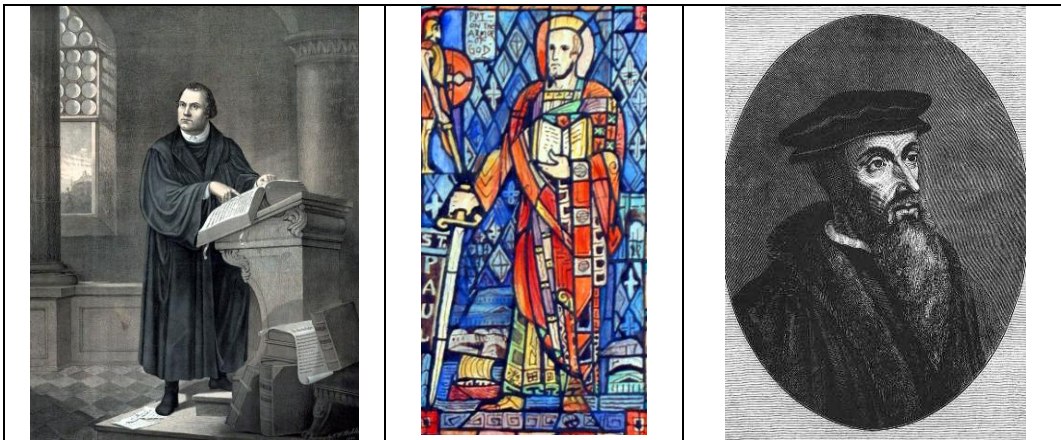
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“Romans” and the Reformation



Written by Robert C. Jones
Acworth, Georgia

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Christian Theology and History Adult Sunday School Courses

Robert Jones

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I've always been a strong believer in adult Sunday School classes and Bible studies in our churches. And many churches have quality, Biblically-based adult-focused programs. Unfortunately, just as many churches tend to downplay adult education, focusing on children's education (not a bad thing in itself), or focusing on the needs of the "unchurched", where topics such as church history and theology are often purposely ignored.

Yet there is a strong need for adult education focused on both the Bible and the basic tenets and history of the Faith. Among the reasons:

- Not all adults come from a strong childhood background in the church – adult Sunday School classes/Bible studies may be their first serious introduction to what Christianity is all about
- Christianity (and especially Evangelical Christianity) is under constant attack from the media and popular culture (movies, music, etc.). We need to give fellow Christians the tools to defend the Faith against attack (or to provide a "ready defense" as Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15)
- Even adult Christians that have a strong Biblical background often know little about the origins and history of their Faith

To better meet the needs of adult Christians (both those mature in their Faith, and those just starting out in the "School of Christ"), I've written a series of courses that focus on the history of the Christian Church (including the Jewish roots), as well as the development of doctrine in the Church. The topics represented in these courses are intended to both further the participant's walk in the Faith, as well as serve as a starting point for Christian apologetics.

While the primary purpose of these courses is for use in churches, they also may be useful for High School and College projects, especially the courses focused primarily on historical aspects.

One note: these courses are primarily written from an Evangelical Protestant viewpoint (I come from a Reformed Church background), but I hope I've given ample time to other points of view throughout the various courses.

Front Cover (left to right): Martin Luther (Library of Congress LC-DIG-pga-02205), Saint Paul (Library of Congress LAMB, no. 1969 (AAA size) [P&P]), John Calvin ("The History of Protestantism" by J.A. Wylie)

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Contents

"ROMANS" AND THE REFORMATION.....	1
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND HISTORY ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL COURSES.....	2
INTRODUCTION	5
Authority.....	6
Authorship and date.....	7
Quiz.....	7
REFORMATION THEOLOGY	8
CHAPTER 1	8
CHAPTER 2	10
CHAPTER 3	10
CHAPTER 4	12
CHAPTER 5	12
CHAPTER 6	14
CHAPTER 7	14
CHAPTER 8	15
CHAPTER 9	17
CHAPTER 10	18
CHAPTER 11	19
CHAPTER 12	21
CHAPTER 13	22
CHAPTER 14	23
CHAPTER 15	23
CHAPTER 16	24
SOURCES.....	27
NOTES.....	28
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	29

Introduction

Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the first great theological treatise of the Christian Church. It would form the basis of the theology of Augustine, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and most other Protestant Reformers. It formed the basis for the Reformers view that we are saved by faith and faith alone – not by works. Below are comments on Romans by four Reformation stalwarts – Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Tyndale and John Wesley:

This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.

Thus in this Epistle we find most richly the things that a Christian ought to know; namely, what is law, Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, the cross, and also how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone, whether righteous or sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe...Therefore it appears that St. Paul wanted to comprise briefly in this one epistle the whole Christian and evangelical doctrine and to prepare an introduction to the entire Old Testament; for, without doubt, he who has this epistle well in his heart, has the light and power of the Old Testament with him. Therefore let every Christian exercise himself in it habitually and continually. To this may God give His grace. Amen. (*Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, 1522, Martin Luther¹)

...this can with truth be said of it [Romans], and it is what can never be sufficiently appreciated — that when any one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture. (*John Calvin's Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, 1539²)

John Wesley had a conversion experience on May 24, 1738 at Aldersgate, when he was listening to a Moravian speaker reading from the preface to Luther's Commentary on Romans:

In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a Society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ; Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. (*John Wesley's Journal*, May 24, 1738)

William Tyndale, the great English Reformer and translator of 80%+ of the King James Version of the Bible, said about Romans "the more groundly it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it".

FORASMUCH as this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament and most pure evangelion, that is to say, glad tidings, and that we call gospel, and also is a light and a way unto the whole scripture; I think it meet 'that every Christian man not only know it, by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. No man verily can read it too oft, or study it too well; for the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is; and the more groundly it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it,' so great

¹ *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, by Martin Luther, Reformation History Library, Ages Software, 1998

² *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein. (*A Prologue Upon the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans*, John Tyndale³)

Romans is also one of the harder books in the Bible to understand. Peter once wrote regarding Paul: “His letters contain some things that are hard to understand...” Peter had probably read Romans.

To provide the Reformation viewpoint on Romans, I’ll be quoting from these sources:

- *John Calvin’s Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*
- *Martin Luther’s Commentary on Romans*

In general, I only quote from Calvin and Luther when the passage(s) in question focus on core Reformation theology. I’ve made an exception in a few places where Luther or Calvin’s interpretation adds clarity to a difficult passage or impenetrable translation.

Authority

There appears to have never been any controversy regarding the inclusion of Romans in the New Testament canon. Romans appears in the mysterious Muratori Canon, a fragmentary list (85 lines) dating to c. 200 A.D., named after its 18th century discoverer, Lodovico Muratori.

In Eusebius’ history of the church, written c. 325 A.D., he includes Romans among the “epistles of Paul” as one of the “accepted” books of the New Testament canon:

THE DIVINE SCRIPTURES THAT ARE ACCEPTED AND THOSE THAT ARE NOT.

SINCE we are dealing with this subject it is proper to sum up the writings of the New Testament which have been already mentioned. First then must be put the holy quaternion of the Gospels; following them the Acts of the Apostles. **After this must be reckoned the epistles of Paul**; next in order the extant former epistle of John, and likewise the epistle of Peter, must be maintained. After them is to be placed, if it really seem proper, the Apocalypse of John, concerning which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time. These then belong among the accepted writings. (*Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 25⁴)

Saint Athanasius includes Acts in his 367 A.D. list of books of the New Testament. The below list is the oldest extant list of books that make up our modern day New Testament:

5. Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. **In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans**; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John. (*From the thirty-ninth Letter of Holy Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, on the Paschal festival*, emphasis added⁵)

³ *A Prologue Upon the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans*, John Tyndale, Reformation History Library, Ages Software, 1998

⁴ *The Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 1*, Philip Schaff, editor, Ages Software, 1996, 1997

⁵ *The Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series, Vol. 4*, Philip Schaff, editor, Ages Software, 1996, 1997

Authorship and date

As indicated in the first verse of the first chapter, the author was Paul, “a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God”. Unlike the four Gospels, or Acts, Paul almost always identified his authorship in his writings.

The destruction of the Temple is not mentioned, so one would assume a pre-70 A.D. date for authorship. Church Tradition places the death of Paul in the 65/66 A.D. timeframe, so it had to have been written before that.

Two possible dates come to mind, depending on when and why Paul wrote this letter.

- c. 57 A.D. This would place his authorship before his arrest and removal to Rome for trial. If this is true, Paul was writing to a church that he had not visited (most of Paul’s letters were to churches that he personally had established).
- c. 62 A.D. In Acts of the Apostles, we’re told that when Paul reached Rome, he met with local Jewish leaders who had heard of Christians, but had never met one. Thus, it is possible that Paul was the first apostle to bring Christianity to Rome. If this is the case, then Romans could have been a letter to Rome from Paul after he was freed from house arrest in Rome (assuming that he was freed from house arrest in Rome – Acts doesn’t tell us). (Pictured: Paul⁶)

Look for clues as you read through Acts as to whether Paul was writing to a church he had never visited, or to one that he was personally familiar with.

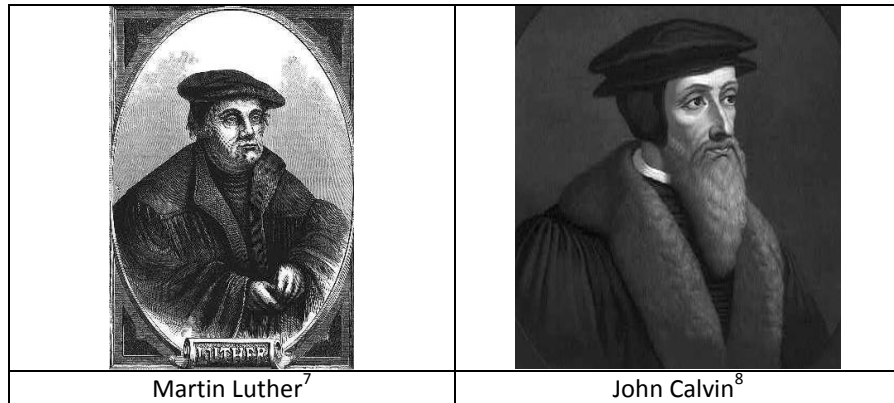


Quiz

1. T/F Paul wrote Romans
2. T/F Martin Luther didn’t believe in predestination
3. T/F Peter thought Paul’s writings were easy to understand
4. T/F Paul thought that no Jews could be saved
5. T/F The term “original sin” is mentioned in Romans
6. T/F Romans was addressed to the Jewish community in Rome
7. T/F Paul viewed that most people are basically good at heart
8. T/F Luther and Calvin believed that we’re saved by a combination of faith and works
9. T/F Paul was always opposed to women in leadership positions in the church
10. T/F Paul says in Romans that he was planning a missionary journey to Spain

⁶ Library of Congress LAMB, no. 1771 (B size) [P&P]

Reformation Theology



The basic Reformation theology, promulgated by Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin, was based on these basic evangelical (a word coined by Luther) tenets:

- All mankind are unregenerate sinners - there is nothing that man can do on his own to achieve salvation
- Sin is a massive gulf between God and humans - God sent his Son, Jesus, to redeem the sins of mankind
- Through faith in Jesus, humans can become reconciled (justified) with God
- Salvation for humans beings is through the Grace (unmerited favor) of God only - no one is worthy of salvation
- Mankind is not saved through works - works are a result of justification, not a cause

The scriptural basis for all of these tenets can easily be found in Romans.

Chapter 1

Verses 1-7: So much to comment on in the salutation of this letter! Including:

- The author identifies himself (Paul) and his position in the church (“apostle”) in the first sentence. Compare this with the four Gospels or Acts, which don’t identify the author anywhere in the text.
- Jesus, by “human nature was a descendant of David”, but is also the “Son of God”
- Verse 5 introduces the concepts of grace and faith, as well as the fact that Paul’s ministry is to the Gentiles

Verse 8-10: The faith of the church in Rome is “being reported all over the world”. Paul remembers them in his prayers “all the time”. The use of the word “remember” could indicate that Paul was writing to people he’d already met).

⁷ “The History of Protestantism” by J.A. Wylie

⁸ Library of Congress LC-USZ62-72002 (b&w film copy neg.)

Verse 11-13: Paul longs to see them so that they can be “mutually encouraged by each other’s faith”. Paul has long planned to see them.

Verses 14-15: Paul has preached to both Greeks and non-Greeks; he longs to preach to the Romans in Rome.

Verse 16: The gospel gives the power of salvation to everyone who believes – Jews and Gentiles.

Verse 17: Romans 1:17 would become the centerpiece of Martin Luther’s theology, capsulizing his views on justification by faith, and salvation by grace, and grace alone:

“The righteousness of God is the cause of our salvation. This righteousness, however, is not that according to which God Himself is righteous as God, but that by which we are justified by Him through faith in the Gospel. It is called the righteousness of God in contradistinction to man’s righteousness which comes from works...righteousness (justification) precedes works and good works grow out of it.” (*Luther’s Commentary on Romans*, p. 41⁹)

Verses 18-20: Paul introduces the wrath of God to the discussion. This wrath is because of man’s “godlessness and wickedness”. Verse 20 is the most interesting:

For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:20, NIV)

This would seem to indicate that everyone who has ever lived has “clearly seen” God’s “power and divine nature”. Paul returns to this theme in Chapter 2.

John Calvin viewed this verse as an example of man’s perverseness:

It hence clearly appears what the consequence is of having this evidence — that men cannot allege any thing before God’s tribunal for the purpose of showing that they are not justly condemned. Yet let this difference be remembered, that the manifestation of God, by which he makes his glory known in his creation, is, with regard to the light itself, sufficiently clear; but that on account of our blindness, it is not found to be sufficient. We are not however so blind, that we can plead our ignorance as an excuse for our perverseness.¹⁰

Verses 21-32: The chapter ends with Paul listing the types of perversity that mankind practices, starting with idolatry and sexual immorality, and ending with a long list of mankind’s sins. Verse 32 discusses the fact that not only is mankind mired in sin, mankind compounds the problem because we “not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them”. No one is worthy of salvation, indeed.

⁹ *Commentary on Romans*, by Martin Luther (translated by J. Theodore Mueller), Kregel Publications, 1954 - 1976

¹⁰ *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

Chapter 2

Verses 1-4: These verses are a slightly different take on the “judge not, lest ye be judged” message in the Gospels. It again stresses a basic Protestant tenet that everyone is sinful – there are no exceptions (even those who feel they can judge others).

Verses 5-11: Here Paul sounds a bit like an Old Testament prophet, discussing a final “day of God’s wrath” in which people will be judged by their character and behavior. Luther interpreted the “day of God’s wrath” as the Judgment Day of Revelations.

While Romans is the quintessential Protestant source document for the salvation by faith, not works doctrine, verse 6 might be interpreted as having a bit of works involved in the criteria for final judgment – “God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’”

Verses 12-16: Jews and Gentiles alike will be condemned for not following God’s law. Verses 14-15 seem to indicate that those not familiar with the law may still naturally follow it, because of their conscience:

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) (Romans 2:14-15, NIV)

This is the second time in as many chapters that Paul indicates that those who have not formerly heard about God may still sometimes obey God.

Verses 17-29: Paul singles out the Jews for having great understanding of God’s law, without actually following it.

Chapter 3

Verses 1-2: Jews have a special responsibility because “they have been entrusted with the very words of God” [the law of God].

Verses 3-9: Using a somewhat complicated argument, Paul argues that the fact that God continues in his faithfulness and righteousness even in the face of the Jews’ lack of faithfulness and righteousness, this doesn’t mean that man should sin more to underscore God’s righteousness and faithfulness. Verse 9 reiterates that everyone, Jews or Gentiles, are sinners, and that non-Jews shouldn’t view themselves as any better than Jews.

Martin Luther uses his commentary on these passages to establish basic Reformation doctrine:

God's righteousness humbles us, casts us down before His feet and **causes us to long for His righteousness; for as soon as we receive it (through faith in Christ)**, we glorify God as its (generous) Giver and we praise and love Him.

...God's righteousness is commended by His work in us; that is to say, since **we cannot be justified by our own merit**, we must appeal to Him to make us righteous. If we confess that we have no power over our sins (to cleanse ourselves of our sins), **He justifies us through faith in His Word**, (the Gospel promise).

Through such faith He justifies us, that is, He declares us as righteous (for Christ's sake). This is the faith-righteousness and a truly divine righteousness, which He works (in us). (Emphasis added¹¹)

Note the text in bold - there is nothing we can do on our own to achieve salvation; we become justified (or “made right with God”) through faith in Christ.

Verses 10-18: Using a mélange of quotations from the Old Testament (mostly Psalms, with one quote each from Isaiah and Ecclesiastes), Paul enlarges on his theme in verse 9 – everyone is a sinner, and no righteous man can be found. This, of course, would become a central theme of the Reformation.

Verses 19-20: We’re not saved through observing the law – “rather, through the law we become conscious of sin”.

Verses 21-26: What will later become basic Protestant doctrine is ensconced in these verses:

- There is “a righteousness from God, apart from law”
- “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe”
- “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus”
- Sins committed before belief are washed away by the sacrifice of Christ – and we’re not punished for those sins if we’re saved (although we deserve to be)

On verse 22, Calvin comments:

Hence faith is said to justify, because it is the instrument by which we receive Christ, in whom righteousness is conveyed to us. Having been made partakers of Christ, we ourselves are not only just, but our works also are counted just before God, and for this reason, because whatever imperfections there may be in them, are obliterated by the blood of Christ; the promises, which are conditional, are also by the same grace fulfilled to us; for God rewards our works as perfect, inasmuch as their defects are covered by free pardon.¹²

Verses 27-31: Since we are justified through faith and faith alone, it doesn’t matter whether we observe the law (Jews) or not (Gentiles).

In Calvin’s commentary on verse 28, he tackles the tricky issue raised in the Book of James, that seems to base salvation on faith and works:

Justification by faith is indeed made very clear, while works are expressly excluded...But Paul affirms in this passage that justification is so gratuitous [free, voluntary, without recompense], that he makes it quite evident, that it can by no means be associated with the merit of works.

...What, James says, that man is not justified by faith alone, but also by works, does not at all militate against the preceding view. The reconciling of the two views depends chiefly on the drift of the argument pursued by James. For the question with him is not, how men attain righteousness before God, but how they prove to others that they are justified, for his object was to confute hypocrites, who vainly boasted

¹¹ *Commentary on Romans*, by Martin Luther (translated by J. Theodore Mueller), Kregel Publications, 1954 - 1976

¹² *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

that they had faith...We may learn from the context, that James meant no more than that man is not made or proved to be just by a feigned or dead faith, and that he must prove his righteousness by his works.¹³

Chapter 4

Verses 1-8: In these verses, Paul explains in more detail his premise from Romans 1:17. Abraham was justified by faith, not by works (Genesis 15:6). Paul quotes King David to show that a man is blessed if his sins are forgiven.

Luther comments on verse 6:

...God does not accept the person on account of his works, but He accepts the works on account of the (believing) person. He first accepts the person who believes in Him, and then the works flowing from faith. The former (the work righteous) finally regard themselves no long as sinners; the latter, (the believers), always acknowledge themselves to be sinners.¹⁴

Verses 9-12: As another example of how salvation is for Gentiles also (not just Jews), Paul points out that Abraham was justified with God *before* he was circumcised. Thus, circumcision is not necessary for salvation, although (of course) it doesn't preclude salvation either.

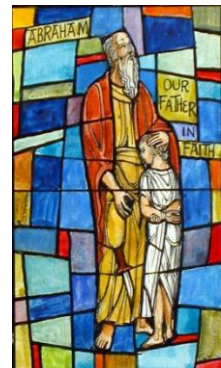
Calvin sees an interesting explanation of the benefits of sacraments in these verses:

In order to anticipate an objection, he shows that circumcision was not unprofitable and superfluous, though it could not justify; but it had another very remarkable use, it had the office of sealing, and as it were of ratifying the righteousness of faith. And yet he intimates at the same time, by stating what its object was, that it was not the cause of righteousness, it indeed tended to confirm the righteousness of faith, and that already obtained in uncircumcision. He then derogates or takes away nothing from it. **We have indeed here a remarkable passage with regard to the general benefits of sacraments. According to the testimony of Paul, they are seals by which the promises of God are in a manner imprinted on our hearts...** (emphasis added)¹⁵

Verses 13-15: Salvation is only through faith, not through obeying the law.

Verses 16-17: Abraham is the father of us all, not just of the Jews.

Verses 18-25: Abraham showed great faith, and it was credited to him as righteousness. The same promise holds for us today. (Photo¹⁶)



Chapter 5

Verses 1-5: Because we have faith, we are justified, and have access into God's grace (unmerited favor). We rejoice in our sufferings because "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope". Luther comments on the suffering verses:

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Commentary on Romans, by Martin Luther* (translated by J. Theodore Mueller), Kregel Publications, 1954 - 1976

¹⁵ *Op Cit*

¹⁶ Library of Congress LAMB, no. 2457 (AAA size) [P&P]

Whatever (virtues) tribulation finds in us, it develops more fully. If anyone is carnal, weak, blind, wicked, irascible, haughty, and so forth, tribulation will make him more carnal, weak, blind, wicked and irritable. On the other hand, if one is spiritual, strong, wise, pious, gentle and humble, he will become more spiritual, powerful, wise, pious, gentle and humble, as the Psalmist says in Psalm 4: 1: 'Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.'¹⁷

Verses 6-8: "Christ died for the ungodly" – although we are all sinners, Christ still laid down his life for us.

Verses 9-11: We are justified by Christ's blood, and as a result, we'll be saved from God's (coming) wrath.

Verses 12-14: Although not using the words, these verses could be used as proof of the doctrine of "original sin" – sin was brought into the world by Adam's disobedience, and as a result, death came too. Luther, not surprisingly, thought these verses were about original sin, too:

The words "and death by sin" show clearly that he is speaking of original sin... But what, then, is original sin? According to the Apostle it is not only the lack of a good quality in the will, nor merely the loss of man's righteousness and ability (to do good). It is rather the loss of all his powers of body and soul, of his whole outward and inward perfections. In addition to this, it is his inclination to all that is evil, his aversion against that which is good, his antipathy against (spiritual) light and wisdom, his love for error and darkness, his flight from and his loathing of good works, and his seeking after that which is sinful.¹⁸



Adam in the Garden of Eden – a Currier and Ives print¹⁹

Verses 15-17: While sin and death came to us from one man (Adam), God's grace comes to us by one man also – Christ.

Verses 18-19: A restatement of verses 15-17.

Verses 20-21: These two verses expand on the theme that the reason for the law was to make humans aware of their sin. Calvin comments in this vein:

He indeed teaches us, that it was needful that men's ruin should be more fully discovered to them, in order that a passage might be opened for the favor of God. They were indeed shipwrecked before the law was given; as however they seemed to themselves to swim, while in their destruction, they were thrust down into the deep, that their deliverance might appear more evident, when they thence emerge beyond

¹⁷ *Commentary on Romans*, by Martin Luther (translated by J. Theodore Mueller), Kregel Publications, 1954 - 1976

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ Library of Congress LC-USZC4-2780

all human expectation. Nor was it unreasonable, that the law should be partly introduced for this end — that it might again condemn men already condemned; for nothing is more reasonable than that men should, through all means be brought, nay, forced, by being proved guilty, to know their own evils.²⁰

Chapter 6

Verses 1-4: Here is a theme that was important in the early church — by being baptized, we are baptized into Christ's death, so that we may live a new life. In the 19th century a movement arose called "perfectionism", which claimed that it was possible to live a sinless life after baptism (Charles Finney and others). Luther would not have agreed with this view:

We are not found in a state of perfection as soon as we have been baptized into Jesus Christ and His death. Having been baptized into His death, we merely strive to obtain (the blessings of) this death and to reach our goal of glory. Just so, when we are baptized into everlasting life and the kingdom of heaven, we do not at once fully possess its full wealth (of blessings). We have merely taken the first steps to seek after eternal life.²¹

Verses 5-7: As a result of being crucified with Christ through baptism, we are no longer slaves to sin.

Verses 8-10: Although we died with Christ through our baptism, we also live with Christ through his resurrection. Christ cannot die again.

Verses 11-14: Don't let sin be your master — once we are reborn again in Christ, we should resist sin. Note that Paul indicates that even after baptism, we still have to guard against sin — we're not rendered perfect by the saving grace of God.

Verses 15-18: Rather than being slaves to sin, the saved are now slaves to righteousness.

Verses 19-23: The "benefit" of sin is death, but the benefit of being a slave to God is holiness and eternal life — "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Calvin comments on how these verses demonstrate salvation through grace:

It may however be hence inferred with certainty, that our salvation is altogether through the grace and mere beneficence of God...for being clothed with the righteousness of the Son, we are reconciled to God, and we are by the power of the Spirit renewed unto holiness. And he adds, in Christ Jesus, and for this reason, that he might call us away from every conceit respecting our own worthiness.²²

Chapter 7

Verses 1-3: Paul continues the discussion of how when you are baptized, your old life dies, and you're born anew. In these verses, he draws the analogy of a married woman whose husband dies — the death of the husband frees her from her marital vows, and allows her to marry again.

²⁰ *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

²¹ *Commentary on Romans*, by Martin Luther (translated by J. Theodore Mueller), Kregel Publications, 1954 - 1976

²² *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

Verses 4-6: Once you are baptized (assuming you are a follower of Mosaic Law), “you also died to the law through the body of Christ”. In your reborn state, you serve in the “new way” of the Spirit, and are no longer bound to the law.

Verses 7-12: Paul points out that the law did serve a good purpose – it defined what sin was. However, knowing what sin is (was) does not make someone immune from its charms.

Verses 16-25: Paul returns to his earlier topic of man’s sinful nature – “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.” Even someone as holy as St. Paul can’t totally defeat the sin in his nature – “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” However, although we are slaves to sin by our nature, Christ can rescue us from “this body of death.”

Luther comments on verse 25, again rejecting the doctrine that would later be called “perfectionism”:

The saints (believers) are at the same time sinners while they are righteous. They are righteous, because they believe in Christ, whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them. But they are sinners, inasmuch as they do not fulfill the Law, and still have sinful lusts. They are like sick people who are being treated by a physician. They are really sick, but hope and are beginning to get, or be made, well. They are about to regain their health. Such patients would suffer the greatest harm by arrogantly claiming to be well, for they would suffer a relapse that is worse (than their first illness).²³

Calvin has a similar comment on the same verse:

A short epilogue, in which he teaches us, that the faithful never reach the goal of righteousness as long as they dwell in the flesh, but that they are running their course, until they put off the body.²⁴



This wood carving from 1681 shows the sins of Wantonness, Avarice, Sloth, Fury, and Vanity²⁵

Chapter 8

Verses 1-4: Through belief in Jesus Christ, we are released from the “law of sin and death”. God sent his son in the “likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.”

²³ *Op Cit*

²⁴ *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

²⁵ Library of Congress LC-DIG-ppmsca-11654

Verses 5-8: Paul draws a distinction between those whose minds are focused on sin with those whose minds are focused on the Spirit. The former have only death to look forward to, but the latter have “life and peace.”

Verses 9-11: In verse 9, it states “And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” This has sometimes been used by Pentecostals and the Holiness Movement to indicate that if someone can’t speak in tongues, or hasn’t had a born again conversion experience, they aren’t really saved. Of course, Paul says no such thing here.

Verse 10 draws an interesting distinction between a believer’s body which is dead from sin, and the spirit of the believer, which is alive through righteousness. Such a verse was misused by the antinomian Gnostics in the 1st/2nd centuries A.D., who basically viewed that they could “eat, drink and be merry” with their bodies, as long as they kept their spirits pure. This, of course, goes against the Pauline doctrine expressed in 1 Corinthians that views the body as a temple of the Lord that should not be defiled.

Verses 12-17: There are few more uplifting verses in the whole Bible. If we believe in God, we are “sons of God”, which means we are “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” We may suffer along the way, but the end game is glorious!

Verses 18-22: The words that the NIV translates as “creation” or “the creation”, both Luther and Calvin translate as “creature” or “the creature,” referring to man. Calvin’s translation says:

¹⁹. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. ²⁰. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope; ²¹. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²². For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.²⁶

I find the Luther/Calvin translation superior, since translating it as “creation” makes the meaning of the passages almost impenetrable. So, the passages refer to the hope that formerly hopeless mankind has in the idea that they can become “children of God”.

Calvin comments on verse 19:

I understand the passage to have this meaning — that there is no element and no part of the world which, being touched, as it were, with a sense of its present misery, does not intensely hope for a resurrection. He indeed lays down two things, — that all are creatures in distress, — and yet that they are sustained by hope. And it hence also appears how immense is the value of eternal glory, that it can excite and draw all things to desire it.²⁷

Verses 23-25: All believers wait patiently and eagerly for “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies”.

Verses 26-27: Believers are not alone in their struggle with sin – the Holy Spirit is on our side! The Spirit is our advocate, according to God’s will.

²⁶ *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

²⁷ *Ibid*

Verses 28-30: Here Paul introduced a topic that was a key part of early Reformation theology, but over time has fallen out of favor with most Protestants – predestination. Has it been decided by God before the creation of the universe who would be saved and who would be damned? Both Luther and Calvin certainly thought so (although the latter is more closely associated with the doctrine today than the former).

Luther spent several pages in his commentary discussing these verses and their connection to the doctrine of predestination (a doctrine earlier developed by St. Augustine). Some excerpts:

He [Paul] here takes up the doctrine of predestination or election. This doctrine is not so incomprehensible as many think, but is rather full of sweet comfort for the elect and for all who have the Holy Spirit. But it is most bitter and hard for (those who adhere to) the wisdom of the flesh.

God absolutely recognizes no chance; it is only men who speak of chance. Not a single leaf falls from the tree without the will of the Father. All things are essentially in His hands, and so are also our times.

The first and most flimsy objection against divine election is this, that man has been given free will by which he can earn for himself either merit or demerit. To this I reply: Man's free will without divine grace has not the least ability to secure righteousness, but is totally corrupt.

The third thought (that we could consider in connection with God's eternal election) is that this doctrine is indeed most bitter to the wisdom of the flesh, which revolts against it and even becomes guilty of blasphemy on this point. But it is fully defeated when we learn to know that our salvation rests no wise upon ourselves and our conduct, but is founded solely upon what is outside us, namely, on God's election.

It is not the characteristic of reprobates to tremble at the secret counsel of God; but that is a characteristic of the elect.²⁸

Verse 28 is probably referring to the big-picture effect of the rewards of salvation, as opposed to stating that in every day-to-day activity on earth, God is going to make sure that only good happens to us.

Verses 31-35: More passages of great hope and cheer! “If God is for us, who can be against us?”, indeed! Although we may suffer hardships in life, no one “shall separate us from the love of Christ”.

Verses 37-39: I could go into a dissertation on “Irresistible Grace” and “Perseverance of the Saints” (the “I” and “P” of the Calvinist acronym TULIP), but I’ll contain myself, and simply paraphrase the verses - nothing, not even the devil himself, “will be able to separate us [believers] from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

Chapter 9

Verses 1-5: Paul has “great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” over the fact that the message of Christ hasn’t been accepted by more Jews, from whom the “the human ancestry of Christ” can be traced.

Verses 6-9: Paul points out that the Word of God hasn’t failed, as it has been accepted readily by non-Jews who are also children of Abraham.

²⁸ *Commentary on Romans*, by Martin Luther (translated by J. Theodore Mueller), Kregel Publications, 1954 - 1976

Verses 10-15: Paul returns to the topic of election by pointing out that of the two sons of Isaac – Jacob and Esau – God choose the younger over the older. He also quotes Moses who stated “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” (Exodus 33:19)

Verses 16-18: Paul uses the example of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart to show that God has ultimate control of all people and all things.

Verses 19-21: One of the arguments against predestination is that it isn’t “fair”. Paul uses the Old Testament (Isaiah 29:16) analogy of the potter being able to do what he wants with his clay, because he is the creator. Fairness has nothing to do with it.

Verses 22-24: These verses seem to indicate that God “puts up” with the existence of non-believers to provide a contrast to the saved to whom he will make “the riches of his glory known”. The saved will include Jews and Gentiles. Calvin interpreted it this way:

It is the second reason which manifests the glory of God in the destruction of the reprobate, because the greatness of divine mercy towards the elect is hereby more clearly made known; for how do they differ from them except that they are delivered by the Lord from the same gulf of destruction? and this by no merit of their own, but through his gratuitous kindness. It cannot then be but that the infinite mercy of God towards the elect must appear increasingly worthy of praise, when we see how miserable are all they who escape not his wrath.²⁹

Verses 25-26: Paul quotes from Hosea 2:23 and Hosea 1:10, probably to show that, although the Gentiles are not the “chosen people”, they can still be “sons of the living God”.

Verses 27-29: Paul quotes from Isaiah (Isaiah 10:22, 23; Isaiah 1:9) seemingly to contrast the fate of the Jews, the chosen people, with the Gentiles from verses 25-26. The good news is that Jews will be saved; the bad news is that only a “remnant will be saved”.

Verses 30-33: Paul indicates that Gentiles have achieved righteousness without the law because of their faith, “but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it”. The latter has not attained it because of a focus on works (obeying the law) rather than faith.

Chapter 10

Verses 1-4: Paul laments that Jews have not attained God’s righteousness, although they are zealous for the law. Verse 4 explains why Christians today don’t follow Mosaic law – “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

Verses 5-13: Paul interprets some passages from Moses in Deuteronomy in light of the Christian view of who the messiah was. The verses in Deuteronomy that Paul is citing are as follows:

¹¹Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹²It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” ¹³Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim

²⁹ *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

it to us so we may obey it?” ¹⁴No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14, NIV)

Paul interprets the reference to the “word” in Deuteronomy 30:14 to be the word of faith – “the word of faith we are proclaiming”.



Moses³⁰

Verse 9 is especially profound – “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” It is not enough to secretly or privately believe that Jesus was raised from the dead to be saved – it also requires a public confession of this faith – “if you confess with your mouth”. Baptism and Communion (Eucharist) are both ways of making such a public confession (as is attending church on a regular basis).

Paul ends this section on a positive note. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord can be saved – Jew or Gentile.

Verses 14-15: These verses could be referring just to the Jews, but it could also refer to everyone. You can’t be saved if 1) you don’t believe in Christ or 2) you’ve never heard of Christ, because no one has preached Christ to you. On verse 15, Calvin notes:

He intimates that it is a proof and a pledge of divine love when any nation is favored with the preaching of the gospel; and that no one is a preacher of it, but he whom God has raised up in his special providence, and that hence there is no doubt but that he visits that nation to whom the gospel is proclaimed.³¹

Verses 16-21: Here Paul is clearly speaking of the Jews, noting that “not all the Israelites accepted the good news”, and using Old Testament passages (in verses 18 and 21) to show that the Jews had indeed heard the good news. Verses 19 and 20 are also Old Testament quotes. Paul uses them (again) to draw a contrast between the belief of the Gentiles and the non-belief of the Jews.

Chapter 11

Verses 1-6: God did not reject his people. God told Elijah that there will be a remnant of 7,000 Jews saved “who have not bowed the knee to Baal”. Paul compares that Old Testament incident with the current day – “So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace” (as opposed to works).

Paul mentions that he is from the tribe of Benjamin.

³⁰ Library of Congress LC-DIG-pga-02677

³¹ *Op Cit*

Verses 7-12: In a fairly harsh indictment, Paul states, “What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did”. Assumedly, given the context of the last couple of chapters, the elect referred to here are the Gentiles. Paul then uses several quotes from the Old Testament to demonstrate that the “others [the non-elect] were hardened”. This is common predestination-oriented theology.

Paul makes another even harsher indictment against the Jews – “salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious”.

Verses: 13-16: Paul points out that this letter is directed to the Gentiles, Paul’s primary target demographic, but he reveals the reason that he has spoken so harshly against the Jews in this letter – “[in] hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.” He goes on to say “if the root is holy, so are the branches” – all the more reason to hope that the Jews (the root) will be saved, as it helps to purify the Gentiles (the branches).

Verses 17-21: Paul warns the Gentiles against arrogance regarding the Jews, stating “Do not be arrogant, but be afraid”. If the root (the Jews) can be torn away from the branches (the Gentiles) because of lack of faith, the same thing could happen to the Gentiles.

Verses 22-24: Paul reiterates that the Jews still have a chance to return to God’s kindness, and Gentiles could be cut off if they slide into unbelief.

Verses 25-27: Paul points out that “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in”, but then quotes the Old Testament to indicate that all Israel will be saved, not just a remnant. However, some ancient scholars view that Paul was referring to all of the elect of Israel here, rather than literally “all”. Luther was unusually non-dogmatic in his commentary on this passage:

From this passage it is generally concluded that the Jews at the end of the world will be converted to faith (*in Christ*). However, it is true that this passage is so obscure that hardly anyone will be persuaded with absolute clarity, unless he follows the verdict of the Fathers (*Augustine, Chrysostom, Theodoret*) who interpret the epistle in this sense. The meaning, then, is: The Jews who are now fallen, will be converted and saved, after the heathen according to the fullness of the elect are come in. They will not remain outside forever, but in their own time they will be converted.³²

Calvin takes a slightly different track, viewing that “Israel” in this context refers to all the people of God:

Many understand this of the Jewish people, as though Paul had said, that religion would again be restored among them as before: but I extend the word Israel to all the people of God, according to this meaning, — “When the Gentiles shall come in, the Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith; and thus shall be completed the salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be gathered from both; and yet in such a way that the Jews shall obtain the first place, being as it were the first-born in God’s family.” This interpretation seems to me the most suitable, because Paul intended here to set forth the completion of the kingdom of Christ, which is by no means to be confined to the Jews, but is to include the whole world. The same manner of speaking we find in Galatians 6:16. The Israel of God is what

³² *Commentary on Romans*, by Martin Luther (translated by J. Theodore Mueller), Kregel Publications, 1954 - 1976

he calls the Church, gathered alike from Jews and Gentiles; and he sets the people, thus collected from their dispersion, in opposition to the carnal children of Abraham, who had departed from his faith.³³

Verses 28-36: Paul tells the Gentiles that while the Jews are “enemies” in terms of the Gospel, they are still loved on account of the Patriarchs. God’s covenant with the Jews is eternal. Although the Jews have become disobedient to God, God will have mercy on them – “For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”

The Old Testament verses from Isaiah and Job stress that we can’t understand God, and that God doesn’t owe us anything.

Chapter 12

Verses 1-2: Verse 2 is one of the most famous verses in all of Romans. It was used by the early monastics as a guide for living away from the sinful world. During the Reformation, the Anabaptists were known (as the Amish are still known today) for their doctrine of "nonconformity", or the feeling that true Christians must separate themselves from the unclean world. Other New Testament verses which express a similar sentiment include 1 Peter 2:9-10, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, 1 John 2:15-17 and Matthew 5:13-16.



Amish farmer in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania (Photo by Robert Jones)

Verses 3-8: Paul here addresses themes that he also addresses in other letters:

- “...in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” – as Paul states in Ephesians 2:8-9, faith is not something we come up with ourselves – “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God”.
- Paul again warns the Gentile followers in Rome not to be arrogant
- Paul discusses the concept of “spiritual gifts”, and stresses that all gifts are important, and that “in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others”. See also 1 Cor. 12:4-7.

Verses 9-13: Paul discusses how believers should treat one another, stressing “be devoted to one another in brotherly love” and “share with God’s people who are in need”.

³³ *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

Verses 14-21: More rules to live by. Verse 18 is interesting – “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone”. This would seem to indicate that there are some people with whom it is impossible to live peaceably, because of their actions or behavior.

Chapter 13

Verses 1-5: Paul takes the view that secular leaders are in authority because of the will of God, and should be obeyed thus and therefore. Government authorities can also be “God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer”. Calvin agreed with this up to a point – he believed that unjust rulers could be removed by the populace. In his commentary on these verses, he states:

For though tyrannies and unjust exercise of power, as they are full of disorder, are not an ordained government; yet the right of government is ordained by God for the wellbeing of mankind. (emphasis added)³⁴

Calvin goes on to suggest a very pragmatic reason for obeying governmental authorities, and ties it in with the inherent sinfulness of mankind.

...the Lord has designed in this way to provide for the tranquility of the good, and to restrain the waywardness of the wicked; by which two things the safety of mankind is secured: for except the fury of the wicked be resisted, and the innocent be protected from their violence, all things would come to an entire confusion. Since then this is the only remedy by which mankind can be preserved from destruction, it ought to be carefully observed by us, unless we wish to avow ourselves as the public enemies of the human race.³⁵

Verses 6-7: Paul continues his theme of obeying the authorities – pay your taxes when due, etc.

Verses 8-10: One should pay all of one’s debts except the debt we owe to love one another. Paul echoes Christ that “[the commandments] are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Paul expounds on this theme in his famous soliloquy in 1 Corinthians 13, verses that are used in many marriage ceremonies.

Verses 11-14: Paul intermingles two themes in these verses:

- Salvation is near – time to wake up, and prepare (“our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed”). This sense of urgency is echoed in Revelation, and is often connected with eschatological views.
- Paul exhorts his readers to lead a pure life – “put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light”. The “armor of light” reference is reminiscent of Paul’s reference to “put on the full armor of God” in Ephesians 6:10. (Photo³⁶)



³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ St. Paul statue at Library of Congress (LC-DIG-highsm-02103)

Chapter 14

Verses 1-8: These verses show a remarkably tolerant Paul, who tells us that we shouldn't be judgmental towards fellow believers. It might also be interpreted that Paul tells us to not sweat the small stuff in our relations with other believers.

Verses 9-11: Continuing to elaborate on the themes in verses 1-8, Paul admonishes us to not "look down on your brother", as we will all eventual stand before the judgment seat of God, and each of us will have to give an account of ourselves to God.

Verses 13-22: While Paul preaches a certain latitude here in terms of personal beliefs and habits, he also warns that if those personal beliefs and habits become a stumbling block to another believer, we should re-examine them. Paul no longer follows Levitical food laws, but he is aware that this belief of his could be offensive to other believers. Paul warns "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God."

This whole chapter is reminiscent of Paul's marketing strategy, which he discusses in 1 Corinthians:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:19-23, NIV)

Chapter 15

Verses 1-3: We should build up and encourage those less strong than we are.

Verse 4: The Scriptures (Old Testament) were written to give us hope.

Verses 5-6: Paul stresses unity among believers.

Verses 7-12: Paul returns to his theme of rationalizing his ministry to the Gentiles by using several quotes from the Old Testament.

Verse 13: A blessing from Paul.

Verses 14-16: Although Paul has spoken "boldly" in this letter, he overall views the Christians in Rome to be "full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another." Paul views that he has a "priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God" to the Gentiles.

Verses 17-21: Paul reflects on his ministry to the Gentiles, his use of the "power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit" to make converts and his long missionary journeys. Paul notes that "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation". This way, Paul can preach the true Gospel, and not have to try to correct the errors of others.

Verses 23-29: Paul talks about his future plans, which include going to Jerusalem “to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem”, a contribution which he has collected in Macedonia and Achaia. He also talks about a future missionary journey to Spain, which would include a stopover in Rome to see the church there. It is unknown whether this missionary journey ever occurred, as it is not recorded in the New Testament (Acts ends after Paul has been imprisoned in Rome 2+ years after the end of his 3rd missionary journey).

He points out that since the Gentiles have received a spiritual blessing from the Jews, the Gentiles should give the Jews “material blessings”.

Verses 30-33: Paul asks the Christians in Rome to pray for him, as he has concerns about his upcoming trip to Jerusalem.

Chapter 16

Since Chapter 16 is essentially a postlude to Paul’s letter, it is often glossed over in courses on Romans. This is a mistake, as we gain valuable knowledge about Paul’s relationship with other believers in this chapter, as well as insight into Paul’s views of women as leaders in the church, including Phoebe, Priscilla and Junias (contrary to some people’s views, Paul’s views on women as leaders in the church is very positive).

Verses 1-2: Paul sings the praises of Phoebe. The NIV translates it as follows:

¹I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **servant** of the church in Cenchrea. ²I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me. (Romans 16:1-2, NIV; **emphasis added**)

The word that the NIV (and KJV) translates as “servant” is actually from the Greek word *diakonos*, which, according to Thayer’s Greek Definitions means:

1b) a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use³⁷

We can thus assume that Phoebe held the office of deacon in her church (the NIV has a note which gives an alternative translation of *diakonos* as “deaconess”), a sign that Paul thought well of a woman in such a leadership role.

Verses 3-5: Paul discusses his old friends, Priscilla and Aquila. Priscilla and her husband Aquila (tent-makers by trade) are mentioned 6 times in the New Testament. Interestingly, Priscilla is mentioned before her husband four of those six times (Acts 18:18,26, Rom 16:3, 2 Tim 4:19) – an unusual practice in New Testament times. An article in Bible Review states:

The public acknowledgment of Prisca’s prominent role in the Church, implicit in the reversal of the secular form of naming the husband before his wife, underlies how radically egalitarian the Pauline communities were.³⁸

³⁷ Thayer’s Greek Definitions, Parsons Technology, 1999

³⁸ Prisca and Aquila, Bible Review, 12/92, p. 42

John Calvin in his Commentary says about Priscilla:

It is a singular honor which he ascribes here to Prisca and Aquila, especially with regard to a woman. The modesty of the holy man does on this account more clearly shine forth; for he disdained not to have a woman as his associate in the work of the Lord; nor was he ashamed to confess this...³⁹

Priscilla and Aquila founded at least two churches in their home (Rom 16:3-5, 1 Cor 16:19).

Verse 7: The most controversial possible reference to a woman leader in the New Testament is in this verse:

⁷Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. (Romans 16:7, NIV)

Why is this seemingly innocent passage controversial? Because one way of reading it is to view that Paul was saying that Andronicus and Junias were outstanding apostles – and Junias is the feminine form of a Greek name. If this is the correct interpretation, then we have a female apostle(!)

The Revised Standard Version muddies the waters by stating “they are men of note among the apostles”. However, Junias (*Iounias*) is clearly of the feminine form, as Thayer’s Greek Definitions states:

“1) a Christian woman at Rome, mentioned by Paul as one of his kinsfolk and fellow prisoners
Part of Speech: noun proper feminine”⁴⁰

St. John Chrysostom (c. 345-407), Patriarch of Constantinople, referred to Junias as a female apostle in one of his sermons:

And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even amongst these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle! (Homily 31, *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans*)⁴¹

So, this verse provides some evidence that there was a female apostle – not in the sense of being one of the 12, but in the post-ascension sense (Acts 14:14, 1 Cor 15:7).

Verse 12: Paul calls out three women who have “work[ed] hard in the Lord”.

Verse 14: Some people view that the Hermas mentioned by Paul in this verse is the person who wrote *The Shepherd of Hermes*, an early Christian work of which Athanasius said it was “appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness.” The more modern view is that it was written by the second century prophet Hermas (c. 140 A.D.), who was the brother of Pius, the Bishop of Rome.

³⁹ *Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, by John Calvin (translated and Edited by the Rev. John Owen), Ages Library, 1998

⁴⁰ *Thayer’s Greek Definitions*, Parsons Technology, 1999

⁴¹ *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 11*, Philip Schaff, editor, Ages Software, 1996, 1997

Verses 17-19: Paul warns the church in Rome to avoid those “who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.” He may be referring to 1st century Gnostics who claimed to be Christians, but actually believed in doctrines more similar to what we’d find in Eastern religions in modern times.

Verse 20a: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” – this may indicate that Paul thought the Second Coming would happen in his own era.

Verse 21: Timothy is mentioned, as well as three relatives of Paul. Paul must have had a fairly large family – in Acts, we learn that he had at least one sister and a nephew.

Verse 22: One of my favorite Biblical quiz questions of all time – “T/F Paul wrote the book of Romans”. False – he dictated it to Tertius, because Paul’s handwriting was so awful (see also Galatians 6:11).

Verses 25-27: Paul ends his letter to the Romans with a dramatic flair, in which he refers to “the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic [Old Testament] writings by the command of the eternal God.” This is not the only time Paul refers to the mysteries being revealed through the coming of Christ – see, for example, 1 Corinthians 15:51.

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Notes

About the Author

Robert C. Jones grew up in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. He made his living as a hotel lounge band leader/musician from 1974-1981. In 1981, he moved to the Atlanta, Georgia area, where he received a B.S. in Computer Science at DeVry Institute of Technology. From 1984-2009, Robert worked for Hewlett-Packard as a computer consultant.



Robert is an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church. He has written and taught numerous adult Sunday School courses (see front inside cover). He has also been active in choir ministries over the years, and has taught the *Disciples* Bible Study six times.

Robert is also President of the Kennesaw Historical Society, for whom he has written several books, including "The Law Heard 'Round the World - An Examination of the Kennesaw Gun Law and Its Effects on the Community", "Retracing the Route of the General - Following in the Footsteps of the Andrews Raid", and "Kennesaw (Big Shanty) in the 19th Century". A new book, "Images of America: Kennesaw", was published by Arcadia in 2006.

Robert has also written several books on ghost towns in the Southwest, including in Death Valley, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Mojave National Preserve.

In 2005, Robert co-authored a business-oriented book entitled "Working Virtually: The Challenges of Virtual Teams". His co-authors were Lise Pace and Rob Oyung.

His interests include the Civil War, Medieval Monasteries, American railroads, ghost towns, hiking in Death Valley and the Mojave, and Biblical Archaeology.

Robert is available as a guest speaker on Christian history and theology topics in the Atlanta Metro area, and North Georgia. See <http://www.sundayschoolcourses.com/speaker.htm> for more information.

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