

1 Romans Overview

Written by whom?

Paul the Apostle (the author of twelve other books of the New Testament). All earliest church leaders believed Paul wrote Romans – no one has seriously argued with this.

Written when and where?

During his third missionary journey between 55-57 A.D. From the country of Greece in or near the city of Corinth.

Written to whom?

To the Christians at the church in Rome (the capital of the Roman empire).

What form?

Letter of instruction and encouragement

What's it about?

What the gospel (the good news) is

What God's plan of salvation is

How God makes all people (both Jew and Gentile) right with Him

How Faith works in God's plan

Written for what purpose?

To prepare the Christians in Rome for his coming (he intended to visit – he didn't know he would arrive as a prisoner on his way to stand trial before Nero Caesar)

To tell the Christians there about the Gospel and God's plan of salvation

To explain how Jews and Gentiles were all part of God's plan now

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Paul's Missionary Journeys and Where Romans Was Written



3 Romans Outline

Focus	Intro- duction	The Righteous- ness of God	The Unrighteous -ness of Mankind	Justification	Sanctification	God's Righteous- ness Vindicated	Living Righteous	Con- clusion
Reference	Chapter 1:1-15	Chapter 1:16-17	Chapter 1:18-3:20	Chapter 3:21-5:21	Chapter 6-8	Chapter 9-11	Chapter 12-15:13	Chapter 15:14-16 :27

The main ideas in Romans:

1. **People know better – but are deeply bad** and choose to live wickedly – no one is good – not even a single one.
2. **God is completely good** – this makes for big problems because He seeks relationship with us.
3. **It won't do any good to try to keep a list of rules** and check them all off – one failure is enough to keep us out of relationship with God. Why? Because He is completely good.
4. **God came up with a way to fix things** – He counts faith in Jesus Christ as righteousness.
5. **Faith has always been the way** to relationship with God – even in Old Testament times.
6. **Faith makes us right with Him** (it justifies us) and then he removes our sins (he makes us holy – he sanctifies us).
7. **God's plan includes all people** – not just Jews, but all Gentiles as well – everyone.
8. **We should live differently** than those who haven't been saved. God has expectations for us.

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Romans Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. Where does Paul say the Gospel was promised and whom did the Gospel concern? (vs. 2, 3)
2. Why does Paul thank God? (vs. 8)
3. Why does Paul long to be with the Roman believers? (vs. 11)
4. To whom did Paul feel committed? (vs. 14)
5. What is the power of the Gospel? (vs. 16)
6. How has God's eternal power and divine nature been seen and understood? (vs. 20)
7. What do people who misunderstand God's nature create instead of accepting his glory? (vs. 23)
8. Who do people serve instead of the Creator? (vs. 25)
9. What happens when people do not acknowledge God? (vs. 28)
10. There is a long list of sins committed by those who reject God: what do these people deserve? (vs. 32)

Romans Chapter 1 – What did it mean to them?

Paul's primary audience is gentiles (people who were not Jewish) so Paul is going to be explaining his understanding of God's plan to justify and save gentiles through the actions of Jesus Christ. It is probably worthwhile to mention that Paul's gospel, theology, and ethics were *his* ideas and understanding. There were believers that did not agree with Paul, and while we believe that his writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit, these writings were still filtered through his training, his background as a Roman citizen, and his deep devotion as a Jewish rabbi. It is a good idea for us to keep this in mind as we study his writings. At the time of writing, Christian leaders were discussing different ideas as they worked together to figure out what it meant to follow Christ.

Paul's theology has a sense of urgency. He believed (as did many other Christians) that Jesus was coming back soon—possibly within their lifetimes. He would have been very familiar with the texts which spoke of the new world which would be ruled by God, brought in by the messiah. Jesus' life and death shifted their theology and expectations, introducing a short delay so that the gentiles could be saved before the judgment. Paul wanted everyone possible to be saved so that when the new world came about, they could all be with God.

Like all first-century Jews, Paul lived in the Roman Empire, and this worldview permeated his gospel. Good Romans (especially men) controlled their bodies and desires with respect to eating, drinking, and sexuality. Paul is concerned with self-control for gentiles because, without proper faith in God, they will lose control over their bodies and desires. He will refer to this control quite a bit during the letter, partly because he was concerned that non-believers would see the lives of believers and form opinions about Christianity based on what was observed.

God is the central focus for Paul and Paul's gospel. Faith is always directed to God. When Paul emphasizes the importance of Jesus as the Christ, we need to understand that (for Paul) it was Jesus' faith in God that provided a path and example for the gentiles to also have faith.

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Romans Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. Paul wanted his readers to understand what was important, to be able to live rightly. What do you think is the most important part of your faith?
2. The Roman Christians who received this letter didn't know Paul personally. Would you rather be taught hard things by someone you know, or by a stranger? Why?
3. Paul seems to be saying (vs. 20, 21) that God has built into humans a basic understanding of what is right, even if they don't have any direct knowledge of who he is. What do you think some of these basic ideas are?
4. What do you think it means to 'live by faith'?

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Romans Chapter 2 – Scripture Questions

1. Why did Paul say that those who judged others were really judging themselves? (vs. 1)
2. What is the point of God's kindness? (vs. 4)
3. How will God repay each person? (vs. 6-8)
4. What does Paul say that God will NOT show? (vs. 11)
5. Who is righteous in God's sight? (vs. 13)
6. When the day comes that Jesus judges everyone, what will be the witness for those who do not know him, or those who do not know the Law? (vs. 15, 16)
7. Paul goes on a fairly long scold against Jewish believers who brag about their relationship with God. He says they are actually dishonoring God by the way they break the Law. What is the result of this hypocrisy? (vs. 24)
8. Real commitment to God was written where, and by whom? (vs. 29)

Romans Chapter 2 – What did it mean to them?

God's nature and character are shown not only in the scriptures that have been preserved for us, but also in nature itself. But no matter where this law is found, humans are unable to live up to it, even when they try. Paul seems to be aware that the Roman believers were feeling a little smug about their understanding of Christianity. The Jewish Christians, in particular, seemed to believe that since they had the Law in their background, they were better than the Gentile Christians. It must have been a blow to them when Paul said, "Nobody is getting saved because they are 'doing' faith the right way." His emphasis on having the right kind of heart and mind put all people (Jew or Gentile) on the same footing. The sin hiding behind judgment of others is idolatry: that is, the person doing the judging is putting themselves in God's place, wanting to be their own Lord.

Evidently there were those who believed that their understanding and execution of the Law guaranteed them eternal life. They saw their good works as an end in themselves rather than as the natural outcome of their hope in God's mercy and grace. This may have come about because of a Jewish understanding of 'righteousness'. The idea was that because they had the Law and followed it, they were seen as 'right' with God, and therefore were saved from the judgment that would come on the Day of the Lord. Righteous first, then saved. (20 or so years later, after the fall of Jerusalem, this reliance on the Law was very understandable. The people lost their Holy City and Temple, and the people were scattered to the four winds—they thought their Law was the only thing left to them.)

Paul was trying to teach that what really mattered was internal motivation. For people who didn't know the Law, this motivation was driven by conscience. For those who did know the Law, it was still a matter of an inward obedience and submission to God rather than outward rituals or physical circumcision. People led by the Spirit receive praise from God.

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Romans Chapter 2 – Application Questions

1. Why do people tend to take God's kindness lightly?
2. What is the difference between being religious and being right with God?
3. Circumcision was not a guarantee of God's favor for the Jews, even though they believed it was. What do some people consider to be guarantees of God's favor? What is our real guarantee?
4. In Paul's time, many Jews kept the law for its own sake, honoring the law rather than the Law-Giver. In what ways do people today "do" church rather than honoring God?

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Romans Chapter 3 – Scripture Questions

1. Rhetorical questions—where no answer is expected, and the answer was well known—were a standard Greek/Roman teaching style. How many of these types of questions does Paul ask in verses 1-9?
2. How does human unfaithfulness affect God's character? (3, 4)
3. How many people (Jew or gentile) are righteous? (vs. 10)
4. In verses 10 – 18, Paul strings together several quotations from Psalms, Isaiah, and Proverbs. What is the overall emphasis of these verses?
5. Who will be held accountable to God? (vs. 19)
6. What can be learned from the Law? (vs. 20)
7. "Justify", "Righteous", and "Righteousness" all stem from the same Greek word which in English could be rendered: "Right-wise" – to make something right or to be right. How many times do these words appear in vss. 21-31?
8. Though all have sinned (vs. 23), how are all believers justified (made right)? (vs. 24)
9. How does Paul believe that people are made right with God? (vs. 28)
10. Does God use different measures to justify people? (vs. 30)

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Romans Chapter 3 – What did it mean to them?

Paul's focus here is that all people, Jews as well as Gentiles, struggle with sin. He is not saying that there was no value to the Law. Circumcision had been under dispute within Christian groups for several years at the time Romans was written. For Jewish Christians, circumcision was simply evidence of their place in the community; the problem came when people assumed that their faith was superior to the gentiles. In the previous chapter, Paul demolishes that idea. Here, he reassures them that there was value to the Law.

Paul had an attitude toward the Hebrew Scriptures which might surprise us. In some cases he quotes exactly from the Septuagint. Other times he seems to drastically change it to fit his purposes. One thing we can see from this freedom is that although the authority of the Old Testament is assumed, it was not viewed as necessary to accept it literally. In fact, Paul is an advocate of a kind of spiritual interpretation of Scripture, interpreting it in light of Christ. So he might use scripture literally, or he might alter it in order to make that connection to Christ clearer.

One major point that Paul is making here is that nobody can make claims of religious superiority, wherever they came from. Paul goes out of his way to emphasize that Jewish believers have advantages, but these advantages don't make them better in the sight of God. The Roman believers seemed to be dividing their congregation over who was being a better person: Paul says that nobody can be good enough, on their own power, to save themselves.

It seems possible that the Roman house churches were using their observance of the law and works to show who was the superior congregation. So they were doing what the law required, but for the wrong reasons. This was bringing up what is probably one of the most dangerous Christian problems, self-righteousness. This can be a root cause of conflicts in Christian groups, and certainly seemed to be a real problem in the Roman house churches.

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Romans Chapter 3 – Application Questions

1. 'Faith' and 'belief' are actually the same word in the Greek. Originally, it meant something like loyalty to a covenant partner. What do you think are the current meanings of 'faith' and 'belief'?
2. According to Paul, everyone sins; salvation is through grace. How does this affect the way we understand and deal with people who disagree with our understanding of the Bible?
3. The Jewish people who follow the Law have an advantage. They have a blueprint for how to live day to day! What do you use to organize the way you follow your faith?
4. The idea of universal sin is important: until we see the places where we have gone wrong, there is a danger of feeling superior to other people. How do you keep yourself humble?

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Romans Chapter 4 – Scripture Questions

1. What was the problem with Abraham being justified (made right) by good works? (vs. 2)
2. Who does David bless? (vs. 6-8)
3. When was Abraham considered righteous (made right) in God's sight? (vs. 10)
4. Which people can be considered righteous (justified) because of Abraham's example? (vs. 11, 12)
5. Why did the promise of inheriting the world come to Abraham? (vs. 13)
6. What does God's promise rest on? (vs. 16, 17)
7. Of what was Abraham convinced? (vs. 21)
8. For whom were the words "reckoned to him as righteousness" written? (vs. 23, 24)
9. Who do we believe in? (vs. 24, 25)

Romans Chapter 4 – What did it mean to them?

The Christians in Rome (and, one can assume, throughout the world) were struggling with the idea of righteousness. What was it? How did you get it? Did you have to earn it? Some teachers said it was a gift, others said that you had to live by Law in order to be considered righteous. Jewish Christians based their understanding on their knowledge of the Law and (they thought) on the example of Abraham. Gentile Christians, on the other hand, claimed that they were righteous only on the basis of Christ's sacrifice.

Paul begins by teaching about Abraham and his relationship with God. There is no question that Abraham did not live perfectly. He failed, several times, to do what we would consider to be the 'right' thing. And yet he had the promise from God, and God's approval. How was this possible? Paul uses Scripture to show that it was Abraham's belief, trust, and acceptance of God's promise that made him 'righteous' with God. In spite of the fact that he and Sarah were physically too old to have children, he did not waver in his belief that, somehow, God would keep his promise of uncounted descendants. This faith in God came many years before he was circumcised. Paul contends that this righteousness, marked by faith, made Abraham the father of believing Gentiles as well as faithful Jews.

Paul uses the example of Abraham, his faith and righteousness, as a mirror for the believers that he was teaching. The basic idea is this: Abraham believed in God as the One who acted in his behalf, and so did Christians who followed Christ. Abraham was justified (made right with God) by his faith, and so were the Christians, whether they were Jews or Gentiles. The same God who made Abraham and Sarah's 'dead' bodies capable of life raised Jesus from the dead.

Justification is not a magic spell which changes a sinful person into a person without sin. It is a description of the way that God forgives our sins in a divine act of mercy and grace that is totally undeserved. This justification, making us right with him, is so overwhelming that it shou

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Romans Chapter 4 – Application Questions

1. Think of someone who has been an example of great faith to you – what did that person do that showed their faith?
2. What prevents people from having faith? What does it mean to have a strong faith?
3. Circumcision used to be the way God's people were differentiated – how are they different from other people now?
4. Faith is believing, trusting and acting on that trust and belief. Describe someone or something you believe in, trust in and how you act because of it:

Believing	Trusting	Acting on Trust and Belief

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Romans Chapter 5 – Scripture Questions

1. Which comes first – justification or peace with God? (vs. 1)
2. What are the good things that Paul says we can boast (or rejoice) about? (vs. 2,3)
3. Identify the benefits that come, starting with afflictions. (vs. 3-5)
4. How is the love of God shown to humans? (vs. 5)
5. When did Christ die for us? (vs. 8)
6. With whom does Paul say that death originated? (vs. 12-14)
7. How does Paul describe the difference between the effect of Adam's sin and Jesus' gift? (vs. 16)
8. Adam's sin led to condemnation for all. What does Jesus' act of righteousness lead to? (vs. 18)
9. What specific thing does Paul mention as the difference between Adam and Jesus? (vs. 19)
10. To what does our justification lead? (vs. 21)

Romans Chapter 5 – What did it mean to them?

One of the things that Paul was trying to teach the Roman Christians was that they were thinking of themselves wrongly. Evidently some thought they were superior Christians. In this reading, Paul says that the only thing they can truly be proud of is that they are allowed to suffer for God's justice, not their superior abilities. Paul is really hammering home the idea that all grace received is from God himself, not because of any superior beliefs or behaviors, but only because of God's love for us. Paul is not urging his readers to do and be what as Christians they ought to do and be, but reminding them of the facts on which all their doing and being rest. Every believer starts from the same place. We were all sinners; God loved us anyway; Jesus died and was resurrected to make things right with God; we are all now at peace with God.

Paul points to the fact that one person's disobedience (Adam) made a huge difference to the lives of people. It is possible that Paul is warning here about the danger of false teachers in their congregations: one person's disobedience, or even simple misunderstanding of grace, could have a catastrophic effect on the Roman believers.

When Paul tells his readers "there is no sin apart from the law" he is not saying that nobody did bad things. He is saying that since before the Law of Moses was given, God had not given any standards for behavior/actions. There was no way to point and say "that thing is wrong" apart from the conscience given to all peoples. You can understand the Jewish Christians' desire to use the Law of Moses as a guide to life. It is so much easier to follow lists—especially lists with which you are familiar—to guide your daily life. For them to acknowledge that this wasn't necessary threw all of their orderly lives into confusion.

Romans Chapter 5 – Application Questions

1. Do you know of someone who has been able to be a joyful person in spite of suffering?
2. How is it that suffering has the potential of building us into better people? Give an example from your own life, if possible.
3. Grace is unmerited/unearned love and favor. Have you ever experienced grace? What does grace feel like?
4. If you've been at odds with another person, how can you become reconciled with them? How does this resemble the way God made reconciliation possible?

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Romans Chapter 6 – Scripture Questions

1. Paul asks, “Does it make sense to sin more so that we can achieve more grace?” What is his answer to this idea? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Joining Jesus (being baptized as a believer) means that we are also joining him in _____, and since he was raised from the dead, we are also walking in _____. (vs. 3, 4)
3. If we are united with Jesus in death, we will certainly be united with him in _____. (vs. 5)
4. From what have we been freed? (vs. 6, 7)
5. How must we consider ourselves? (vs. 11)
6. Because we are now alive to God, what kind of choice must we make toward sin? (vs. 12, 13)
7. What choice have believers made? (vs. 16-18)
8. Paul calls his readers to deliberately make themselves slaves to _____. What does this lead to in their lives? (vs. 19)
9. Now that we are free from sin and committed to God, what waits for us at the end of sanctification (being made like Jesus)? (vs. 22)
10. What payment waits for those who stay in sin? What is the free gift of God? (vs. 23)

Romans Chapter 6 – What did it mean to them?

There are several different ways to understand what Jesus did on the cross. Here are a few of the most common ones, with **extremely simplified** explanations.

#1 The Moral Influence Theory

One of the earliest theories for the atonement is the Moral Influence theory, which simply taught that Jesus Christ came and died in order to bring about a positive change to humanity.

#2 The Ransom Theory

This theory essentially teaches that Jesus Christ died as a ransom sacrifice, paid either to Satan (the most dominant view) or to God the Father.

#3 Christus Victor

Within the Christus Victor framework, the cross did not pay off anyone but defeated evil thereby setting the human race free.

#4 The Satisfaction Theory

In this theory, Jesus Christ's death is understood as a death to satisfy the justice of God. Satisfaction here means restitution, the mending of what was broken, and the paying back of a debt.

#5 The Penal Substitutionary Theory

Jesus Christ dies to satisfy God's wrath against human sin. Jesus is punished (penal) in the place of sinners (substitution) in order to satisfy the justice of God and the legal demand of God to punish sin.

#6 Recapitulation Theory

According to this model, Christ lived out all the stages of human life in such a way that his life of obedience compensated for Adam's life of disobedience. Christ obeyed the Father, reversing the curse in Adam and setting us free from the tyranny of the devil.

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Romans Chapter 6 – Application Questions

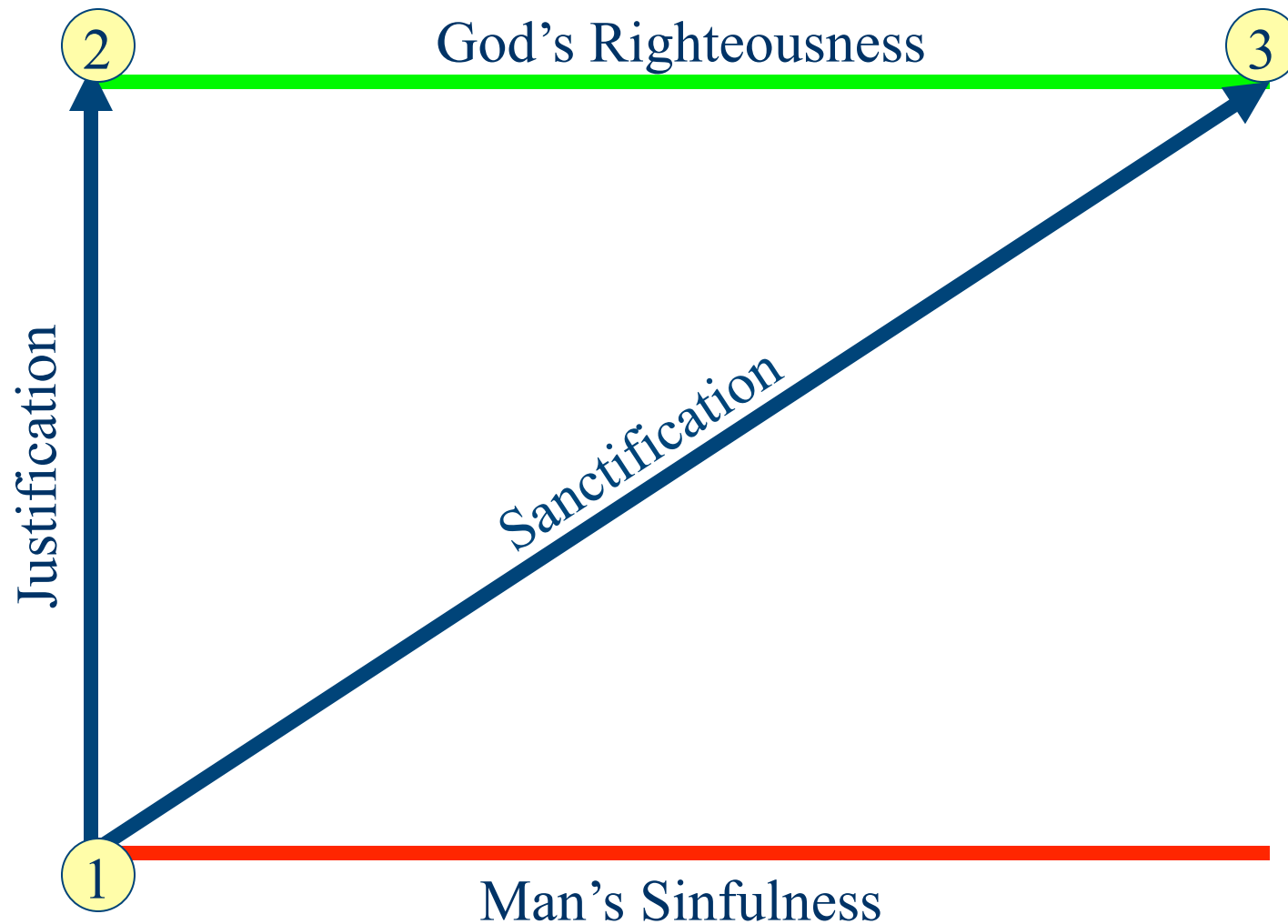
1. Paul uses a teaching device called 'rhetorical questions'. In other words, he asks a question to which he already has the answer, in order to lead his listeners to a conclusion. This was a common teaching technique, and is still used today. What is the best way for you to learn?
2. There are many different ways to think about the effect of Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul talks about one here that is often called "Christus Victor". In this theory, Jesus Christ dies in order to defeat the powers of evil (such as sin, death, and the devil) in order to free mankind from their bondage. Have you ever wondered "What is the point of the cross?" If so, what did you decide?
3. Everybody is a slave to something. As Bob Dylan sang,
"But you're gonna have to serve somebody
Yes, you're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody
How can you tell who you are serving? Is it by the way you feel, or the results you get?"
4. Where should we get our information about how to live in a way that God approves?

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Romans Chapter 7 – Scripture Questions

1. Paul refers to the Roman law about marriage by talking about the way _____ ends the relationship. (vs. 2)
2. Why are we now free from the Mosaic Law? (4-6)
3. What was the purpose of the Law? (vs. 7)
4. In spite of the fact that knowledge of the Law leads to (spiritual) death, what does Paul think about the Law? (vs. 12)
5. Paul says that he doesn't do some things that he wants to do and does other things he doesn't want to do – what's the matter with Paul? (vs. 15)
6. What makes it so hard to do what we ought? (vs. 17)
7. What makes it so hard to avoid doing that which is sinful? (vs. 17)
8. There is a war raging in each of us – who are the combatants in this war? (vs. 23)
9. Who rescues us from the struggle we have with sin? (vs. 25)

Romans Chapter 7 – Sanctification – the Process of Growth



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Romans Chapter 7 – What did it mean to them?

Paul's reasoning can be convoluted! His use of "if then, so now, and therefore" styles can be confusing. Here is a simplified version:

1. The Law describes what God expects of people
2. The Law gave us a standard of right and wrong
3. The Law shows us where we have sinned
 - The Good News: the Law let's us know how badly we've messed up
 - The Bad News: now we know
4. The Law doesn't just reveal sin – it stimulates the desire to sin. Our natural tendency is to want that which is forbidden. The law shows us what is forbidden.
5. The Law only applies to you while you live
 - A married person whose spouse dies is freed from the laws of marriage
6. If you die - the Law no longer applies to you
 - Becoming a Christian means you have died as far as the Law is concerned
7. You have also died as far as sin is concerned – but sin does not give up – it keeps fighting to take you back
8. There is a war going on inside us between Sin and our desire to do right – this war can't be won on our own
9. Jesus has rescued us from the battle over sin, though he does not take us OUT of the battle

Romans Chapter 7 – Application Questions

1. Sins of the flesh appeal to physical appetites – what are some sins of the mind?
2. Coveting is one of those sins that doesn't want to let go of us. Does our culture promote coveting? How? What can we do about it?
3. Each one of us seem to be especially vulnerable to specific sins – are there ways we can help each other to resist these sins?
4. What do you think 'sin' means? Doesn't everybody sin? What's so bad about it?

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Romans Chapter 8:1-27 – Scripture Questions

1. There is no condemnation for who? (vs. 1) What does that mean?
2. What are the marks of the mind that is set on sinful desires? (vs. 5-8)
3. What does Paul say about those that do not have the Spirit of Christ? (vs. 9)
4. What happens to those who live according to their sinful natures? (vs. 13)
5. How are those who are led by the Spirit of God considered? (vs. 14)
6. “Abba” is the Aramaic word for “Daddy”. What does it mean that we can address God this way? (vs. 15-17)
7. The creation is waiting eagerly for what? (vs. 19) Who are the sons of God?
8. The creation is suffering pain as if going through what? (vs. 22)
9. The Spirit helps us how? (vs. 26)

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Romans Chapter 8:1-27 – No Condemnation

You've left one Law's Jurisdiction and Entered a New Jurisdiction

Just like it's possible to leave one legal jurisdiction and enter another:

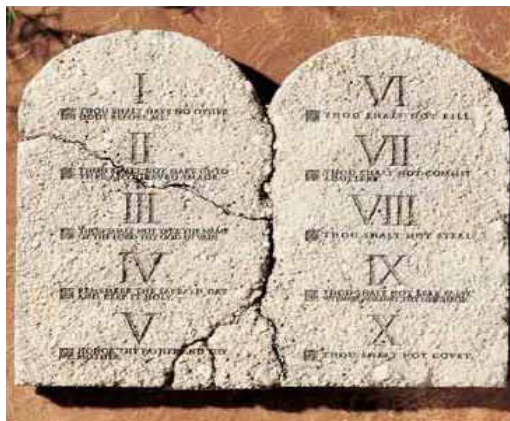


American Law

European Law



It's possible to leave the legal jurisdiction of the old Jewish Law



and enter into the jurisdiction of the law of the Spirit of life

Romans Chapter 8:1-27 – What did it mean to them?

1. We aren't condemned any more because we've left the jurisdiction of the Law and entered the jurisdiction of Grace
2. Your mind is controlled by the way you live your life:
 - If you live according to your sinful nature – that's what will fill your mind
 - If you live according to the Spirit – that's what will fill your mind
3. If you're led by the Spirit – you are a son of God – a child of His. As one of his children – you have an inheritance – just like His other heir, Jesus.
4. The creation is waiting eagerly for us to inherit – in fact, it's sick of waiting and groans in pains as strong as childbirth
5. The Spirit helps us in our weakness – helps us communicate with God

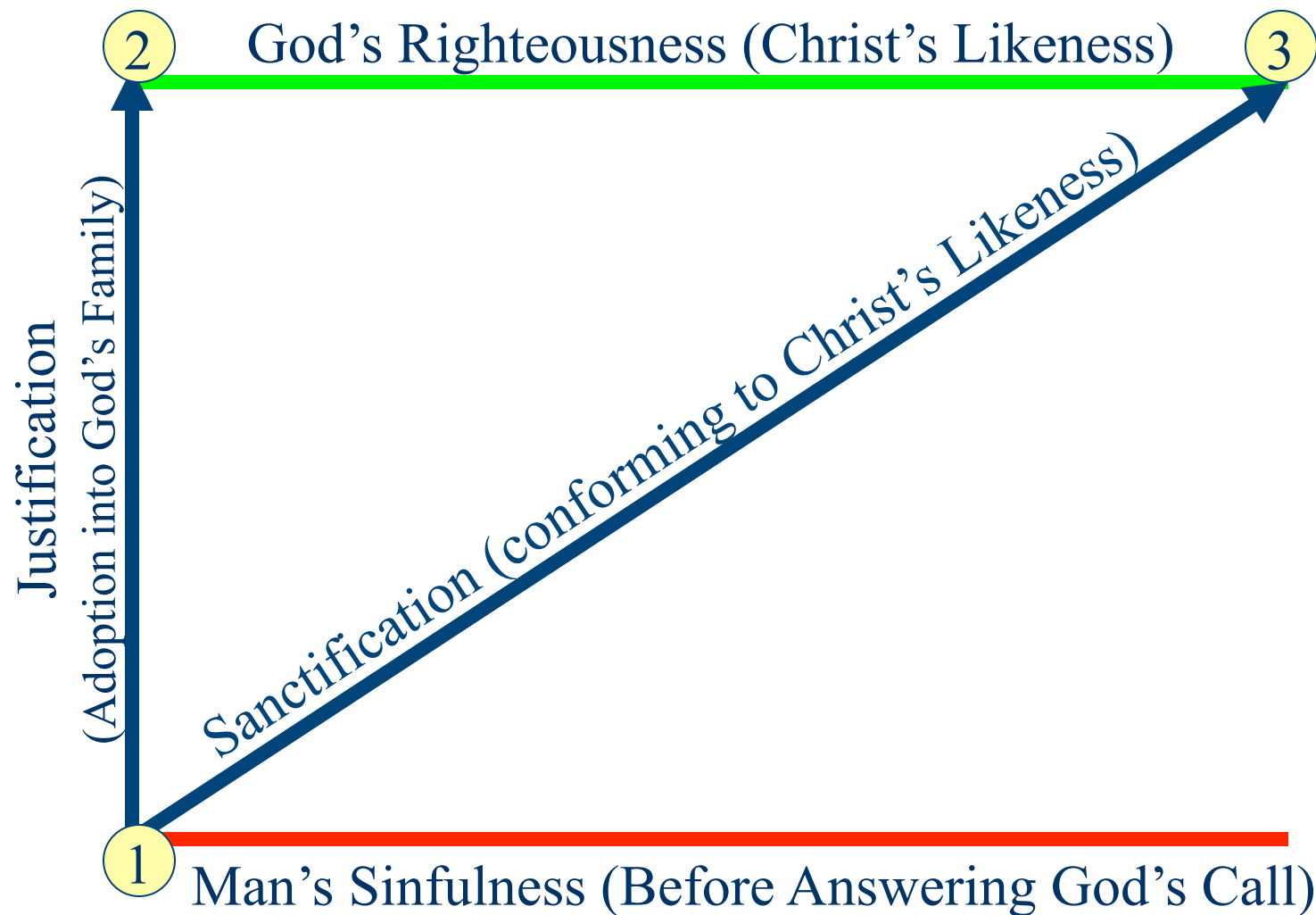
Romans Chapter 8:1-27 – Application Questions

1. Paul insists that the Law, though good in itself, is not able to save us. What is it about having a list of rules that is so attractive?
2. There's a war being fought within each of us – who's fighting this battle and how do we help or hurt in this war?
3. What does it mean to live by the Spirit? In what ways does the Spirit of God transform people?
4. If there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, then why do we feel so guilty when we sin? How should we deal with feelings of guilt and condemnation?

Romans Chapter 8:28-39 – Scripture Questions

1. What does Paul say about God's plan? (vs. 28)
2. What kind of relationship does Paul use to describe those who follow Jesus? (vs. 29)
3. What are the order of events that Paul lists in vs. 30? Put them order:
 - Glorified _____
 - Predestined _____
 - Justified _____
 - Called _____
4. If God is for us, who can be against us? (vs. 31)
5. What did God give up for all of us? (vs. 32)
6. Can affliction, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword, separate us from the love of Christ? (vs. 35)
7. We are more than _____ though him who _____ us. (vs. 37)
8. What are the next things Paul lists that cannot separate us from God's love? (vs. 38, 39)

Romans Chapter 8:28-39 – Conforming to His Likeness



Romans Chapter 8:28-39 – What did it mean to them?

God works for our good in everything – even in the bad things that happen. Paul's readers were faced with political pressures. The Jews had a protected status as a religion, and they were petitioning the Roman government to reject the Christians as a Jewish subdivision. Paul needed to encourage his readers to stand fast in their faith.

The reason he does this is to make us like Jesus. Paul was reminding his readers that any suffering they encountered had a purpose.

God calls everyone to follow Him – only a few decide to follow, and he won't force anyone. (It is possible that the troublemakers in the Roman churches were trying to force people to take sides.)

God knew who would decide to choose to follow because he is **outside** of time, not fixed in time like us.

If God is for us, it doesn't matter who is against us. This may have been a way for Paul to encourage his readers not to give in to the pressure from the false teachers in the Roman churches.

Christ talks to God for us, speaking in our favor. If God is our heavenly judge, then Christ is our heavenly lawyer defending us.

Nobody and nothing can separate us from God's love (against our will).

Romans Chapter 8:28-39 – Application Questions

1. What does it mean that God works for our good? What does “for our good” mean?
2. What does it mean to be called for God’s purposes? What if I’m not interested in the thing that God seems to want me to do? Sometimes those things seem scary.
3. What does it mean to be conformed to Christ’s likeness? Is it possible to take a break from this ‘conforming’ business or being a part of a Christian community and then come back to it later?
4. Is it possible to be a ‘conqueror’ in God’s sight and a loser in the world’s sight? Why? Can you think of any examples?

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Romans Chapter 9 – Scripture Questions

1. What was Paul willing to accept, if it would only save his Israelite family? (vs. 3)
2. What are the benefits of being Israelite that Paul lists? (vs. 4-5)
3. How did the Israelites get their identity as children of God? (vs. 8)
4. Who are the twins that Paul uses as examples of God's control over his plan for humanity? (vs.13)
5. Why don't we have any grounds for saying that God is unfair? (vs. 14, 15)
6. What objection does Paul imagine people making to his claim about God? (vs. 19)
7. God is compared to an artisan making something in verses 20-21. What type of artisan and what is he making?
8. In the quotation from Hosea, how does God assert his right to accomplish his plan the way he sees fit? (vs. 25, 26)
9. What mistake did the Israelites make when they were trying so hard to follow the law? (vs. 31, 32)
10. According to Paul, what did the Jews "stumble" over? (vs. 33)

Romans Chapter 9 – What did it mean to them?

It breaks Paul's heart that the Jews don't all understand and accept Christ as the Messiah. They had everything they needed – yet they wouldn't accept Christ. God chose the Jews to be His people – but they rebelled against Him again and again. God's true children aren't blood descendents – they are the ones who believe and follow Him. God chooses some people for certain tasks or purposes. Sometimes this can seem unfair. God's choices are not always understandable. God chooses people like the Jews or like us to show the riches of His Glory. Israel's trouble stemmed from their tendency to pursue salvation by works.

The struggle between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians wasn't necessarily bitter or contentious. They had very different ideas about what made a 'good and acceptable' believer. Paul, however, recognized that if these ideas of division were allowed to continue then the divide would only become deeper. It was almost an instance of idolatry: these believers were substituting their own ideas and understanding of how salvation was achieved instead of adopting the salvation directly from Jesus.

The Jewish Christians were, evidently, well 'versed' (pun intended) in their Scriptures. Paul is vehement that he is not trying to get rid of their devotion to their way of life. Instead, he tries to explain that because of those scriptures these believers should focus on the plan of God to include all people based on faith. This understanding would focus on God's plan and ability to save, and not on the ability to keep the Law.

The discussion of what we call 'predestination' is difficult for us to understand. If God chooses who is going to believe, then why should we work hard to follow him? This problem has swirled around Christians for as long as there have been believers. Paul seems to be trying to tell his readers that God knows all, and that they shouldn't depend on what they think they know, but instead depend on God's grace through Jesus. While this was probably as frustrating for Paul's readers as it is for us, in the end all we have is the knowledge that God loves us and wants the best for us.

Romans Chapter 9 – Application Questions

1. In what ways does God choose us to be His own? Are there ways in which we choose God ?
2. Do you ever think about this idea that since God knows all about us, he knows how we are going to respond to his call? How does that make you feel about your faith? Was it inevitable, or did you have any say in what happened?
3. In years past, many people saw church membership as a social good, and a thing that good people did. It wasn't necessarily because they believed in Jesus. Do you think this was okay? What are the benefits of being a 'social' Christian?

Romans Chapter 10 – Scripture Questions

1. What did Paul wish for his Israelite brothers and sisters? (vs. 1)
2. How had they acted, instead of accepting the righteousness of God? (vs. 3)
3. From where does our salvation come? (vs. 9)
4. First we believe with our _____, which leads to _____. Then we confess with our _____, which leads to _____. (vs. 10)
5. Paul quotes Joel 2:32. What does this scripture say? (vs. 13)
6. Why does Paul say “how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news”? (vs. 14-15)
7. Where does faith (or trust) come from? (vs. 17)
8. What two questions does Paul ask about his Israelite brothers and sisters? (vs. 18, 19)
9. Who does God show himself to? (vs. 20)
10. Why is God exasperated with Israel? (vs. 21)

Romans Chapter 10 – What did it mean to them?

It should not surprise us that even in the early days of Christianity, there was conflict over what 'being a believer' meant. There was a lot of variation in what it meant to be a Jew, and they were famous for having debates about following the Law. One of the early debates was about Jesus' place in the Law: did he bring it to an end, or was he the fulfillment of the Law, leaving the Law intact? Paul seems to be coming down on the side of "fulfillment".

The churches in Rome wanted to be faithful. They were, predominately, Gentile converts, and this provided a real struggle for the Jewish believers. In some cases they were genuinely concerned for their Gentile brothers and sisters, worrying that their lack of investment in the Mosaic Law affected their salvation. This is one reason that Paul presses so heavily on the way that salvation is achieved. He quotes and uses Scripture throughout this section to show his Jewish hearers that God's plan was not only for Gentiles (which they had already accepted) but that it depended not on the Law but on the condition of their hearts.

It is a truism about people that once a thing is settled in our minds, we don't like to change it. After all, if we accept one basic change, we might lose everything that we had built in our lives. Paul's ask of his Jewish brothers and sisters was large: he was telling them that salvation did not depend the Law, the Law which had been the central part of their lives, their understanding of the world, even their national identity. For them to accept that salvation was based solely on faith (trust) in Jesus as the son of God was huge.

Romans Chapter 10 – Application Questions

1. Paul gives an extremely clear explanation of how people are saved. Why do you think people have made it so complicated?
2. It wasn't that the Israelite people didn't want to follow God. They did want it, very much, but they still got it wrong. What can we do to make sure that we don't mix up our knowledge of God with our own desires and wants?
3. Paul's explanation of how the word about Jesus gets to people is famous for encouraging mission work, missionary training, financial support, etc. This seems like a job for professionals, not ordinary people like us. Do you know any missionaries? What kind of people are they?
4. Throughout this chapter, Paul quotes and uses Scripture over a dozen times. Have you ever memorized scripture? Which ones?

Romans Chapter 11 – Scripture Questions

1. Was Paul saying that God had turned his back, rejecting the Israelites? (vs. 1)
2. Which prophet complained that he was the only Israelite left who followed God? How did God answer him? (vs. 2-4)
3. Why did God treat the Israelites with undeserved grace? (vs. 6)
4. What did the failure of the Israelites to recognize Jesus as Messiah mean for the Gentiles? (vs. 11)
5. For what did Paul hope, as a result of his ministry to the Gentiles? (vs. 14)
6. How does Paul describe the Gentile relationship to God? (vs. 17)
7. What warning is given to the Gentile believers? (vs. 21)
8. Does God take back gifts and promises that he makes? (vs. 29)
9. What does Paul say about “all people”? (vs. 32)
10. Paul says that _____ comes from the Lord. (vs. 36)

Romans Chapter 11 – What did it mean to them?

Paul doesn't have any qualms about using Scripture in a way that supports his explanations. For instance, in verse 2 it says "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." In the original quote from Psalm 94:14, 'whom he foreknew' is not in the Psalm. In a couple more places in this chapter, he mixes together phrases and ideas from multiple Scriptures. As a denomination, we are usually uncomfortable with what we call 'cherry-picking' verses, but this was not at all uncommon for Paul's day. Rabbis would focus on the meaning of Scripture, and use those meanings to explain other ideas.

We also must be careful of losing meaning based on our unfamiliarity with the original language of our scripture. For instance, in verse 7, the word 'achieved', or 'found', 'pursuing' or 'searching for', is meant to convey the idea that the Israelites are still seeking God. The word 'hardened' or 'stubborn' is a verb that can mean callused. Paul frequently uses words that in the original Greek had connotations of athletic exertions, meant to imply that being a believer required persistent effort.

In verse 25, Paul speaks of 'mystery'. In Greco-Roman religious language (very familiar to Paul's Gentile readers), this word is used to describe truths about a god that was only revealed to that god's faithful followers. Paul was teaching his readers that it wasn't due to their special intelligence that they had been brought into the family of God, but that because of the Israelite's callused (hardened) minds and hearts they were (temporarily) out of the family.

One way we might bring this to our own lives is to read/study humbly, assume that we are probably missing something, and be willing to learn new ideas. We should also hold tight to the knowledge that our salvation is from God's grace alone, and not from any special understanding of our own.

Romans Chapter 11 – Application Questions

1. Paul is definitely not trying to get the Jewish believers to give up their cultural/traditional lifestyles. How can we do this in our day? If, say, a Wiccan practitioner believed in Jesus but continued to follow Wiccan holidays and practices, would this be okay? What about the Masons, who firmly believe that Jesus is the Messiah but have their own traditional practices? Is this okay?
2. The idea that those who fall can be brought back and 're-grafted' onto the family of God is a problem. How closely should we monitor people who 'come back' to the Lord? Should we just assume that they are one of us again, and let them all the way into fellowship? Or should we put them on probation and then make them come back in slowly, proving their commitment?
3. There are a lot of conflicting beliefs about Israel's place in eternity. Some people believe that there will be a sudden conversion when Jesus returns. Others believe that Jews who live faithfully by their Law will be acceptable to God as they are. Still others believe that it is the responsibility of Christians to convert the Jewish people as a prerequisite to Jesus' return. What do you think?

Romans Chapter 12 – Scripture Questions

1. What does Paul ask the Roman believers to do with their bodies? (vs. 1)
2. Who is supposed to change the way that these people think? (vs. 2)
3. How does Paul compare the group of believers with a physical body? (vs. 4, 5)
4. What are the different gifts Paul lists? How should they be used? (vs. 6-8)
5. How are the relationships in the congregations supposed to work? (vs. 9, 10)
6. What are the practical ways in which Paul asks the believers to live? (vs. 11-13)
7. How are the Roman Christians supposed to behave in the face of opposition? (vs. 14)
8. What kind of interactions with others does Paul encourage? (vs. 15-18)
9. How does Paul want the believers to respond to those who do bad things to them? (vs. 19, 20)
10. How do we defeat evil? (vs. 21)

Romans Chapter 12 – What did it mean to them?

It is easy for us to forget how new Christianity was, as a religion. The house churches were made up of wildly different groups of people, and they were all still trying to figure out what it was to 'be a Christ follower'. That's one reason the gifts of the Holy Spirit were so important: God needed to work pretty directly with people to help them understand what he wanted, much as he had to give specific instructions to the Israelites after they left Egypt. The work of the apostles was critical, since they had been with Jesus (in person) and had direct knowledge of what he wanted. Even then, this knowledge was filtered through their personalities, understanding, and backgrounds.

Paul takes the time to explain, very plainly, what the expectations are for moral living as they all wait for Jesus' return. Nobody was supposed to see themselves as superior to the others, but to see themselves as integral parts of the body of Christ, with specific jobs. Here was no place for troublemakers or self-importance. The attitude towards themselves, other believers, and outsiders was to be in imitation of Jesus himself. Paul also warned them against pretending to be loving, which makes us think that there were people in the churches who had one face for church gatherings and another face for daily living.

We should remember that these believers lived in a specific culture and time. They needed to avoid anything that would make the Roman government think they were troublemakers, and it was important that outsiders see them as agreeable and generous. Paul didn't want anything to get in the way of the Gospel, and if that meant that believers needed to bend over backwards to be seen as good citizens, then that's what needed to happen. Each generation of believers has a different relationship with their culture and government, and the truth of the Gospel must be shown and preached in a way that is unique to that time.

Romans Chapter 12 – Application Questions

1. Paul was helping the Gentile believers out by giving them pretty specific ways to live. Do you like this kind of clarity, or do you prefer more general guidelines? What would you think if our pastor was this specific about how we should behave?
2. The Roman Christians lived in a time and place when there were very few options for help (of any kind) for those in need, outside of family. And many of these believers had been kicked out of their families, so Paul's instruction to care for God's needy and to welcome strangers was extremely important. Whose job is it, today, to take care of Christians who are needy?
3. The end of this chapter seems to be saying "Meet people where they are, and don't try to make people let you 'win'." How far should this attitude go? Should we just give in to everyone, in order to make everyone happy?

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Romans Chapter 13 – Scripture Questions

1. How does Paul want his readers to behave toward the Roman authorities? (vs. 1)
2. What should good behavior from good people bring about from authorities? (vs. 3)
3. What is the duty of rulers? Which people should they punish? (vs. 4)
4. What are God's servants supposed to do with taxes? (vs. 6)
5. What sort of character does Paul encourage his readers to have? (vs. 7)
6. Is there anything that Paul says his readers should owe to others? (vs. 8)
7. What does the Law demand from believers? (vs. 10)
8. How does Paul describe the time of waiting for Jesus to return? (vs. 11, 12)
9. What kind of behavior does Paul encourage for his readers? (vs. 13)
10. How near should Jesus be to believers? (vs. 14)

Romans Chapter 13 – What did it mean to them?

Ever since Paul wrote these words, both church and political leaders have used the first part of this chapter as a rule to enforce obedience to government. There are archaeological remains that show it was used publicly to encourage submission. These words have also been used for evil: in apartheid South Africa, leaders in the Dutch Reformed Church and the ruling Nationalist Party used this passage to promote their racism. As recently as the early years of the Iraq War, these words were used to combat anti-war demonstrators. Even more recently, these words were used to defend policies that separated families and kept children in cages.

It is undeniable that while God has a design for appropriate and helpful government, people have a real skill at abusing one another. Power makes this even more likely when it is concentrated in a government. So how do we read this passage and faithfully understand it? There are, as you may guess, a myriad of ways to interpret verses 1-7. Some suggest that Paul's words be taken literally. Some suggest that Paul is encouraging his audience to follow the basic laws of government—like paying taxes, not committing crimes (obeying traffic signals!)—but that this does not apply to immoral policies. Others feel that it is important to take into account the historical situation of Paul's readers as poor foreigners living under Roman imperialism, suggesting that Paul's instructions are a way for them to survive as they await Jesus' return.

There is a final group of scholars that remind us that Paul did not have the final say among the earliest Christian assemblies, and that we need not assume he was always perfectly correct, even if he was an inspired writer. Even if his accommodation strategy was based on the enforcement of 'just' laws, Roman authorities rarely enforced the laws uniformly. Like today, marginalized populations took the main brunt of governmental policing and authority. In the end, we are called to live as Jesus did, showing love to those in our community and behaving as uprightly as possible in the places where we live.

Romans Chapter 13 – Application Questions

1. Paul's readers were struggling to find ways to live both faithfully and safely. All of us have to find that line for ourselves, where we can live as followers of Jesus AND stay out of trouble—or do we? When following the rules breaks what we consider to be God's law, what do we do?
2. “Behaving properly” changes from generation to generation, from culture to culture, from nation to nation. How do YOU decide what ‘behaving properly’ means for your own life?
3. A lot of Paul's instructions came about because he (and his readers) expected Jesus back very soon. Well, it's 2,000 years later and we are still waiting. Is there any possible way to make our expectation of his return seem real to our hearts and minds?

Romans Chapter 14 – Scripture Questions

1. Which followers of the Lord should be welcomed? (vs. 1)
2. Why should we welcome people who have different opinions? (vs. 3)
3. Who decides if someone is living rightly? (vs. 4)
4. If we choose different ways of living, what reason should we have for our choices? (vs. 6)
5. What should we use as the standard for our choices? (vs. 7, 8)
6. What must we be prepared to do, after Jesus returns? (vs. 12)
7. How do our feelings and opinions about life choices affect us? (vs. 14)
8. What is God's kingdom about? (vs. 17)
9. What should we try to do? (vs. 19)
10. If our choices cause problems for other followers of the Lord, what should we do? (vs. 21)

Romans Chapter 14 – What did it mean to them?

Paul is stressing hospitality to those with different backgrounds of spiritual practices. Evidently there had been problems with arrogance on the part of some believers who felt that their faith was stronger, and so the weaker believers should give way to them. While Paul is not explicit about the eating practices that were causing trouble, it is possible that they could be about eating food that had been sacrificed to other ancient gods, as had happened in 1 Corinthians 8. It was common for the meat sacrificed at various temples to be sold in nearby marketplaces. It was nearly impossible to say which meat had come from which temple. The Jewish converts had especial difficulties with this meat, since it appeared to support idol worship. They had genuine spiritual questions about this practice, and sometimes chose to eat only vegetables as a way to cope with the problem. Paul is being very stern with the Christians who were flaunting their freedom in the faces of those with questions and doubts. He reminds those with no doubts that they would have to face God someday to answer for their arrogance.

There is a second issue for the Roman Christians, that of celebrating ritual holidays. With both the Gentile and Jewish Christians, conversion came with the price of leaving behind family connections. These connections, like the ones we have now, often centered around religious holidays. Should they continue to celebrate or not? If they did participate, it may have been seen as resuming the old worship. If they did not, it made them seem (to the community) as if they were neglecting their family duties. Paul seems to feel that if their faith is strong it won't make any difference whether they do or do not join in these festivities, but that if their practice gives other believers trouble in their own minds then they should not join in the festivities. The important point is that they should not put their own desires ahead of other Christians, that everything they do be in honor of God, and that they live ethically in their community.

Romans Chapter 14 – Application Questions

1. Letting other people have their own opinions is HARD—especially when they seem really, really wrong to us. Do you have any tricks or tips about letting these folks go? Are there any ideas that we should push back on?
2. Paul says that we should try to live at peace and help each other have a strong faith. Who helps you have a strong faith? Who holds you accountable for living at peace?
3. Paul is most likely concerned about spiritual choices being made by the Roman believers, like eating meat that had been offered in sacrifice to idols. Do we have anything similar to this today? For instance, should we be concerned about the movies/TV shows that we watch?

Romans Chapter 15 – Scripture Questions

1. What attitude should we have towards those who struggle with their faith? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Who makes us patient and cheerful? (vs. 5)
3. How do we show honor to one another? (vs. 7)
4. In verses 9-12, Paul quotes Scripture. Who does this scripture emphasize is sought/accepted by God?
5. What will the power of the Holy Spirit give to faithful believers? (vs. 13)
6. Why did God choose Paul to be a servant for the Gentiles? (vs. 16)
7. Where has Paul always tried to preach? (vs. 20)
8. Why was Paul headed to Jerusalem? (vs. 25, 26)
9. What was he going to do after delivering this gift? (vs. 28)
10. For what did Paul ask the Roman Christians to pray? (vs. 30-33)

Romans Chapter 15 – What did it mean to them?

In the beginning of this section, Paul is describing Christ as the model for the way that the various groups in the Roman churches interacted. He has particular concern for those whose faith is weak, because they are vulnerable to the majority. We can notice that he has not been specific about who is weak or strong. Those who received this letter probably thought of 'weak' and 'strong' in different ways than we do today. Those who thought of themselves as strong (because they were confident in leaving behind all of their previous religious practices and traditions) may have been looking down on those who wanted to continue to carefully follow the laws and rituals familiar to them. There were Jewish Christians who leaned toward Paul's sense of freedom from the law, and others who were loyal to the more conservative pattern of Peter and the Jerusalem church.

Paul strongly encourages his readers to be unified. Indeed, he hopes that the entire world will someday be unified through the gospel. Because of his desire for them to be unified, it is important that these believers accept and value one another as followers of Christ first and foremost. In his words, Christ came as both a servant of the Jews, to show that God kept his promises, and so that the Gentiles would praise God for his kindness towards them. It is, perhaps, inevitable that humans will try to work out hierarchies among themselves, but it is not Christ-like. Paul saw himself first as a servant to the Lord. He wanted his readers to see themselves as servants to one another.

Romans Chapter 15 – Application Questions

1. Paul often quotes Scripture to back up his teaching. Should we spend more time memorizing scripture? Why or why not?
2. Because the Church was so new, it was an important part of the apostle's work to correct and instruct the believers. Well, the Church is old now, and we have pastors instead of apostles. What do you think is an important part of our pastor's work?
3. Whatever issues the Roman Christians were struggling with, the way Paul closes this chapter makes it clear that he believed their prayers had power, and that their prayers reached God's ears. Should we be more intentional about praying for one another in our class? If so, how can we do this? Are there tools that would make it easier to keep up with the prayers?

Romans Chapter 16 – Scripture Questions

1. Who does Paul greet first? How does he describe her? (vs. 1, 2)
2. Why was Paul grateful for Priscilla and Aquila, who were leaders of one of the house churches? (vs. 4)
3. Where did Adronicus and Junia spend time with Paul? Who respected them? (vs. 7)
4. Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis are respected for what reason? (vs. 12)
5. This letter to the Roman churches would have been moved from group to group (probably by Phoebe since she is mentioned first). How does Paul want these churches to greet one another? (vs. 16)
6. What is still worrying Paul? (vs. 17)
7. What startling hope of Paul's occurs in the middle of verse 20? (vs. 20)
8. Who inserts his own greeting near the end of the letter? (vs. 22)
9. What will make believers strong? (vs. 25)
10. Why can we praise the only wise God? (vs. 27)

Romans Chapter 16 – What did it mean to them?

There were several house churches in Rome, attended/led by Phoebe, Prisca and Aquila, Epaenetus, Andronicus and Junia, and possibly Aristobulus. At least seven out of the names listed were women; ten are names commonly given to enslaved persons; at least eleven are names indicating they (or their ancestors) were immigrants to Rome. Tryphaena and Tryphose were missionaries—both women. It is visible in this list that the early church was made up of women, men, enslaved, free, Jewish and non-Jewish, rich and poor. Paul had his work cut out for him trying to unify these various peoples!

Since going to Spain was very important to Paul (though he never made it there), it would be necessary for him to make a plan and develop support and contacts in Spain. While Paul normally began in synagogues when evangelizing a new area, recent studies indicate that Spain had neither large groups of Jewish settlers nor any synagogues during the first century. Paul couldn't count on his usual audience to create new churches of Jesus followers. This lack of audience in Spain would also create economic problems for Paul. Normally, a synagogue would have a small hostel attached to it for the use of travelers. So Paul would be dependent on people like Phoebe to provide funds for his survival.

Another problem would have been cultural and language barriers. We know that Paul spoke Greek and Hebrew, but not Latin or any local rural Spanish languages. So, he would be dependent on translators. Phoebe, by virtue of her good name among believers and her social/financial standing, would have been the ideal person to help Paul develop connections and strategies for his next missionary journey. Her name tells us she was not Jewish. As a deacon(ess), she would have been a leader in her local house church. The title used for her is 'patroness', which had a clear legal and social connection in the Greco-Roman world. Patrons and patronesses were upper-class figures who provided legal protection for their employees, slaves, friends, and dependents.

Romans Chapter 16 – Application Questions

1. The power to serve comes from the Holy Spirit, but it has to work through people. Who can you think of in our church that serve now (or have served in the past)? What kind of recognition should they receive?
2. The early church was extremely diverse. Nowadays, Sunday mornings are said to be the most segregated places in America. Is this a problem? What issues do we avoid by being so similar? What do we lack because of our similarities?
3. The early church was still figuring out the mechanics/logistics of being an organized group of believers. We have bylaws and spreadsheets, traditions and notebooks. How do you feel about the organizations we have built up? Do you find them helpful? Why or why not?