

ROMANS

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to a church he had never met.

1:1 He introduces himself as Jesus Christ's *slave*.

This involves two claims:

- 1) he belongs in the succession of faithful believers going back to the beginning of time who were God's slaves (cf. Josh. 14:7; 24:29; Ps. 89:3).
- 2) Jesus Christ is God and is his God.

As Jesus Christ's slave, Paul is a *summoned messenger*: he has received a summons and is entrusted with a message of good news from God.

For this gospel, Paul has been *set apart* from other activities: his entire life is devoted to carrying this message.

In the book of Romans Paul is writing up this message.

1:2 It is with good reason that Paul is entirely devoted to the gospel: the gospel is God's big project: he *promised* it in advance (eg. Isa. 52:6-7; Joel 2:32). He gave a preview of the gospel in the sacrifices.

1:3-4 God's gospel is all about his Son, about whom Paul tells us three things:

1) He was truly human.

This is brought out in 3 phrases:

- i) He *came into being*.
- ii) He had a human descent – *from David's seed*.
- iii) He lived a normal human life on earth: *according to the flesh*.

2) His resurrection identified him as God's Son

He was *marked out in power as God's Son ...as a result of the resurrection from the dead*.

The resurrection was the great miracle which established the fact that this human being was in fact the Son of God.

3) Jesus is Lord

To be God's Son is to be God in the maximum sense (Ps. 118:27; 1 Kgs. 8:60).

1:5-6 Because Jesus Christ is God, two things follow:

- 1) *the obedience of faith* is required: submission to Jesus as Lord by believing on him.
- 2) *all the nations* are called to that obedience, including the Gentiles in Rome.

1:7 A prayer for the beloved saints in Rome.

1:8-16 In this passage we find three references to the gospel.

1) The gospel is Paul's spiritual service (v. 9).

This involves

i) *thanks* to God that there are believers in Rome (v. 8): it is God's achievement.

ii) *prayer* (v. 9).

2) The gospel is Paul's driving passion (v. 15)

In vv. 10-15 Paul gives 4 reasons why he wants to visit Rome, although he has been prevented so far:

i) Not everyone in Rome is converted yet (v. 13).

ii) The gospel strengthens those who already believe it (v. 11).

iii) Gospel encouragement is a two-way experience (v. 12).

iv) Rome is a world in miniature, and the gospel is for every type of people (v. 14f).

3) The gospel is Paul's pride and joy (v. 15f)

Perhaps Paul had been accused of evading the challenge of the capital city. *I am not ashamed* means 'I am thoroughly proud of the gospel': it is a miracle message for all the world.

1:17 Here Paul continues to explain why the gospel is God's miracle for salvation: *God's righteousness is revealed in it*.

God's righteousness probably means his favour towards his people rooted in his covenant commitment (cf. eg. Pss. 35:24,27f; 36:10; 71:24; 143:1).

In the gospel, in Jesus Christ, God's favour is put conclusively on display (cf. eg. Matt. 1:23; Lk. 15:1f; Mk. 2:5; Jn. 8:11; Ac. 10:38; 1 Jn. 4:19).

God's righteousness is revealed

from faith: out of God's faithfulness.

to faith: into our faith.

This is backed up by Hab. 2:4: despite appearances, God will not abandon his people: those whom he favours will survive his judgment.

And the question which Romans will answer is:

who belongs to this covenant community?

1:18-25 The word *for* (v. 18) indicates that Paul is about to tell us why God's favour needed to be revealed in such a dramatic way as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ: another revelation is taking place: *God's anger*, about which this passage says five things:

1) Its source

It is revealed *from heaven* (v. 18): in his anger God stands aloof (cf. Neh. 9:27f).

2) Its target

This is summed up in the words *ungodliness and unrighteousness* (v. 18), which are explained by the phrase *they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful* (v. 21):

ungodliness: the failure to glorify God.

unrighteousness: the failure to live as thankful beings, recognizing that everything is God's gift: unfairness to God.

In practice this involves idol worship (v. 23), which involves bypassing *the glory of the incorruptible God*, and then transferring gratitude to *images*.

This human rebellion is summed up in v. 25: *to worship and serve God's creation instead of God the Creator is the lie* (the ultimate in untruth).

3) Its reason

The hypocrisy of the lie:

people unjustly hold out against the truth (v. 18).

This is explained by vv. 19-20: so much about God is obvious.

4) Its justice

People are *inexcusable* (v. 20), because their reasoning is *empty*: constantly *professing wisdom*, they have plunged themselves into darkness like the *fools* they actually are (v. 21f).

5) Its nature

God *gave them up* (v. 24): his anger is his departure; he withdraws restraints on human folly, and lets us get on with what we want to do.

1:26-27 The withdrawal of restraint is seen also in the madness of homosexual activity. Paul says seven things about this.

1) It is a vile passion (v. 26)

It destroys a person's honour, and obliterates rational thought. In v. 27 Paul speaks of *being set on fire with desire* – a picture of a life totally out of control.

2) It is a poor exchange (v. 26)

It involves settling for some vulgar imitation of true love.

3) It is unnatural

It involves giving up what comes naturally (v. 26) and getting involved in what goes against the grain of nature (v. 27).

4) It is moral deformity

It is *shameful* (v. 27).

5) It overturns God's order

God's order for human life includes male headship: here women are mentioned (v. 26) before men (v. 27).

6) It is waywardness

The word *error* (v. 27) suggests going round in circles and never getting anywhere.

7) It brings its own appropriate penalty

The consequences of homosexuality demonstrate that it is wrong (v. 27).

God's anger leaves us to reap the bitter fruit of our rebellion against him.

1:28-31 For the third time Paul mentions God's abandonment of this sinful world – to a *debased mind* (v. 28). People descend into intellectual failure, because they find the knowledge of God distasteful.

As a result, human relationships end up in a mess. In v. 29 *unrighteousness* is repeated from v. 18, followed by 21 words (vv. 29-31), all but one of which depict relationships gone wrong: the one exception, *haters of God*, reminds us of the root of this condition.

Such things are *not fitting* (v. 28) – they do not suit human beings made in God's image.

1:32 The end result is death – as everyone really knows: conscience writes the sentence of death across our sinful life.

And yet, the common outlook of humanity is that sin is acceptable.

2:1 Paul now turns his attention to his fellow Jews [and to anyone who is proud of his own morality]. They will have agreed that the practices mentioned since 1:18 are vile, and might feel superior. Paul has to demonstrate that they are no different, even though they may superficially appear to be.

This *therefore* goes back behind the *therefore* in 1:24 to stress that rebellion against God is present in everybody's heart.

2:2-3 If ever we imagine that we can hide from God's judgement behind our own supposed goodness, we delude ourselves: the whole world is totally defenceless.

2:4 However, God is *good*: he puts up so patiently with the world as described in 1:18-32, with a view to leading us to a *change of mind*, particularly in our verdict on ourselves in that we come to accept God's verdict.

2:5 Paul now continues his censure of the Jews: he sees *hard-hearted impenitence*, which is *accumulating wrath*.

2:6 In terms of God's judgement, ethnic background, religious experience and a sense of moral superiority are irrelevant: God *repays according to works*.

2:7-11 This passage elaborates on God's impartiality in judgement (v. 11): he deals in the same way with *the Jew first and also the Greek* (vv 9,10).

The two categories, *those who have done good* who receive *eternal life* (v. 7), and *those who have done evil* who receive wrath (v. 8f), cut across both ethnic groups.

2:12 Gentiles who sinned in ignorance of the law will perish, and Jews who sinned against the law they knew will be assessed by that law.

2:13 It will not be merely having the law that counts, but having done it.

The word *justified* here refers to final acquittal at the last judgement: a profession of allegiance to God has to be backed up by works.

2:14-16 But are there in fact any Gentiles who do the law?

Paul says, 'yes there are'. He is probably referring here to Gentile Christians.

They *did not have the law by nature*, and yet they are now *doing the law* because the law has been *written on their hearts* (v. 14-15a).

It is true that they know that they have not kept the law perfectly (v. 15b), and yet they will be justified by a God who can read their inner motivation (v. 16).

NOTE: Paul is not teaching salvation by works, but judgement by works, and the only works that result in final justification are those stemming from the gracious miracle of salvation, which involves the writing of God's law on the heart.

2:17-20 Paul now addresses the Jew directly. He starts by acknowledging the very real privileges of the Jews, listing eight of them:

1. The noble name *Jew* (v. 17).
2. The foundational *law*, on which the Jew could *rely* (v. 17).
3. The worship of *God*, in which the Jew could legitimately *boast* (v. 17).
4. The *knowledge of God's will* (v. 18).
5. A proper moral sensitivity – the ability to give *approval* to what God deems *excellent* (v. 18).
6. A valid *education* (v. 18).
7. Competence as living witnesses to the truth, able to *guide, enlighten, instruct, and teach* (v. 19-20a).
8. The only definition of *truth – in the law* (v. 20b).

2:21-22 Yet for all these privileges, the Jews are not in fact keeping the law (v. 21-22a), and are quite happy to profit from the pagan environment in which they live (v. 22b).

2:23-24 This Jewish inconsistency brings the name of God into disrepute.

2:25 This verse drives the point home: there is no virtue in having the law and all the privileges that go with it unless you are *keeping the law*. Failure in that respect means that the distinction between privileged Jew and Gentile outsider has broken down.

2:26-27 Conversely, a Gentile who keeps the law will be counted a member of God's covenant community (v. 26), and the law-abiding life of such a Gentile will itself be a condemnation of the law-breaking of the Jew (v. 27).

2:28-29 Back in v. 15 we learned that law-keeping on the part of Gentile Christians is the result of the miracle of God's grace in which the law is written on their hearts. These verses make the same point regarding the Jews. The true Jew (who keeps the law) is one in whom God's grace is at work by the *Spirit*.

At this point the apostle leaves us aware of the helplessness of man, of the uselessness of human effort, of our total dependence on God for salvation, and of the absolute sovereignty of his Spirit in working in human hearts to bring to birth acceptable works:

Jew and Gentile alike are part of the world given up by God;

Jew and Gentile alike are candidates for justification in the final judgement because of obedience.

3:1 But now a definite question naturally arises, which results in a brief interruption of the main flow of the argument, but which needs to be cleared up:

what advantage has the Jew?

Paul seems to have removed every advantage, and to have made outward *circumcision* pointless.

3:2-8 But this is not the logic which Paul sees in his argument.

He sees huge advantages in the position of the Jews, at the centre of which is their possession of the law.

Paul traces these advantages in four steps:

1) God made his commitment to the Jews

In *committing* his law to them (v. 2), he committed himself to them.

2) God stands by the commitment he made to the Jews

Although some Jews *did not believe* God's word (v. 3), their unfaithfulness does not undermine *God's faithfulness* (v. 4).

3) The fact that God stands by the commitment he made to the Jews displays his glory

Our unrighteousness [our unfairness to God] is set side-by-side with *God's righteousness* [his favour towards his people] (v. 5), and the contrast highlights the magnificence of God's favour.

4) God expects a response to the commitment he makes

In vv. 7-8 Paul addresses an issue raised by the gospel: it sounds like dangerous talk. If sin makes God's faithfulness shine out even more brightly, two things seem to follow:

1. sin does not really matter (v. 7)
2. we ought to sin as much as we can (v. 8)

Paul does not really answer the point: it is enough to say that the idea comes from the pit. Professing to belong to God has implications: we must live out the response of deep gratitude.

The Jews, then, are at an advantage when it comes to keeping the law in order to be admitted to God's favour at the judgement: they had the law, while the rest of the world did not.

3:9 But now another question arises:

recognising the Jews' advantages, are they any *better* off in fact?

The answer is *not at all*, because Jews and Gentiles *are all under sin*: sin is a power that submerges us.

3:10-18 To emphasise the universality of sin, Paul brings together a string of OT quotations.

In vv. 10-12 the key words are *none, no, not one, and all, together*. All people are under sin – there are no exceptions.

This universal tragedy comes to expression in barbed words (v. 13f) and bent ways (vv. 15-17).

The root of it all is that *there is no fear of God* (v. 18), a phrase which summarises the religious root of all human rebellion, as in 1:18-25.

3:19-20 All these texts are from the Jewish Bible – which proves the universality of sin. That Gentiles are under sin can be taken for granted. What needs to be proved is that the same is true of the Jews, which is what these quotations do (v. 19a).

Three things follow:

1) We are all left speechless

No excuses can be offered (v. 19b).

2) We are all found hopeless

All the world is *guilty*: it only remains for God to pass sentence (v. 19c).

3) We are all proved helpless

The law brings us to *the knowledge of sin* (v. 20):

- i) it tells us what sin is.
- ii) it tells us that we are sinners.

Consequently, no one, Jew or Gentile, can be justified by the *deeds of the law* (v. 20).

NOTE: on first hearing, 3:20 sounds like a contradiction of 2:13, but there are two important differences:

- 1) the word *by* (on the basis of): no one is justified because of doing the works of the law. Whereas 2:13 only says that the doers of the law are justified, but does not say that they are justified because of doing it.
- 2) The word *flesh*, which is often opposed to Spirit: *flesh* means the law-breaking human race – which obviously cannot be justified by doing the law. Whereas 2:13 occurs in a context which speaks of the Spirit, implicitly in v. 15, and explicitly in v. 29.

At this point the apostle has brought us to the recognition that we are all speechless, hopeless, helpless, and outside God's favour.

3:21 *But now* signals something new:

3:22 God has chosen a new way to show that he is favourable –

through Jesus Christ's faith (his life of faithful obedience).

And Jesus Christ is for all who believe (Jews and Gentiles).

There are three ways in which *there is no difference*:

3:23-24 **1) A past event:** *all sinned.*

- in Adam as the representative human being.

2) A present reality: *all lack God's glory.*

i. God does not have a good opinion of anyone.

ii. Human life lacks its proper splendour.

3) A possible change: *justified.*

- there is only one way into God's favour:

i. free of charge

ii. by his grace (God's characteristic mode of operation).

iii. he covered the cost: *the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* sets sin's slaves free.

3:25-26 These verses explain how our justification is in the redemption in Christ Jesus:

he is the 'ilasthron, the mercy seat, the place where God meets his people (Ex. 25:22).

On the Day of Atonement the blood of two sin offerings was sprinkled on the mercy seat (Lev. 16:6,14-15).

Sin offerings secured atonement and forgiveness (Lev. 4:20,26,31,35): the burning of the victim was *a sweet aroma to the LORD* (Lev. 4:31), by which the LORD's anger was soothed (cf. Gen. 8:21).

On the Day of Atonement there were two results of the sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat:

- 1) the people were cleansed (Lev. 16:30).
- 2) the threat of death was averted (Lev. 16:2,13).

Christ's blood was shed for our cleansing and to avert the death-threat hanging over us because of our sin.

Paul makes three further comments about Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of the mercy seat:

1) God was behind it:

he set him forth.

2) It was in faithfulness that God sent Jesus Christ:

the words *through faith* probably refer to God's good faith.

3) The coming of Christ demonstrates God's favour towards the people to whom he has committed himself.

- i. in that sin was not punished before he came.
- ii. in that he has now come and shed his blood to cleanse us and avert our death.

God is therefore just in admitting to his favour everyone whose life is based on Jesus' faithfulness.

3:27-28 There is therefore no possibility of boasting:

since the law was lived out by the faithful Jesus in his representative capacity, I recognise that I have nothing to boast about: we are admitted to God's favour independently of works of law.

3:29-30 If works of law were the basis for admission to God's favour, the Jews' advantage would extend to the point that God would be exclusively theirs.

However, God is gracious in his attitude to all peoples: this follows from the oneness of God.

3:31 All this raises an important question for the Jews:

doesn't this teaching of God's universal favour on the basis of Jesus' faithfulness make the law totally pointless?

Not so, says Paul:

the law is established in that it shows us that we cannot be justified by our own obedience, and so drives us to Christ as our only hope.

4:1-2 Abraham is introduced as a test case: does the gospel as the apostle has expounded it hold true in the case of the Jewish champion of obedience?

4:3 Paul quotes Gen. 15:6 to back up his claim in 3:28.

4:4-5 Paul now begins to apply this principle to anyone.

He considers two possible ways of finding God's favour:

1. A business arrangement (v. 4)

- but just to speak of God being in debt to people makes the very idea ridiculous.

2. The nature of God (v. 5)

- he does admit the ungodly to his favour, and we must believe in him as he is.

4:6-8 Ps. 32:1-2 makes the same point:

those who are *blessed* (equivalent here to *justified*) are not those who have kept the law and avoided sin, but those whose sins are

- *forgiven* (God does not charge us with our sins)
- *covered* (God pulls a veil over our sins)
- *not imputed* (God does not calculate our sins)

And because God is this God, anyone can know his favour: it is nothing to do with us.

4:9 But the apostle wants to make quite sure that the gospel is being understood.

So he raises this question:

is it only Jews / moral people who can enjoy the blessing of admission to God's favour?

4:10 To begin his answer, Paul asks a second question:

when was it that Abraham was admitted to God's favour simply because he took God at his word – was it before or after he was circumcised?

Clearly, *before* (Abraham's circumcision did not take place until Gen. 17:23).

Therefore, the blessedness pronounced by Ps. 32 cannot be limited to those who are circumcised (the Jews).

4:11-12 What, then, was the reason for circumcision?

It was a sign and seal of God's favour already received: it did not add anything.

It follows that Abraham is the spiritual ancestor of all who take God at his word, whether or not they are circumcised.

4:13-17 The law is also as irrelevant as circumcision, a point which Paul proves by a logical argument:

1. IF the law is the key to inheriting everything,
2. THEN taking God at his word is irrelevant,
3. IN WHICH CASE God's promise is meaningless,
4. BECAUSE all the law does is to expose the fact that none of us is a candidate for God's favour;
5. SO God's favour has to come to those who assume that God is reliable,
6. EVEN where that favour is undeserved,
7. BECAUSE this is the only way that the promise can be guaranteed to anyone at all;

8. AND IF there are no conditions,

9. THEN God's favour is available to everyone.

The key is the nature of God.

4:18-21 Still using Abraham as a model of how anyone is admitted to God's favour, Paul tells us four things about Abraham's faith:

1) He refused to see the case as hopeless.

He was promised descendants when he had no child and he and Sarah were elderly; yet, his hope in God was never extinguished.

2) He refused to be swayed by appearances.

He paid no attention to the obstacles in the way of the fulfilment of God's promise.

3) He gave God the glory.

He did not focus his attention on himself: God gave him the ability to take him at his word.

4) He had no doubts about God's ability.

He was convinced that God's promise never exceeds his power to perform.

4:22-24a Because that was the nature of Abraham's faith, he was admitted to God's favour.

Paul's main point is that the gospel he preaches does hold true, that this was precisely the way in which Abraham was admitted to God's favour.

So, everyone admitted to God's favour comes the same way as Abraham : on the basis of God's faithfulness to his word.

4:24b But now something new emerges in the discussion.

Jesus our Lord is mentioned for the first time since 3:26.

Chapter 4 has left him temporarily out of view while the basic principle by which God admits anyone to his favour is examined, namely his own faithfulness, which we take to be reliable.

Now, however, Christ must be reintroduced to the exposition of the gospel, since it is in his life that this basic principle is spelt out:

he is the embodiment of God's word;

so now to take God at his word centres on our attitude to Jesus.

God has proved his reliability by raising Jesus from the dead.

4:25 The reference to Jesus' resurrection raises two issues:

1) Why did he die?

His death was caused by our offences against the law: he died to avert the death-threat hanging over us because of our sins, and to cleanse us from the defilement of those sins.

2) Why was he raised?

His resurrection was proper because his death had secured our admission to God's favour.

5:1-2a The words *justified by faith* sum up the whole of 1:18-4:25:

it is because of Jesus' life of faithful trust and obedience that we are admitted to God's favour.

Paul now mentions two consequences of justification by faith:

1) peace with God

the end of the conflict described in 1:18-3:20:

the entire reversal of the human position in relation to God.

2) access into grace

God is the God of grace, and through Jesus Christ we have personal access to him:

Which means that we are in a place of stability.

5:2b-11 On that foundation, three things bring us joy:

1) the hope of the glory of God (v. 2)

God will pronounce us accepted.

2) tribulations (vv. 3-4)

because by a chain reaction, tribulation leads to hope.

In vv. 5-10 there is a digression to emphasise the important fact that this hope really is certain: it will not leave us finally disappointed.

The evidence is God's love enacted in the substitutionary death of Christ.

In human life it is rare for one person to risk his life, even for the best of men.

But Christ's death was not for the righteous, but for those who are weak (v. 6), ungodly (v. 6) sinners (v. 8), God's enemies (v. 10).

By that death, we are reconciled: we have become God's friends.

3) God himself (v. 11)

Real, lasting, permanent joy is found only in God.

5:12-19 This passage divides into three sections:

I. vv. 12-14a: the apostle starts to make a comparison between Adam and Christ, but then breaks off to deal with an issue that arises.

II. vv. 14b-17: Paul returns to the comparison, but immediately acknowledges, and develops the point that the differences between them are more significant.

III. vv. 18-19: Paul spells out the single point of comparison.

So far Paul has been stressing God's open-hearted generosity: he does not restrict his grace to a select few; although for the Jew first, salvation is equally for the Gentile.

In this passage the apostle underscores the truth that the achievement of Christ is as extensive as the disaster of Adam.

The key words are *one* and *all*:

through *one* man (Adam) life was ruined for *all* people, both Jews and Gentiles;

but Adam is a type (v. 14):

through *one* man (Jesus Christ) everything was restored for *all* people, Jew and Gentile alike.

I. vv. 12-14a

Sin entered the world through the one man Adam, and sin's consequence, death, came with it. However, sin and death were not limited to this one man, but spread to all people.

At this point Paul breaks off the comparison. He recalls that it is the function of the law to define sin (3:20; 4:15). Yet the law was not given until the time of Moses. Nevertheless, sin was obviously in the world prior to the giving of the law, because people died in that period. However, it cannot be calculated in the absence of the law. It was nonetheless real, because even then death controlled the world.

II. vv. 14b-17

Paul now returns to the comparison, and yet has to acknowledge that the effects of the work of Christ are incomparable to the effects of the sin of Adam.

Adam's *offence* is mirrored by Christ's *free gift*.

However, the incomparable nature of the two things is stressed by the words *much more*, and in vv. 15-17 Paul breaks up the symmetry:

v. 15

- i) *One man's offence* is balanced not by 'one man's obedience,' but by two things: *God's grace* and *the gift* which came *by that grace*. So the answer to human sin is actually found in God, and whereas sin is merely committed, grace comes in the form of a gift.
- ii) *Many died* is balanced not by 'many lived,' but by *the gift...abounded to many*. So whereas Adam's sin resulted in a world of dead people, Christ's response not only restored them to life, but also gave grace to them in abundance.

v. 16

- i) *From one offence* is balanced not by 'from one act of obedience' but by *after many offences*. This emphasises the stupendous nature of God's grace.
- ii) The rest of this verse is more neatly balanced, but notice the contrast in effects: *condemnation* is paralleled by *justification*; a terrible plight is overthrown by a tremendous blessing.

v. 17

By the one man's offence death reigned is balanced not by 'by one man's obedience life reigns', but by the remarkable statement that those who receive the grace and righteousness themselves reign in life: in Adam we are controlled by death, in Christ we are restored to self-control as the fruit of the Spirit.

III. vv. 18-19

Paul finishes by rebuilding the symmetry of the typology, content that we shall now recognise that the symmetry applies only in one point of comparison

Note the neat parallels:

v. 18

one man	-	one man
an offence	-	a righteous act
all men	-	all men
condemnation	-	justification of life

v. 19

one man	-	one man
disobedience	-	obedience
many	-	many
constituted sinners	-	constituted righteous

5:20-21 Here are two themes which sum up vv. 12-19:

1) Sin abounded

- as a result of the giving of the law: this was indeed God's purpose in giving the law

2) Grace abounded much, much more

- at the cross

6:1 From the truth of grace abounding against the background of sin, this question arises: should we not therefore continue sinning to provoke an even greater abundance of grace?

However, the question overlooks the tense of *abounded* in 5:20, which implies that the abounding of grace was something that happened once and for all: grace abounded at the cross; for us to try to make it carry on abounding is to fail to understand what God has done for us in Christ.

6:2 Having quickly dismissed the notion implicit in the question of 6:1, Paul begins to demonstrate why that notion is so ridiculous.

In v. 2 we have a summary:

1. We died to sin.
2. Therefore we cannot live in sin any longer.

6:3-10 Here Paul elaborates on those two points.

1) We died to sin

This death took place in our baptism (vv. 3-4a).

But our baptism took us back to Calvary: when Jesus dies, all his people were united to him (vv. 5,6,8).

What died was *our old man, the body of sin* (v. 6) – i.e. humanity in its sinfulness, in which we all individually participate.

The truth that we died to sin leads on to something else: we share also in Christ's resurrection (v. 4).

To participate in his resurrection life now anticipates our own final resurrection (vv. 5,8).

2) We cannot live in sin any longer

This is the ethical challenge which arises from the spiritual reality:

- we are *no longer sin's slaves* (v. 6);
- we are *freed from sin* (v. 7);
- we have *new life* (v. 4).

The spiritual reality is that we are *dead to sin*.

A dead person is absolutely unresponsive: we have lost our appetite for sin.

But we are also raised in Christ to newness of life – and in that we must *walk* (v. 4): we start to live the life of eternity here and now.

We are no longer slaves of sin. A slave was totally at his master's disposal.

But a master no longer issues orders to a slave who has died.

Just as Jesus' death was unrepeatable (v. 10) and his resurrection irreversible (v. 9), so our break with sin is a once-for-all event: there is no going back.

6:11-14 These verses face the issue, how do we actually live in freedom from sin in practice? The answer comes in three stages:

1) Understand the gospel

The word *reckon* (v. 11) means think, understand, get the picture firmly embedded in your mind:

when you were baptised you ceased to exist in God's eyes as a sinner, and became a new person in Christ.

2) Put the gospel into practice

Since we have been united with Christ, then we must live as he did: he never sinned, so we must stop sinning.

Paul deals with this in two ways:

i) the general situation (v. 12)

We are no longer to allow sin to be king of our lives.

ii) the specific practicalities (v. 13)

We achieve this by breaking things down into small parts: each member must be considered: we must not enlist any part of ourselves in sin's service, but sign each part up for God's work.

3) Take note of the promise

This is vital, because sin's tug is still so powerful: is it really possible to make the break?

In v. 14 we have the promise, *sin is not going to be your lord any more*: Jesus is Lord, and he will see to it that you do "become what you are becoming."

The reason is that we *are not under law but under grace*. The law is no longer standing over us to condemn us (as in 3:20; 4:15; 5:13,20). Grace now defines our existence – and grace refuses to leave us where it found us (cf. Deut. 31:10-13).

6:15 The question of v. 1 is repeated, because a misunderstanding of v. 14 could result in it being raised again:

if we are not under law, does that mean that we need make no effort to obey the law?

Not at all!

6:16 The reason is that such an attitude turns you into sin's slave, and that leads to death.

However, there is an alternative slavery – to obedience – and that leads to righteousness: to be admitted to God's favour is truly to live.

6:17-18 The apostle concedes that the Roman Christians have been changed from slaves of sin to slaves of righteousness: they have been set free.

6:19 The slavery to lawlessness simply leads to more lawlessness:

- it goes nowhere.

The slavery to righteousness aims at holiness

- it is life with a goal.

So the challenge is:

devote every part of yourself to this aim.

6:20-22 Paul contrasts the alternative slave masters:

1) **sin** (vv. 20-21)

- i. fruitless
- ii. shameful
- iii. deadly

2) **God** (v. 22)

- i. fruitful
- ii. holy
- iii. life-giving

This makes clear the flaw in the logic of v. 15: sin is simply not the road that leads to life.

6:23 Sin mocks its slaves by killing them.

God, the better master, gives life in Christ (life forever on the basis of Christ's life).

7:1-4 These verses form a summary of chapter 6.

v. 1 echoes 6:14: – the law (in its condemning role) is relevant only as long as someone is alive.

vv. 2-3 illustrate the point, taking the law against bigamy as an example.

v. 4 applies the point:

there has been a death – that of Christ – which is also our death to the law (in its condemning role); consequently, we have been remarried – to Christ in the experience of his risen life.

7:5-6 Notice the contrast between *when* (v. 5) and *but now* (v. 6).

v. 5 sums up life before conversion as *in the flesh*.

In Romans the basic meaning of the word *flesh* has to do with things of the present created order.

However, it has a developed sense in the way of life which gives the things of the present created order ultimate significance.

In that condition, the law incensed our antagonism to God and made us want to sin.

NOTE: Paul will elaborate on this from v. 7.

v. 6 teaches that as Christians we are released from the law in that sin-arousing capacity, so that we now delight to obey the law in the power of the Spirit.

7:7 The statement of v. 5 raises another question:

if the law actually stimulates sin, is the law itself a sinful thing?

Not at all, says the apostle.

The explanation begins by saying that the problem is not with the law but with *I*: I am sinful, but I needed the law to show me.

NOTE: there are four main suggestions as to the identity of the *I* in vv. 7-25:

1. the unconverted person.
2. the unconverted person at first, and then the converted person struggling with sin.
3. the 'carnal' Christian.
4. The Jews as God's people and the impact on them of the giving of the law.

In my view the fourth answer is best: Paul speaks as the typical Jew, who knows and loves the law, and yet finds it impossible to achieve.

However, there is a wider application to any unconverted person before and after coming under conviction of sin as a result of being confronted by God's law.

Why does Paul cite the tenth commandment particularly?

Covetousness is the epitome of law-breaking, because it is the craving for the things of the present created order, and is therefore idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

The law shows that to live for the things of this world as if they are ultimate is rebellion against God, and therefore sin.

7:8-14 The apostle now hammers this point home.

There are four 'hammer blows':

1. v. 8

The Jew (the unbeliever) had no understanding of himself as a sinner until the law provided a launching pad: in response to the law, the rebellious attitude rose up, so that the concept of 'sin' began to make sense.

2. v. 9

The Jew (the unbeliever) was alive, with no concept of sin, until the law alerted him to the fact that he was actually living in rebellion against God.

3. vv. 10-11

Though the law defines true life, it actually brought death, by showing the Jews (unbelievers) where they really stood before God.

But sin is deceptive: it tries to make the sinner think that he can use the law as a ladder to climb to heaven.

4. vv. 12-14

These verses pick up the question of v. 7. Here is the answer: there is nothing wrong with the law.

Four terms express that: *holy, just, good* (v. 12), *spiritual* (v. 14).

So it is not the law which is responsible for the death of my self-confidence: sin, through the law, killed my idea that my life was something other than idolatry.

God's purpose in giving the law is described in two phrases in v. 13:

- *that sin might appear sin*

The law brought sin out into the open as a meaningful concept.

- *that sin might become exceedingly sinful*

To live for this present world is deep-seated rebellion against God.

At the end of v. 14, Paul sums up: the unbeliever is *fleshly*, totally taken up with material things.

Because of the law, he can now see that this means that he is totally possessed by sin.

7:15 At this point there is a change. The law is now doing its work. The Jew (the unbeliever) has become a puzzle to himself.

7:16 This confirms that the Jew (the unbeliever) recognises the rightness of the moral demands which God makes.

7:17 The word *now* signals a significant moment:

here is the beginning of the desire for redirected ambitions, but still the powerlessness to achieve through merely having received the law.

7:18-20 These verses hammer this fact home, as they lead up to a repetition in v. 20 of the statement of v. 17. Two points are made:

1) There is nothing good in me (v. 18a)

2) The evidence that there is nothing good in me:

I am unable to put into practice my new desires resulting from my confrontation with the law (vv. 18b-19).

7:21 Here is a description of the Jew after Sinai (the unbeliever coming under conviction of sin through the law):

there is the will to do good, and yet evil is present.

The phrase *I find then this law* is a compressed way of saying, 'this, then, is how I find the law to operate.'

It informs the will but does not enable the doing.

7:22-23 These verses elaborate on that last point:

The law has stimulated better desires (v. 22).

However, there is another side to God's law: it proves to be beyond my capacity to obey, and stimulates my sinfulness (v. 23).

Previously the Jew (the unbeliever) needed the law to show him that he was a sinner at all; now he needs the law to show him just how sinful he is: to obey is outside the realm of possibilities.

7:24 At this point the Jew under the impact of Sinai (the unbeliever under conviction of sin) is close to despair. He cries out for deliverance.

7:25 The first part of this verse answers that cry.

The second part goes back behind the answer to summarise vv. 15-23.

8:1 Now Paul begins to take up the thought of 7:25a.

For those *in Christ* (cf. 6:11, 23) there is *no condemnation*. We are totally identified with him: he is sinless, and in him we share in a standing before God of total acceptance.

The result is that our ambitions are redirected Godwards, because God's Spirit has taken over our lives.

8:2 We are now given an explanation of how it is that *we walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*.

At this point Paul reintroduces the law.

We have been set *free from the law of sin and death* (from the law as a standard that is simply out of reach).

It is *the law of the Spirit of life* which has set us free: God's law given new power by the Holy Spirit.

We are set free from the law by the law, from the law as it meets our inability by the law filled with transforming power by the Spirit.

In the power of the Spirit the law becomes the instrument of our sanctification.

But this can only be true *in Christ Jesus*.

8:3-4 These verses continue the theme of living the Christian life, but first reassert the indispensable starting-point.

We need to look more closely at three phrases:

1. *in the likeness of sinful flesh* (v. 3)

This emphasises that the human nature which the Son of God assumed was authentic human nature – as Adam's before the fall.

2. *on account of sin* (v. 3)

The reason why the Son of God came was all to do with the presence of sin in the world.

3. *the righteous requirement of the law* (v. 4)

This sums up the demand of the law which must be put into practice in Christian living.

8:5-8 These verses continue the theme which has dominated since 7:5:

There are two contrasting possibilities for our life-ambition, here couched in terms of *mindset*.

There are basically only two ways of thinking:

- *according to the flesh*

all our ambitions are tied up with this creation.

- *according to the Spirit*

our ambition is to serve God.

As v. 5 makes clear, how we think and how we live are totally intertwined.

The purpose of vv. 6-8 is to demonstrate why the mindset of the Spirit is right. There are two reasons:

1) The contrast in the tendency and outcome of each mindset (v. 6)

The mindset of the flesh leads to death.

The mindset of the Spirit leads to life and peace.

2) The unattractiveness of the mindset of the flesh

The apostle makes three comments, but they really all amount to one thing: the person whose mindset is of the flesh

- is God's enemy (v. 7)
- rejects God's law (v. 7)
- is unable to please God (v. 8)

8:9 Here Paul notes two things:

1) The church lives in the Spirit

The pronoun *you* is plural on both occasions: this refers to the church as a corporate body.

2) The individual needs the Spirit to belong to Christ and his church

Being a true Christian is not a matter of outward involvement with the church, but of having the Spirit.

8:10-11 These verses caution against a possible misunderstanding of the emphasis on life in vv. 2 and 6.

The possession of this life does not mean that Christians are exempt from the mortality which sin has brought upon us. However, the presence of the Spirit of Christ gives us real inner life, and this is the pledge of our final resurrection.

8:12-13 Paul has explained the gospel as admission to God's favour entirely by his grace as brought to us by the faith of Jesus Christ.

However, once we have embraced this gospel we are placed under obligation.

Our obligation is summed up as *putting to death the deeds of the body*. This involves immediately checking ourselves whenever the urge to live for the things of this creation takes hold of us.

8:14-15 The apostle now moves from obligation to privilege: we are sons of God by adoption. Paul explains adoption in two respects:

1) What adoption is contrasted with

It contrasts with the old life which was characterised by *bondage to fear*: adoption implies freedom and peace.

2) What adoption means in practice

It means that we cry out to God from our desperate hearts as *Abba, Father*: to be able to do this signifies that we have been placed into the same position as Jesus himself (cf. Mk. 14:36).

8:16-17 Here we have the Father's answer to our cry: when in our desperate need we turn our hearts towards him, he tells us conclusively by the Spirit that, notwithstanding the sins that make us feel hopeless, in spite of the sufferings that highlight our weakness, we are nonetheless his children and heirs.

Our inheritance is summed up in the word *glorified*. Finally, we shall hear God express his good opinion of us.

However, for the present we must endure the cost of following Christ in a godless world.

8:18-25 This passage develops the theme of glory after suffering. We shall approach it from two angles:

1) The glorious hope for believers

Three themes stand out:

i. Our eager wait

We were saved *in hope* (vv. 24-25): for the present, our salvation is always unfinished.

The verb *eagerly wait* (vv. 23,25) reminds us that though we long for the future, it is out of our reach just yet.

ii. What we are eagerly waiting for

Paul builds up a picture in four stages:

1. *the glory which shall be revealed in us* (v. 18)

We look forward to the display of the fact that God has a good opinion of us because of the faith of Jesus Christ.

2. *the revealing of the sons of God* (v. 19)

God's declaration of his good opinion of his people will be his way of identifying his family, with the entire created universe as the audience.

3. *glorious liberty* (v. 21)

When God finally declares his good opinion of his people it will be like a weight off our minds.

4. *adoption* (v. 22)

We shall be totally renovated and made like Christ perfectly. This will ratify the status as adopted sons which we already enjoy.

iii. Why we wait so eagerly

Paul gives two reasons:

1. *because of what life is like now*

Life is full of *groans* (v. 23): we feel hemmed in by difficulties.

In v. 18 Paul speaks of *the sufferings of this present time*. Elsewhere in the New Testament the word for *sufferings* used here denotes persecution, sin, afflictions, the work of the devil, and death.

2. *because something better is on the way*

The future glory is so much better than the present sufferings that there is no comparison (v. 18). Two words emphasise this point:

1) *consider*

This has to do with accounting: having added up the debit value of suffering, it is impossible to calculate the credit value of glory.

2) *worthy*

This has to do with weighing: sufferings have no weight at all in comparison to the glory to come.

2) The glorious hope for creation

The word *creation* occurs once in each of vv. 19-22. God's saving purpose includes the repair of the whole creation.

Creation needs to be repaired because it was *subjected to futility* (v. 20). The reference is to Gen. 3:17-19. However, God did this *in hope*, so that creation's present sufferings can be compared to labour pains (v. 22).

Two questions must be asked:

i. What is the futility?

There are two aspects:

1. *Creation is unable to fulfil its proper purpose*

The Bible gives three reasons why God created everything:

1) *to be a suitable home for the human race* (Isa. 45:18)

2) *to bring him glory* (Rom. 1:20)

3) *as a present for his Son* (Col. 1:16)

In all three respects God's purpose has been frustrated.

2. *Creation is being given a role for which it was not designed*

The emphasis in Romans on the flesh and covetousness (cf. 1:25) reminds us that when people treat created things as their ultimate goal, everything goes wrong.

ii. What will creation be like once it is repaired?

It will be *delivered from the bondage of corruption* (v. 21). Death and decay will be removed.

8:26-27 In the context of our present sufferings, our ignorance comes to light, particularly in the area of prayer.

We do not know what to pray.
We do not know the right way to pray.

But we have help – from the Holy Spirit: he prays directly to God from deep inside our hearts.

8:28 Although our ignorance comes to the fore in the realm of prayer, we are not totally ignorant.

We do know that everything that happens does us good if we love God because he has called us to faith in Christ (cf. Gen. 45:5; 50:20).

8:29-30 Here is the reason why all things promote our good:

God foreknew us: he planned everything in advance out of his love for us.
And that everlasting love set in motion a chain of events:

- we were *called* – the Spirit helped us to understand and believe the gospel.
- we were *justified* – we were admitted to the divine favour.
- we were *glorified* – this involves conformity to God's Son (v. 29), a process which is already underway.

8:31 The present time is one of suffering, but the future glory is beyond comparison.

In view of this we can confidently ask:

If God is on our side, who can possibly oppose us successfully?

8:32-39 The rest of this chapter answers the question.

1. It demonstrates how we may be sure that God is for us.
2. It considers things which might be against us and shows how they cannot defeat us.

1) How do we know that God is for us?

Three answers are given:

1. He delivered up his own Son for us (v. 32)

God did not spare his priceless treasure, but gave him up as the substitute who died instead of sinners.

2. He justifies us (v. 33)

God admits us to his favour by wrapping the righteousness of Jesus around us so that he views us as being as perfect as Jesus, and draws us near to himself.

3. Christ makes intercession for us (v. 34)

Although Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension are also mentioned, the emphasis is on the intercession: the very same Saviour who died, rose, and ascended is the one who intercedes. He still cares for us in heaven, and the Father gladly receives his intercession.

2) Who might be against us?

Paul mentions two main things:

1. *There might be condemning charges against us* (v.v. 33,34)

They might come from other people, from Satan, or from our own heart. There might seem to be validity in our being charged with guilt. But since God has already declared us 'not guilty' because of Jesus Christ's faithful life and death on our behalf, no charges against us can stand.

2. *The circumstances that affect us might conspire against us* (vv. 35-39)

Circumstances might separate us from God's love in Christ (vv. 35,39). Paul looks at two groups of things:

i) life's problems (vv. 35-36)

Problems take different forms for different people. But we super-conquer (v. 37), because we are united to Christ, the victor.

ii) life's normal experiences (vv. 38-39)

In any situation, God's love is there, and the believer is safe.

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 9-11

If God's people are inseparable from his love (8:35-39), if God is faithful to his commitment to his people (1:16; 3:1-4), why does Israel – the ancient people of God – appear to be rejected now?

These chapters bring us to the very heart of Paul's concern as he expounds the gospel. They are the heart of the epistle. Because if God's commitment to Israel has proved unreliable, what confidence can any of us have that the principles of the gospel expounded in Romans will hold true for us?

9:1-3 Paul expresses his intense sadness because most of the Jews of his generation have not believed in Jesus as the Messiah. He is sad because he too is a Jew, and he would willingly forfeit his own salvation if it would mean that his fellow Jews would be saved.

9:4-5 The situation is especially sad because of the privileges the Jews have enjoyed. Paul lists nine privileges:

1) The title 'Israelite'

The Jews truly are God's chosen people, to whom the LORD made his unbreakable commitment.

2) The adoption

The Jews are the LORD's firstborn (Ex. 4:22), adopted into the status of primary heir.

3) The glory

It was Israel's privilege to witness the LORD's awesome glory. Despite seeing his glory, the people remained alive – evidence of their favoured position.

4) The covenants

In the covenant with Abraham, the covenant at Sinai, and in the new covenant, the LORD committed himself to Israel as a people.

5) The giving of the law

The law was one of Israel's greatest treasures.

6) The service

This probably refers to the services of sacrifice at the tabernacle and temple by which Israel's fellowship with God was sustained.

7) The promises

God promised Israel land (Ac. 7:17), a Saviour from their seed (Ac. 13:23), the multiplication of the seed and blessing (Heb. 6:13-15), and the hope of resurrection (Ac. 26:6).

8) The fathers

Elsewhere in the New Testament this may refer to:

1. Abraham in particular.
2. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob specifically.
3. The twelve sons of Jacob as the ancestors of the twelve tribes.
4. The Exodus generation.
5. The next generation after the Exodus generation.

6. The generations alive in the days of the prophets.

As the *God of your fathers* the LORD stresses his unfailing covenant faithfulness.

9) The Christ

The Jews' supreme privilege was that the Saviour of the world is a Jew.

Christ is described in three ways:

i. *over all*

He was first in time and first in priority.

ii. *God*

This is one of the clearest statements in Scripture of the full and absolute deity of our Lord.

iii. *blessed forever*

The repetition of words from 1:25 identifies Christ with the Creator God.

The Old Testament makes clear that the God who is forever blessed is the God of Israel (cf. 1 Chr. 29:10; Pss. 41:13; 72:18-19; 106:48).

How tragic, then, that Israel failed to recognise their own God when he came to them in Christ.

But what does that say for the faithfulness of God?

That is the puzzle which the rest of chapters 9-11 unravels.

9:6-29 The apostle begins by addressing three questions, and in each case he answers by quoting Old Testament Scriptures:

1) **Has God's word become unreliable?** (vv. 6-13)

In v. 6 Paul says, 'not so'.

He uses four Scriptures, all of which point to a different aspect of the particularity of God's dealings with the Jewish people – and with the Jews as exemplifying his dealings with all people.

1. *a particular calling* (vv. 6-7)

The Scripture used here is Gen. 21:12. The point is that just being an ethnic Israelite does not make a Jew an Israelite in truth (the true Israelite is defined in 2:28: it is matter of the heart and the Spirit).

2. *a particular sonship* (vv. 8-9)

The Scripture used here is Gen. 18:14. The point is that just being Abraham's descendants does not make a Jew one of God's children.

3. *a particular election* (vv. 10-12)

The Scripture used here is Gen. 25:23. The point is that God's election is sometimes surprising. Just because two people are indistinguishable humanly speaking does not mean that they are equally the objects of God's choice.

4. a particular love.(v. 13)

The Scripture used here is [Mal. 1:2-3](#). The point is that not all the Jews are the objects of God's love as now focussed in the cross of Jesus Christ (5:8) and revealed to the heart by the Spirit (5:5).

2) Has God's way become unrighteous? (vv. 14-18)

This question (v. 14) inevitably arises: there is something about us that makes us want to protest at the particularity of God's dealings with people.

Paul refutes the charge by reference to two Old Testament Scriptures.

1. God's nature is essentially mercy (vv. 15-16)

The Scripture used here is [Ex. 33:19](#). The point is that the whole atmosphere of the gospel is mercy. Mercy means two things:

- i. *God withholds the judgement people deserve.*
- ii. *God gives people the blessings which they do not deserve.*

To challenge God's righteousness, to ask him for strict fairness, is in effect to request judgement.

2. God's purpose is the universal extension of his mercy (vv. 17-18)

The Scripture used here is [Ex. 9:16](#). The point here is that whenever some are hardened (whether Pharaoh in Moses' day or Israel in Paul's day), it is so that all nations may receive God's mercy.

3) Has God's will become unreasonable? (vv. 19-29)

If one of God's strategies for vastly enlarging the scope of his mercy is to harden some, is it not unreasonable for him to punish those who are hardened? That is the question in v. 19.

Before the apostle answers he makes two preliminary comments:

- i. who on earth do we think we are? (vv. 20-21)
- ii. look how patient God is, even with the objects of his wrath (v. 22)

In answering the main question Paul continues to use Old Testament Scripture. This time he uses four texts in two pairs.

1. God's ultimate purpose is gloriously to extend his mercy (vv. 23-26)

- and there is nothing unreasonable about that!

The pair of Scriptures used here are [Hos. 2:23](#) and [Hos. 1:10](#). In them Paul discerns a prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles. If Israel is bypassed, it is only so that far larger numbers of people benefit.

2. God cuts judgement short (vv. 27-29)

- and there is nothing unreasonable about that!

The pair of Scriptures used here are [Isa. 10:22-23](#) and [Isa. 1:9](#). In them Paul hears God saying that there is still hope for Israel, and that even unrestrained judgement would only be what we deserve.

Therefore, the particularity of calling, sonship, election, and love does not mean that very few will be saved.

The reverse is true: God's sovereign freedom is vital if heaven is to be populated at all.

But God's sovereign freedom is the sovereignty of mercy – mercy vast and glorious, mercy beyond our wildest dreams.

God's ultimate purpose is to save the vast majority of both Jews and Gentiles.

9:30-33 These verses are a summary of chapter 9.

In vv. 30-31 Paul mentions two surprising realities:

1. Gentiles are not typically concerned about striving to enter God's favour, and yet they grasped admission to that favour on the basis of the faith of Jesus Christ.
2. Jews do aim at obtaining God's favour and have a head start in that they have the law, and yet they failed to reach what they intended.

In v. 32 Paul asks *why*?

Paul only explains the second surprise:

Israel's mistake was to give her own attempts to keep the law the fundamental position which rightly belongs to Jesus' success in keeping the law. The evidence of this error is their rejection of Christ.

In v. 33 Paul combines two Old Testament texts, [Isa. 28:16](#) and [Isa. 8:14](#) to draw attention to the Jews' failure to see how the law pointed to Christ.

However, the chapter ends on a gloriously positive note: for believers, Jew and Gentile alike there is a destiny of glory because of God's mercy.

10:1-13 This passage is an exposition of the last line of 9:33; at 10:13 the same point is made with a quotation from [Joel 2:32](#).

The point of the passage is to emphasise that Israel's rejection is not final: the door is still open for Jews to believe in Jesus as the Christ.

Israel needs to be *saved* (v. 1) because of their ignorance of the fact that God's favour stems from his grace and faithfulness and nothing else (vv. 2-3).

There are two aspects of this misunderstanding:

1. Israel imagined that they had to find for themselves an entry-point to the divine favour.
2. Israel failed to see that a freely bestowed favour can, by definition, be universal.

As a result, Israel did not accept God's favour as it truly is – directed to the world and not dependent on the law. Israel was therefore unable to take her place in a world situated within the divine favour.

This was the result of a further, deeper misunderstanding: Israel failed to see the law as leading to Christ. So their eyes were blinded to him when he came (v. 4).

In v. 5 Paul gives an explanation of v. 4. He uses Lev. 18:5 messianically: Christ is the only one who attained life by doing the things of the law.

In vv. 6-13 the apostle expounds the only route into God's favour available to sinners, whether Jews or Gentiles:

righteousness on the basis of the faith of Jesus Christ.

In vv. 6-8 Paul shows from [Deut. 30:12-13](#) that the entry to God's favour opened by Christ is available to all who come to him. It is accessible to all in the preaching of the gospel.

What it means to receive the gospel is defined in vv. 9-10. It means:

1. verbal confession of Jesus as Lord, which leads to salvation.
2. wholehearted acceptance of the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead, which opens the door to God's favour.

The main point is the simplicity of it, and vv. 11-12 stress that because the route into God's favour is so simple it is open to all, and there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

10:14-15 Paul now faces up to some obvious things:

1. The Jews cannot call on Christ if they do not believe on him.
2. They cannot believe on him if they have never heard of him.
3. They cannot hear of him unless someone preaches to them.
4. And no one can preach to them unless he is sent to them.

10:16-19 However, Israel's problem is not that they have not heard. The problem is their wilful refusal to believe.

10:20-21 The fact of Israel's disobedience is repeated in v. 21, but v. 20 indicates how blessing has come to the Gentiles as a result of Israel's unbelief – and so paves the way for what Paul wants to say next.

11:1a Paul now puts into words the question which has been in the background since the beginning of chapter 9: in view of Israel's rejection of Christ, might God have rejected them?

The question has far-reaching implications:

If God could change his mind about the Jews, what is to stop him changing his mind about Gentile believers?

This question controls the structure of the rest of chapter 11, which divides into four parts:

1) The answer as it relates to Israel's present (vv. 1-10)

Paul answers: God has *definitely not* cast his people away.

As evidence for this he points out that there are Jews who have become Christians, and uses himself as an example (v. 1).

Paul sees a parallel between his own times and the days of Elijah. Elijah felt that he was the only Jew till serving the LORD. But the LORD assured him that there was a *reserved* company – and it turned out to be far larger than Elijah had realised (vv. 2-4).

So in Paul's day there was a *remnant* chosen by grace, not works. And the remnant is always a larger group than we imagine (vv. 5-6).

In v. 7 Paul distinguishes between ethnic Israel as a whole and the *elect* within Israel. It is true that many Jews rejected Christ, but some did believe – and that is enough to prove that God has not totally thrown his people away, even though he has hardened *the rest* (vv. 8-10).

2) The answer as it relates to the future for both Jews and Gentiles (vv. 11-29)

In v. 11 the question of v. 1 is repeated and Paul again bluntly rejects the implication that Israel's fall is final and fatal.

He then elaborates on this by looking to the future in two senses: (1) the unfolding development through subsequent generations; (2) the ultimate future, the end times.

It will be clearest to treat this section thematically, structuring it around the parable of the two trees (vv. 16-24).

1. THE FIRST TREE

- representing Israel, the Jewish people.

They are *holy* (v. 16), *cultivated* (v. 24) by God. He nurtured *the root* (v. 16) – i.e. the patriarchs (vv. 26,28). The growth of the branches represents the emergence and growth of the twelve tribes. The result was *fatness* (v. 17; cf. Josh. 21:43-45).

2. THE SECOND TREE

- representing the Gentile peoples of the world.

They are *wild* (vv. 17,24), not nurtured by God's grace, unproductive.

3. BACK TO THE FIRST TREE

Israel's rejection of Christ is compared to branches being broken off (vv. 17,19). Paul sees this as the defining moment in Israel's recent history. He calls it

- *their fall* (vv. 11,12)
- *their failure* (v. 12)
- *their hardening* (v. 25)

The unbelieving branches were *not spared* (v. 21).

This represents God's *severity* (v.22), for he is at work in all this, *because of their unbelief* (v. 20).

However, the failure of the Jews is only *partial* (v. 25).

Nevertheless, the question arises:

Why would God harden a sizeable proportion of his own people?

The answer is in v. 28: it is for the good of the Gentiles that God left the Jews in partial unbelief. It is an element in his strategy of gloriously enlarging his mercy.

4. THE TWO TREES COMING TOGETHER

Branches of the wild olive tree are grafted in to the cultivated olive in place of those broken off (vv. 17,24), and so partake of its fatness (v. 17).

Salvation comes to the Gentiles (v. 11). Here we see God's *goodness* (v. 22).

As Paul surveys the indefinite future he sees as the outcome of Jewish unbelief:

- *riches for the world* (v. 12)
- *riches for the Gentiles* (v. 12)
- *the reconciliation of the world* (v. 15)

However, in all this God has a strategy: *to provoke Israel to jealousy* (v. 11).

Paul is therefore exceedingly pleased to be an apostle to the Gentiles:

1. because he longs to see the glory of the God of Israel recognised and enjoyed globally;
2. because he wants to be instrumental in provoking his fellow Jews to jealousy so that some of them will be saved (vv. 13-14).

However, he cannot rest content that ultimately only *some* Jews should be saved.

We look therefore to the ultimate future. At that time, three things will happen:

1) *The fullness of the Gentiles will come in* (v. 25)

A moment will come when the number of Gentiles who have become Christians will reach God's interim goal.

2) *All Israel will be saved* (v. 26)

There has already been a hint in the word *until* (v. 25) that Israel's partial hardening is only temporary.

What is the meaning of the phrase *all Israel*? The following suggestions have been made:

1. All God's elect, both Jew and Gentile.
2. All the elect Jews.
3. Every Jew who has ever lived.
4. The nation of Israel considered as a single whole.
5. My view: every single Jew alive anywhere in the world at the moment when the fullness of the Gentiles is brought in will turn to Christ.

Paul describes this as their regrafting into the first olive tree (vv. 23-24).

The basis for the end time conversion of Israel is the covenant (vv. 26-27): God never stopped loving the Jewish people (v. 28).

There has to be a conversion of Israel to Christ, because God's honour is at stake (v. 29).

3) *A greater ingathering of Gentiles*

There are just hints at this:

More riches for the world is to follow Israel's fullness (v. 12).

Israel's acceptance will lead to a greater outburst of life from the dead (v. 15).

In view of God's plan in history the apostle makes direct application to the Gentiles as to how they ought to live:

- *do not boast* (v. 18)
- *do not be haughty* (v. 20)

In vv. 21-22 Paul asserts that a lapse from faith would result in the removal of Gentiles: a part of genuine Christian faith is continuation in God's goodness.

3) A summary of the entire answer (vv. 30-32)

Paul sums up in four points in vv. 30-31:

1. The Gentiles were once disobedient (v. 30).
2. Israel has become disobedient (v. 31).
3. The Gentiles have obtained mercy as a result of Israel's disobedience (v. 30).
4. Israel shall obtain mercy as a result of the mercy shown to the Gentiles (v. 31).

The grand and glorious conclusion stated in v. 32 is that God's ultimate purpose is the universalisation of his mercy.

This may mean that every single person, both Jew and Gentile, alive at the time when the Lord returns will be converted.

4) The proper response to the answer (vv. 33-36)

We are humbled before such astonishing mercy. These verse teach three things about God:

1) His transcendent wisdom (v. 33)

The apostle uses four pictures to convey the grandeur of God's wisdom:

1. *It is too deep to get to the bottom of it:*

'Oh, the depth'.

2. *It is too abundant to calculate the size of it:*

'riches'

3. *It is too hidden to be sniffed out:*

'unsearchable'

4. *It is too vast to walk around:*

'past finding out'

2) His total independence (vv. 34-35)

These three rhetorical questions are making three statements:

1. *You cannot read God's thoughts:*

'who has known the mind of the LORD?'

2. *You cannot give God advice:*

'who has become his counsellor?'

3. *You cannot get God to owe you anything:*

'who has first given to him and it shall be repaid to him?'

3) *His absolute sovereignty*

Notice the three prepositions. Everything that exists is

- *of God*

He is the Creator.

- *through God*

He is the Sustainer and Ruler.

- *for God*

He is the Goal.

The only fitting conclusion is: *To him be glory forever.*

12:1-2 At this point the apostle presses an urgent word of exhortation:

present your bodies to God.

- place at God's disposal the whole of your life in every part as you live in this present world.

Paul compares living for God to presenting a sacrifice. He describes this sacrifice in four ways:

Living is a summary term: to present our bodies to God is the true expression of new life in Christ.

The next three terms define each other

A *holy* sacrifice is one which is *acceptable to God*, and what is thus acceptable is defined by *the word of God*.

But how shall we be able to do this?

There are two things to help us:

- 1) The first is indicated by the word *therefore*, which connects this command with all that has gone before: given what God in Christ has done for me, the only sensible response is to present my life to him.
- 2) The second is defined as *the mercies of God*. This phrase should probably be connected with what follows: in mercy, God by his Spirit comes to our aid.

To place ourselves at God's disposal involves *proving God's will* (finding out what it is and recognising that it is right – and so doing it with joy).

This means that we should

- 1) stop following the fashions of the world;
- 2) be different from the world.

The form of the verb *be transformed* indicates that this is a process already underway, and that it is God's work.

The power to be different is found in the renewed mind.

These two verses are like a heading to 12:3—15:13. The rest of the passage works out what it means in practice to present our bodies to God.

12:3-16 The same Greek root (*fronew*) appears seven times in v. 3 (four times) and v. 16 (three times). It has to do with *attitude*.

v. 3: do not develop an exalted attitude to yourself beyond what is proper, but keep your attitude to yourself within safe limits.

v. 16: have the same attitude to yourself as to everyone else, not always having the attitude that you deserve better than you are getting because you have an inflated attitude to yourself.

If we have this safe attitude to ourselves, two things happen:

1) *we recognise that we are all members of the same body with different functions* (vv. 4-8)

2) *we love every other church member in a genuine way* (vv. 9-15).

12:17-21 We are not to retaliate – but why not?

1) To retaliate robs us of the opportunity to put beauty on display (v. 17)

The word *good* suggests beautiful.

2) To retaliate would be to contribute to the fracturing of harmony (v. 18)

Whenever possible, believers are to be preservers of peace.

3) To retaliate is to usurp God's authority (v. 19)

God is responsible for justice.

4) To retaliate is to jettison our concern for the welfare of others (v. 20)

To fail to do good when another is in need is really an indirect form of retaliation: kindness will melt your enemy's heart and so win you a friend.

5) To retaliate is to admit defeat (v. 21)

It is to be overcome, instead of being an overcomer.

13:1-7 Christians should have a general attitude of respect towards the state authorities.

1) The reasons (v. 1)

All authority is delegated by God, and there are no exceptions to this rule.

2) The implications (v. 2)

There is no place for anarchic opposition to the government; even when we must *obey God rather than men* (Ac. 5:29), we must still retain respect for those in authority, otherwise they have the right to become our judges.

3) The problem

The principle spelt out in vv. 3-4 does not always seem to work out in practice: governments do sometimes terrorise innocent people.

Paul may be talking in idealistic terms.

He may mean that whatever the government does to the church, everything promotes the good of believers (cf. 8:28-29).

4) The motivation

We are to do good not only to avoid punishment, but also *for conscience' sake* (because it is the right thing to do before the Lord).

5) The practicalities

We are to pay our taxes in a spirit of honour.

13:8-10 Love is a debt which is always outstanding.

1) Whom should we love?

i. *One another* (v. 8)

- within the Christian church.

ii. *The other* (v. 8)

- the particular person in need whom we meet at any given time.

iii. *Your neighbour* (v. 9)

- anyone.

2) How should we love?

i. *The measure of love* (v. 9)

- *as yourself*: with the same instinctive urge to protect.

ii. *The meaning of love* (v. 10)

- *no harm*.

3) Why should we love?

- It leads to fulfilling the law

13:11-14 These verses explain why we should *do this*, linking this passage with the whole of chapters 12-13.

1) It is dark

The *night* (v. 12) is a picture of this world in its sin. Two things are true of the darkness:

i. *people sleep* (v. 11)

ii. *people are awake for mischief* (v. 13)

Three pairs of night time sins are mentioned:

- (i) drunken revelry
- (ii) licentious lewdness
- (iii) envious strife

2) Morning is coming

Dawn is breaking (v. 12), and *salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed* (v. 11).

3) We need to get up quickly

We must not be sleepy about discipleship (v. 11).

4) We need to get dressed

We must *put on Christ* (v. 14) as the *armour of light* (v. 12), ready for Christ's victory parade.

14:1-15:7 In the church at Rome there were differences of cultural background: some were Jews, some were Gentiles.

NOTE: The principles Paul outlines here apply to any issues which are *debatable* (14:1) and over which genuine Christians take different views.

Paul characterises the differences in outlook as

- *weak in the faith* (14:1)
 - people who held to a certain strictness about observing the Jewish ceremonial law.

They felt the need of railings to hem them in on the pathway of faith.
- *strong* (15:1).
 - people who were more liberated in their outlook.

Possibly there was a spectrum of attitudes, roughly classified by these two main types.

Paul mentions two particular issues, perhaps just as examples:

1. ***what a Christian should eat*** (14:2).

The *strong* would eat meat and enjoy it.

The *weak* had become vegetarians.

2. ***whether there are any special days*** (14:5).

The *strong* would give all days equal status.

The *weak* continued to observe the Jewish festivals.

The apostle makes two things clear:

1) He is talking about genuine Christians on both sides (14:6).

- i) they both recognise the Lordship of Christ.
- ii) they both *give thanks* from hearts transformed by grace.

2) His own sympathies are with the *strong* (15:1).

In 14:1-6 Paul gives separate instructions to each group, and then addresses both:

To the strong he says *receive* (v. 1) and *do not despise* (v. 3) the weak.

To the weak he says *do not judge* the strong (v. 3), and gives two reasons (v. 4):

1. You are not your fellow believer's Lord – Jesus is.

2. It is the Lord's interests which are at stake, not yours.

To both groups he says *let each be true to his own convictions* (v. 5).

The underlying foundation for this is that *God has received* us all (14:3).

In 14:7-12, Paul goes on to make three further points:

1) Recognise that all your fellow believers are aiming to please the Lord.

None of us is living for self (v. 7), and since all the Lord's people belong to him, no one else has the right to try to sort out the lives of others (v. 8).

2) Rejoice in the Lord's commitment to all his people.

Christ actually died to save his people: so he is not likely to turn against any of them (v. 9). So we dare not judge or despise other believers (v. 10).

3) Remember that we are all accountable to the Lord.

To judge one another is to try to knock God off his throne (vv. 10-12).

In 14:13, Paul rounds off the challenge so far with two commands:

1) There is a judgement we must avoid

We must not pass comment on other people.

2) There is a judgement we must make

We must make the judgement that we will not trip others up.

The passage from 14:14-20 begins and ends with the same statement:

No food is still to be regarded as unclean, but for those who still feel the need of railings, to do what they consider wrong is wrong for them.

The verses in between teach three main principles:

1) Walk in love (vv. 15-16)

Otherwise a believer's relationship to the fellowship will be *destroyed*, and what is good (the gospel) will be rejected.

2) Get your priorities right (vv. 17-18)

There are four evidences that God is king in a church: *righteousness, peace, joy, and the Holy Spirit*. If these are the qualities of service, then it is accepted.

3) Pursue peace (vv. 19-20)

We should be determined to live in harmony, and not let minor issues threaten the church with collapse.

From 14:21 to 15:4, Paul presses home his appeal to the strong: the onus is on them to accommodate to the weak.

They are not to parade their liberty when to do so would cause the weak to sin by becoming judgmental (14:21).

While they are in a happy position if they can do certain things with no feelings of guilt, they are to be sensitive to those who cannot (14:22-23).

We are not to please ourselves (15:1), but put others first (15:2), with Christ as our model (15:3).

For now we live in hope (15:4): we are not to expect everything in this world.

The final word on this subject is a reminder of the great goal of unity amongst God's children (15:5-6): we should *receive one another just as Christ has received us* all (15:7). A church where that is the defining feature truly exists *to the glory of God*.

15:8-13 The apostle now sums up what Romans (and the gospel) is all about. He makes two statements:

1) Jesus Christ became a servant of the Jews for the sake of God's faithfulness (v. 8)

The Son of God became a human being to give his life to re-gather the Jews to the Shepherd of Israel.

Jesus Christ is the guarantee that all the promises made to the patriarchs will be accomplished.

2) The Gentiles are glorifying God for his mercy (v. 9)

Gentile outsiders have been brought in by an act of sheer mercy: Christ died not for the Jews only, but for the whole world.

Paul demonstrates that it was to be expected that the Gentiles would be brought in from four carefully chosen Old Testament quotations (vv. 9-12). They are carefully chosen for four reasons:

1. Where they are from.

One quotation comes from each of the four divisions of the Hebrew Bible:

i) *The Former Prophets*

v. 9: 2 Sam. 22:30

ii) *The Law*

v. 10: Deut. 32:43.

iii) *The Writings*

v. 11: Ps. 117:1

iv) *The Latter Prophets*

v. 12: Isa. 11:10.

2. They build up a picture towards the total inclusion of Gentiles with Jews as the people of God.

i) The LORD's name is confessed *among* the Gentiles (v. 9)

ii) The Gentiles rejoice *with* Israel (v. 10).

iii) The Gentiles praise God *for* his mercy and truth towards the Jews (v. 11).

iv) There is hope for the Gentiles *themselves* in Christ (v. 12).

3. They speak of an increasing expansion.

i) The LORD's name is confessed *among* the Gentiles (v. 9).

- ii) There is an implicit invitation to all the Gentiles in the words, *O Gentiles* (v. 10).
- iii) That the invitation is to *all* the Gentiles is now made explicit (v. 11).
- iv) Finally, *the Gentiles* are considered as a whole, a single entity (v. 12).

4. They build up to a climax in the word hope

This takes up a major theme of Romans (cf. 5:2-5; 8:20-25; 12:12): in a hopeless world, Christians stand out as people of hope.

In v. 13 Paul recognises that only God by the Holy Spirit can be the source of abundant hope.

15:14-33 The main body of Romans is complete. Now Paul addresses the specific question why he wrote this letter at all (cf. 1:10-15).

- 1) What is not his reason for writing (v. 14)

He has not written because he has doubts about the Roman Christians. Three things give him confidence about them:

- i. Their practical Christian living.
- ii. Their grasp of Christian truth.
- iii. The effectiveness of their meetings.

- 2) What is his reason for writing (v. 15)

He has sought to *remind* the Romans of the truths of the gospel.

But the question still arises, why did Paul believe that he had the right to send such a detailed reminder to this particular church which he had never met? In answering, Paul indicates three vital principles:

1. His Vision for Gospel Expansion (vv. 15-24)

Paul is an apostle to the Gentiles – and the Gentile world includes Rome.

However, he recognises that he has no right to glory in what Christ has achieved through other servants – and this includes the existence of a church in Rome, but he is thrilled to have had a part in the achievement of the goal of Gentile obedience.

In v. 19 Paul defines the area where his ministry has been centred. He preached at Jerusalem soon after his conversion (Ac. 9:26-29). In Ac. 20:2 we read that he preached throughout Macedonia, which would have taken him to the border of Illyricum.



Paul's reason for concentrating on this area was his calling to be a pioneer – which explains why he has not yet been to Rome.

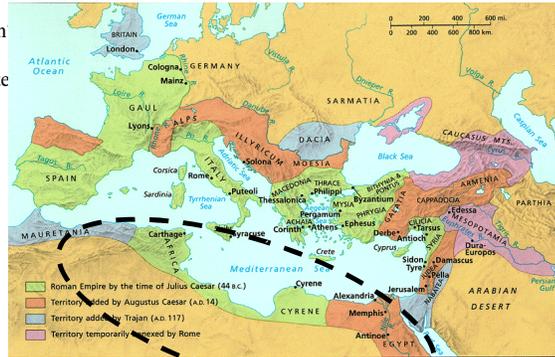
But now the work in that region is completed, and Paul is looking for new ground to pioneer with the gospel, and he sees it in Spain.

On the way he intends to visit Rome – for two reasons:

1. to enjoy fellowship with them;
2. to receive help from them: perhaps that Rome should become his new base.

Why Spain

To exte



Did Paul actually get to Spain?

Writing around AD 90, Clement of Rome says that Paul “reached the limits of the west”.

2. His Passion for Gospel Unity (vv. 25-29)

Before heading west, Paul has more pressing business, and must head off in the opposite direction.

He must take to the Jewish church in Jerusalem a collection made by the Gentile churches to support them during a time of economic hardship. The Gentiles owed it to the Jews because they had become sharers in the Jews' heritage of blessing.

Paul saw this as a vital part of his ministry as a *seal* of the unity of the church across the ethnic divide.

3. His Need for Gospel Intercession (vv. 30-32)

Before setting off for Jerusalem Paul enlists the prayer support of the Roman church so that he may come to Rome happy. He feels some anxiety on two counts:

- 1) *Jewish unbelievers may be lying in wait for him*
- 2) *Jewish believers may not welcome the Gentiles' gift*

In v. 33 Paul speaks of God's *peace*, which sums up all the blessings of that salvation which Romans has been about.

16:1-2 Paul commends Phoebe, a *deacon* at Cenchrea, near Corinth, and his *sponsor*, and possibly the carrier of this letter.

16:3-15 Four things stand out as we read this greetings list:

1) The membership of the Roman Church

Four potential dividing lines are bridged by the gospel:

1. *Jews and Gentiles*
2. *Slaves and free people*
3. *Male and female*
4. *Known and unknown people*

2) The organisation of the Roman Church

The church met in a number of congregations.

3) The characteristics of the Roman Church

1. *It was a loving church.*
2. *It was a labouring church.*

4) The heart of the Roman Church

It was *in Christ*.

16:16-24 In v. 16 Paul underlines the importance of local and global Christian unity and love. The greetings in vv. 21-24 are an expression of that wider fellowship.

However, such unity is under threat: Satan sows false teaching through people motivated by self-interest, whose words sound very plausible.

Nevertheless, Satan will be totally defeated by the *God of peace*; the church will share in the victory.

16:25-27 Paul concludes on a note of praise to God as the only one who possesses genuine wisdom.

His wisdom is his ability to fix his people steadfast in the truth. This ability accords with the gospel message about Jesus Christ, which proclaims the unity of Jew and Gentile as one humanity in Christ. This was always the theme of the Old Testament, but it now becomes clear in the light of Christ. God's aim was to extend submission to Christ as Lord to all the nations. God's saving grace is as wide as the world!

Research Papers

Answer one question (4000 words – 7000 for graduates):

1. Expound the teaching of the book of Romans on justification.
2. Explain and assess the various interpretations of the phrase 'the righteousness of God' in Romans.
3. What does Romans teach about the Holy Spirit?

4. "All Israel shall be saved". Explain and assess the various interpretations of this phrase. Why is it important?