

## **THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS**

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## INTRODUCING ROMANS: PAUL AND THE ROMAN CHURCH (15:14-16:27)

1. No NT book has had a greater impact on Christianity than Romans.
  - a. Augustine developed the doctrine of original sin from his reading of Roman 5:12-21 (his Latin version of 5:12 read “in whom all have sinned”).
  - b. Luther, tormented by the idea of finding a gracious God and producing enough works to please God, found liberation in the words, “the just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:17).
  - c. Wesley’s heart was “strangely warmed” when he listened to the reading of Luther’s commentary on Romans.
  - d. What role has Romans played in the Churches of Christ? In a previous generation, Romans’ focus on grace and faith was bothersome to many. In more recent times, people have welcomed this emphasis. *Teachers might take a few moments to ask the class about their own journey or past impressions of Romans.*
  
2. Just as we often discover the cutting edge of an article or book by reading the conclusion, we will discover that a good place to begin the reading of Romans is at the back (beginning at 15:14), where Paul describes his setting and relation to the Roman church.
  - a. Although interpreters have followed Luther in reading Romans as a generic statement of the Christian faith, the personal comments at the end indicate that Romans, like other letters, is addressed to a specific situation.
  - b. In Romans 15:14-15 Paul actually tells us what this letter is about: an account of his life’s work.
  - c. Chapter 16 offers insights into the Roman church.
  
3. While the body of the letter (1:18-15:13) is impersonal, 15:14-30 is highly personal.
  - a. Unlike the other letters, this letter is written to a church that Paul has neither founded nor visited (15:22).
  - b. According to 15:14-21, his message is associated with his life’s work as a minister to the Gentiles.
    - i. He describes himself as a priest (15:16) offering the Gentiles as a sacrifice to God.
    - ii. In preaching only where Christ has not been named (15:20), he fulfills the mission of the servant described in Isaiah 52:15 (Rom. 15:21).
    - iii. As the conclusion to Romans, this section suggests that the letter is primarily an explanation of the work of Paul’s life.
    - iv. Later readers, including Luther, have read the letter as a book about “how I get saved.” The letter is actually about how a Jewish movement became a Gentile church.
    - v. If we see the connection between the body of the letter and the conclusion, we see that Romans is about missions.
  - c. According to 15:22-33, the outcome of his life’s work is endangered.
    - i. Although he writes in anticipation of a visit, he is now going out of the way by way of Jerusalem, taking up the collection that represents the work of his life (15:25-29).

- (1) The collection, which is mentioned in 1 and 2 Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9), has been gathered over an extended period of time.
    - (2) The collection represents the solidarity of Jewish and Gentile churches.
  - ii. Rom. 15:24 also suggests that Romans is a missionary fundraising letter; Paul explains himself in the hope of getting support for a mission to Spain.
  - iii. According to 15:30-33, Paul asks for prayers because he does not know if the work of his life will be accepted—even by the Christians.
  - iv. This question—will there be a united church of Jews and Gentiles—is the context for our reading of Romans.
  - v. *Discussion: Why would Paul write such a heavy theological statement to support his mission efforts? Wasn't there a better way to build support?*
4. Chapter 16, with its greetings to 26 people and others associated with them, is remarkable in a letter to a church that Paul has never visited. It may also serve as a clue to what the letter is about.
- a. According to 16:1-2, Paul offers a commendation for Phoebe, who is apparently the letter carrier. That she is a deacon of the church in Cenchrea indicates that Paul writes from Corinth (probably to be related to his situation in Acts 20:2).
  - b. The greetings are extended to multiple house churches in Rome (cf. 16:5, 10, 11, 14, and 15). Like the Jewish synagogues in Rome, they would exist in different parts of the city. Holding them together would have been a challenge.
  - c. The list indicates the diversity of the Roman church.
    - i. Aquilla and Priscilla (16:3-5) are Jews who have returned from the expulsion by Claudius (cf. Acts 18:2). Indication of mobility and their good standing among Gentile churches. This may be strategic: to identify Jews who were well respected among Gentile churches.
    - ii. Jewish names: Mary (v. 5), Rufus (v. 13) and Julia (v. 15). Others could be Jewish names.
    - iii. Greek names: Narcissus, Andronicus
    - iv. Slave names: Nereus, Hermes, Persis, Herodion, Tryphosa, Tryphaena, Ampliatus, Staches, Urbanus.
    - v. Note the number of women: 9 out of 26. Junia is an apostle! Others have labored for the gospel: Maria in v. 6; Tryphena and Tryphosa in v. 12. (This information is taken from an article by Peter Lampe in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl Donfried).
  - d. The commendation of each one (i.e., “beloved,” etc.) suggests that Paul is attempting to address the diversity of the congregation and to raise the esteem of each one in an attempt to hold together a community composed of people from diverse backgrounds.
  - e. *Discuss the challenges of maintaining unity among people of such diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Distinguish between superficial and genuine unity.*

## WEEK TWO: INTRODUCING PAUL'S GOSPEL OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

1. Every effective speaker knows the critical importance of the beginning of a speech; it is even more critical in situations when the audience is not acquainted with the speaker, as in Romans (remember that letters are dictated and then read orally; hence they are speeches). (*One might ask the class what makes the most appropriate beginning for a speech; ancient teachers of rhetoric said that an introduction should introduce the topic and make the audience favorably disposed*).
  - a. Paul has a special challenge inasmuch as he will not deliver this speech in person, but depends on someone to deliver and read the communication.
  - b. Phoebe is apparently the deliverer of the letter (Rom. 16:1-2), which was written from Corinth.
2. As we noticed last week, Paul writes at a critical moment in his life when the work of his life is in question.
  - a. According to 15:22-30, he is on his way to Jerusalem to deliver the collection from Gentile churches, but does not know whether the Jewish churches will accept this sign of solidarity from Gentile churches.
  - b. According to chapter 16, the Roman church is sociologically and ethnically diverse, facing the same question that Paul faces everywhere: Can Jew and Gentile live in harmony in the church?
3. A comparison of 1:1-7 with the introduction to Paul's other letters indicates the challenge that Paul faces in writing to the Romans (in Greek vss. 1-7 are all one sentence). The situation requires that he expand on his usual introduction (author, recipient, greeting), explaining his credentials (v. 1), his message (vss. 2-4), and his mission (v. 5), indicating his relationship to the readers (vss. 6-7).
  - a. In v. 1, Paul sets out his credentials in an elaborate way, describing himself as not his own man but as a slave "set apart for the gospel" (1:1; cf. Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5) just as OT prophets were "called" and "set apart." His credentials are especially important for a church he did not establish.
  - b. In vss. 2-4, he summarizes the gospel, anticipating the message of the book (promised by the prophets [v. 2] concerning the son who came to earth and was raised [v. 3-4]). This message of the one who was "Son of God" according to fleshly descent and "Son of God" because of the resurrection should reassure the readers that he, in fact, preaches the gospel that everyone acknowledges.
  - c. In vss. 5-7 he creates a bond with them, indicating that his special call to the Gentiles includes the readers (note that Paul identifies the readers as Gentiles).
4. In verses 8-12 Paul creates a special bond with his readers that should make them attentive to his message.
  - a. Just as Paul normally begins his letters with a thanksgiving (which functions as a compliment), these verses are designed to make the readers favorably disposed, as Paul praises them and indicates his desire to see them.
  - b. Paul is very gentle in his approach in vss. 11-12, as he suggests that a future visit would result in reciprocal encouragement. That is, since he is not their founder, he is not presumptuous about his relationship with them.

5. Verses 13-17 tell us what the book is really about; these verses are all one thought unit
  - a. According to 1:13, Paul has wanted to reap *fruit* (NRSV “harvest”) among Romans as among other Gentiles in all of his travels (cf. 15:14-15)..
  - b. This is explained in v. 14 by figure of indebtedness. Hence the desire to *evangelize* (NRSV “proclaim the gospel”) in Rome (v. 15) as part of Paul’s calling.
  - c. Mention of *evangelize*, by which Paul reaps a fruit (or “harvest” v. 13), leads to description of *euangelion* (gospel) in v. 16. This leads to clarification of *euangelion* in 16-17, which is thesis of the book.
  - d. Note the movement from Paul’s personal involvement in the evangelization of Gentiles to the statement of his message, an indication that in Romans Paul is explaining himself and his work.
  - e. One may note the symmetry between 1:1-17 and 15:14-30 in providing Paul’s personal reflections about his life’s work.
  
6. After indicating that he has been commissioned to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (1:5, 13), Paul lays the foundation for his message about a multi-ethnic church by indicating his indebtedness to the “Greeks and barbarians” (1:14).
  - a. “Greeks and barbarians” reflects the way Greeks divided humanity: Greeks and everyone who could not speak Greek (for a similar division of humanity, cf. Col. 3:11).
  - b. This “indebtedness” is a key to what Romans is about: a community that transcends cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences.
  - c. Imagine how this is heard in the ethnically diverse community of Rome (as reflected in Romans 16. *Discussion: How do we hear the message? As something theoretical? How can we implement this kind of message of inclusion? Do you know examples of those who have done it well?*
  
7. While 1:14 divides humanity into “Greeks and barbarians,” 1:16 divides humanity into “Jews” and “Greeks”—the normal way of dividing humanity. In contrast to those who saw the gospel as good news for themselves or their group, Paul says that “it is the power of God for salvation for *everyone* who has faith. **1:16-17 is the thesis statement of Romans, the basis for the argument of the entire book.**
  - a. “Power” suggests the effect of the message in changing lives (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5-10).
  - b. The Greek *pas* (or *pantes*), translated “all” or “everyone,” is a constant focus of Romans for the inclusive nature of the gospel (cf. 3:9, 12, 22; 4:11, 16). This would have been a challenge to each group to recognize that gospel is also for “the other guys.”
  - c. “To everyone *who has faith*” indicates that both Gentiles and Jews are on the same “playing field”—that neither group has special privileges.
  - d. V. 17 (note “for”) supports v. 16. The “righteousness of God” (can be translated “justice of God) is revealed in the gospel; that is, Paul is catching up with what God is doing. Salvation is not about our efforts, but about the deeds of God.

- i. Jewish readers would know that the “righteousness of God” is a judicial metaphor for the judge to whom the poor and helpless could appeal to “do right.” Oppressed Israelites placed their hope in the righteousness/justice of God (cf. Ps. 118:40).
  - ii. Paul’s revolutionary step is to say that God’s righteousness extends not only to Israel, but to others. God is absolutely impartial. Hence Paul’s mission.
- e. Paul’s revolutionary statement confronts both sides in Rome and it confronts us today, asking if we are ready for what God is doing with the others who do not deserve mercy. We assume that we deserve mercy, but that the others have shown that they are not worthy. *Discussion: Can you imagine that Romans is speaking to us? Where does it confront our own feelings?*

### WEEK THREE: NO ONE IS RIGHTEOUS (Rom. 1:18-3:20)

1. The thesis statement of Romans in 1:16-17 declares that the good news is what God *has done* in the coming of Christ: God has revealed his *righteousness* (=justice); i.e., he has *justified* a people by faith. [*Dikaiosyne* =righteousness/justice; *dikaio* =justify]. Whereas traditional Jewish expectation longed for the time when God would vindicate (= “justify”) those who faithfully kept the law at the end and pour out his wrath on the ungodly, Paul declares that God has already demonstrated his righteousness with the coming of Christ.
2. Chapters 1-4 indicate what God *has done*; chapters 5-8 (and 9-11) will indicate *what god will do*.
3. In 1:18-3:20 Paul’s focus on what God *has done* is under the heading, “the wrath of God is being revealed” (1:18). Here he describes humanity that is bereft of the gospel.
  - a. Note the parallelism of 1:17, 18: the righteousness of God *is been revealed*; the wrath of God *is being revealed*. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans*, 30: With this antithesis Paul demonstrates the thesis by pointing to the opposite. “Thus, if I want to argue that ‘every good person is free,’ then by antithesis I will try to show that “every wicked person is enslaved.”
  - b. The wrath of God is a divine quality inherited from the Old Testament (Ps. 78:31; Isa. 13:13; 26:20; Isa. 51:7; Jer 6:11; 25:25; Hos. 13:11; Zeph. 1:15). It denotes “the divine reaction to human sin and evil, the justifiable reaction of a loving and faithful God to his disobedient people, prone to idolatry and evil conduct” (Fitzmyer, *Spiritual Exercises Based on Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, 33).
  - c. Note the progression from all humanity in 1:18-32 (presumably Gentiles) to those who know the law (ch. 2) to all humanity in 3:1-20).
  - d. Just as the righteousness of God is for *all* who believe (1:16), the focus here is again on *all* (cf. 3:4, 9, 12, 19); just as all are on the same playing field as recipients of God’s grace, all are on the same playing field under the power of sin.
  - e. *Relate this to the situation of Paul’s churches, where there is great resistance to putting everyone in the same category. Discuss our own resistance to what Paul has said. Is pride and self-seeking on the same level as the sins Paul mentions in Romans 1? Imagine how this is being heard in a tense situation where people have come from Jewish and Gentile background.*
  - f. *Discuss our perceptions of the concept of “wrath of God.” Is this a disturbing concept for those who prefer to talk about the love of God? How is God’s wrath related to God’s love?*
  - g. Note that Paul doesn’t focus precisely on “Gentile” and “Jew” (only in 2:17 does he use the word “Jew”); readers would infer this distinction.
  - h. Paul’s emphasis in 1:18-3:20 is not only universal sinfulness, but the fact that people sin although they *know better* (cf. 1:21, 32; 2:17-24); hence they are “without excuse” (1:20; 2:1).

4. The emphasis in 1:18-32 is that people (presumably Gentiles) do not use the knowledge they have.
  - a. The argument for natural revelation is intended to show that the Gentiles *know better* than their behavior indicates (1:19-23).
  - b. The sexual sins in 1:24-27 result from failure of humans to use the knowledge of God that they have.
  - c. This is the most extensive discussion of homosexuality in the NT and the only reference to female homosexuality.
  - d. Note the long list of sins in 1:29-31 as further indications that people do not use the knowledge they have.
  - e. Note the threefold “God handed them over” (1:24, 26, 28).
  - f. *Class discussion. Note how Paul’s discussion of homosexuality, etc. function in the argument. The primary topic is the effect of not knowing God; the sins are illustrations of Paul’s larger point.*
  
5. The effect of chapter 1 can be seen only when one reads chapter 2, which places those who know the law on the same level as the rest of humanity; they also are “without excuse” (2:1) and as much under God’s wrath as everyone else.
  - a. Note the reference to “Jew first and then the Greek” (2:9); i.e., God is impartial in his justice (2:11), and both stand under his wrath.
  - b. Verses 11-15 are often taken out of context. The point is that God is impartial, and that Jew and Greek will be judgment by the law (whatever law they know); *the assumption is that no one actually lives up to the law.*
  - c. In 2:17-29 argues that keeping the Jewish law is of no advantage because outward observe of the law (i.e., circumcision) is of no value without the inner transformation.
  
6. Some suggest that 3:1-8, with the rhetorical questions (diatribe), provides the outline for the rest of the book.
  - a. 3:1-5 seems to be answered in chs. 9-11.
  - b. 3:6-8 is answered in ch. 6.
  
7. In 3:9-20 Paul concludes the section with the claim that all are under sin. The result in 3:20 is that performance of works gives no advantage.
  
8. *Discussion: Note questions from Fitzmyer, 38. Does God’s wrath against my sinful conduct ever enter my thinking? Have I worshiped the creation rather than the creator? Do any of the catalogues of sins in 1:29-32 enter my life? Other questions for discussion. Has sin dropped out of the vocabulary to be replaced by therapeutic terminology? (Ex.: I attended a congregation where someone came forward and confessed to having “hang-ups.”) Or do we reserve the word sin only for the most outrageous behavior? What is implied in the language of “guilt trip?” What are the particular offenses of religious people?*

## THE REVELATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (3:21-5:11)

1. After describing in negative terms the condition of all humanity without the gospel, Paul restates the letter's thesis statement in 3:21 (compare 1:17 and 3:21).
2. Paul's restatement in 3:21-26 is probably the most compact statement of the gospel in all of his letters.
  - a. Once more we note that "righteousness (=justice) of God" is his act of redeeming those who call on him in the same way that the judge in the OT hears the cries of the oppressed. Equivalents to righteousness of God are "faithfulness of God" (3:3) and "love of God" (cf. 5:6-7).
  - b. Whereas others had claimed that God in his righteousness would vindicate those who keep the law, Paul says that the righteousness is for all those who have faith (3:22); note the focus on *all who have faith* (i.e., no one has prerogatives based on works of law).
  - c. Just as *all* are under sin (3:23), *all* receive God's righteousness.
  - d. Note the other words that amplify God's righteousness: gift and redemption (v. 24); sacrifice of atonement (v. 25).
    - i. "Redemption," the purchase of a slave, has associations with the exodus.
    - ii. "Sacrifice of atonement" (NIV) recalls the OT's description of the entry of the high priest into the tabernacle to take away sin (Lev. 16).
  - e. In the context of the setting, Paul is indicating that it is Christ's work, not our own, that brings us into his company. Hence the issue is not only how we were saved, but also how the "other" in our midst is also saved by the blood of Christ
3. A section 3:27-5:11 forms a "bookend" in Greek, using the term for "boast" (NIV "rejoice" in 5:2, 11), which is the same word as "boast" in 3:27; i.e., (human) boasting is excluded, but our "boast" is in Christ (5:11). The subunits explore this theme.
4. In 3:27-31, Paul introduces a major theme of the book: Since we are saved by the work of Christ, there is no place for arrogance or boasting.
  - a. We may assume that those who had been faithful to the law had acted arrogantly toward others.
  - b. According to 11:13-26, Gentiles now admitted to God's people are now arrogant over their status.
  - c. A constant theme is that one should not "think more highly of himself than he ought to think" (12:3; cf. 11:25).
  - d. *Discussion: What are the temptations to arrogance among Christians? Family heritage? Our capacity to maintain a high moral standard while others do not? Good reputation? Have you ever felt yourself tempted to spiritual pride when you compare yourself to others? Paul's doctrine of the righteousness of God undermines all arrogance.*

5. The story of Abraham in chapter 4 is the illustration of Paul's point in 3:27-31: Abraham had no reason to boast because he had no human achievements (or works). The entire chapter is a commentary based on Gen. 15:6: Abraham believed God and it was reckoned for righteousness. Paul expands on the words *believed*, *reckoned*, and *righteousness*. As you read through chapter 4, take special note of the focus on inclusiveness in Paul's use of *all* or *every*.
- a. Whenever Jews wanted to prove a point, they appealed to Abraham as the example. In many Jewish books, Abraham is considered the first Gentile proselyte; as such, he was circumcised as an example for other proselytes (cf. Gen. 17).
  - b. Paul's focuses on the word *reckon* in 4:1-8, contrasting it to wages earned, appealing to a subtext (Ps. 32:2), which (like the primary text, Gen 15:6), has the word *reckon*. God has cancelled a debt without any payment from the human side.
  - c. The focus of the entire presentation on Abraham is that he is the father of *all*, not only of the Jews (note the focus on *all* and *every* from previous weeks); that is, no group in the church has the rights to Abraham.
    - i. In 4:9-12, Paul appeals to the fact that circumcision was a *seal* of Abraham's righteousness as an indication that he was righteous before he became a Jew. Result: He is the father of *all who believe*, of the circumcised and uncircumcised (v. 12).
    - ii. In 4:13-17 Paul emphasizes that Abraham was not saved by law; hence the promise is firm to all his seed (v. 16) and he became the father of many nations (v. 17); that is, Abraham is not father of one ethnic group.
    - iii. In 4:18-22 Paul emphasizes Abraham's *faith*: he believed in God's promise when his belief made no sense at all.
    - iv. In 4:23-25 Paul indicates that the entire story speaks to the Roman situation. Note that Paul moves from 3d person to first person plural here, speaking for all Christians.
    - v. Discussion: How do we define faith? Compare our own definitions of faith with Abraham's faith. Note that Abraham's faith is not mere intellectual assent, but *trust*. *We might discuss the challenges to faith that we have, comparing our own challenges to Abraham's. What are the major challenges? How do we deal with the long periods of God's apparent absence?*
  - d. In 5:1-11 Paul continues the theme of boasting to say that we do not boast in our own works, but we "boast" in Christ. [Sometimes "boast" is a good word in the Bible; it has the connotation of "be proud of"]. He continues the first person plural here.
    - i. In 5:1-2, Paul summarizes the first four chapters with a reference to the past tense ("having been justified by faith), and turns to the present tense (we have peace, and we rejoice (literally "boast"). The NIV's "we rejoice" catches the idea well, but loses the verbal link to boasting in 3:27-4:2.

- ii. In 5:3-5, Paul continues the theme of rejoicing/boasting with his claim that we rejoice in sufferings because suffering turns us toward hope in the ultimate outcome. We believe in the future because of what God has done in the past.
- iii. In a beautiful statement, 5:6-8, reiterates what God has done in the past.
- iv. Paul summarizes the point in 5:9-11: Because we have been reconciled in the past, we “boast/rejoice in God” who ensures the future hope.
- v. *Discussion: The focus on boasting/exulting, rejoicing introduces an atmosphere of celebration for people who know that they have been rescued. In what way does this atmosphere of celebration characterize our own Christian outlook? Where do you see the indicators that Christians “rejoice in their tribulations” because of their faith in the future?*

### UNITED WITH ADAM, UNITED WITH CHRIST (5:12-6:11)

1. The focus of 5:12-6:11 is the solidarity between the one and the many—i.e., the effect of the one on the many.
  - a. In 5:12-21, Paul demonstrates that, just as the sin of one person can affect humanity, the righteous deed of one person can affect humanity also.
  - b. In the section on baptism (6:1-11), Paul makes a similar point about being united with Christ.
  - c. This argument introduces a way of thinking that is foreign to western ideas about individual autonomy and responsibility.
  
2. In 5:12-21, Paul compares the work of Adam with the work of Christ to show the parallel between the founder of the old humanity and the founder of the new humanity.
  - a. The parallels are evident in the frequent “just as . . . so also” (5:18, 19, 21); 5:12 also begins with “just as” but lacks the “so also.” Note that 5:18 actually completes what Paul began to say in 5:12 before he made the clarifications in 5:13-17.
  - b. When one recalls the importance of “all” and “every” in the earlier part of the letter, the focus becomes clear in 5:12-21: Paul emphasizes that “all” are sinners” and that the “many” become righteous. This is not just a Jewish story, but the story of all humanity.
    - i. Note “death passed to *all* men because *all* have sinned” (5:12).
    - ii. According to 5:15, “many” died through Adam’s trespass, and “many” are made righteous.
    - iii. According to 5:18, just as trespass brought condemnation for *all*, so also Jesus’ death brought life for *all*.
    - iv. In 5:19, Paul contrasts the *many* were made sinners in Adam, and *many* were made righteous in Christ.
    - v. When we place this emphasis on *all* and the *many* within the context of Romans, we see Paul’s attempt to demonstrate to a divided church that Christ places all in the same predicament and in need of the same gracious gift.
  - c. Despite the parallelism between Adam and Christ, Paul assures his readers that the two are not exactly symmetrical (5:15, 16).
    - i. Note the “how much more” (5:15, 17) to indicate that the work of Christ exceeds that of Adam.
    - ii. “Where sin abounded grace abounded more exceedingly” (6:21).
  - d. *Teaching note. This section raises numerous questions that are not directly the focus of Paul’s presentation (i.e., to what extent did humanity share Adam’s guilt? To what extent are we responsible?) These issues may be addressed, but we may want to limit the amount of time given to these questions and maintain our emphasis on Paul’s major point. In light of western ideas of individualism, we may discuss our response to this emphasis on solidarity of guilt and righteousness. Note that Paul uses sin in the singular to denote a power that rules*

*humanity, not as a word for individual offenses. Do we believe in corporate guilt? Are we guilty of anything other than the specific offenses we might commit? Paul's discussion is designed to take away all self-righteousness and self-centeredness*

3. Paul's statement, "where sin abounded, grace abounded more exceedingly," leads to the inevitable question which Paul answers in 6:1-11: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound" (6:1).
  - a. In this section Paul employs the diatribe, the conversation with an imaginary person (cf. also 6:15; 7:7). [The diatribe was a well-known teaching device among philosophers.]
  - b. *Discussion. Does the doctrine of grace inevitably lead to cheap grace? What is your own experience of the consequences of teaching salvation by grace? Do people become less ethically motivated? Less committed to the life of the church? One might also ask what our real motivations for ethical commitment are.*
  - c. In 6:2-11 Paul answers the question by describing the irrevocability of our conversion, declaring that our present existence is determined by a once-for-all event of the past.
    - i. In saying, "We died to sin," Paul is referring to the portrayal of sinful humanity in the first five chapters, indicating that in a once-for-all act, we died to that power.
    - ii. Just as Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection were irrevocable, we shared in that great event at our baptism (vss. 3-5). [Note the power of that image for first generation Christians who had made a radical change from the sins described in ch. 1.]
    - iii. V. 4 indicates the ethical consequences of baptism.
    - iv. Paul's analysis of baptism should be read within the context of 5:12-21: He has undone Adam's sin, and we share it through baptism.
    - v. *Discussion. Paul's description provides the opportunity for us to reflect on the meaning of baptism. If Paul's image of this "death" to the old existence in baptism spoke powerfully to those who had made a radical change, how does it speak to those of us who are not first-generation Christians and have not made such a radical break?*
    - vi. Verses 5-11 focus presents a great challenge for interpretation. Paul's emphasis is on the assurance that we have left the power of sin (that is, there are no commands in verses 5-10, but statements that sin will not rule any more). Paul finally gives a command in v. 11: "*Consider yourselves dead. . . .*" *The challenge for interpretation is the tension between our own experience of sin and Paul's assurances that we are dead to sin. How do we correlate Paul's statements with our own experience?*
  - d. V. 11 is the answer to the question in 6:1. How do we emphasize God's grace and avoid cheap grace? We *consider* ourselves dead to sin.

### ENSLAVED TO RIGHTEOUSNESS (6:12-23)

1. In the first five chapters of Romans, the focus has been on what God has done to redeem humans and place Jew and Gentile on the same level.
  - a. In the thesis statement of the book that is stated in 1:17 and repeated in 3:21-22, Paul emphasizes that God's righteousness is *for all who have faith* (i.e., both Jew and Gentile).
  - b. Paul has also emphasized that *all* are sinners under God's wrath (1:18-3:20; 5:1-2).
  - c. Abraham, without works of his own, was the father of all (ch. 4).
  
2. In 5:12-6:11 Paul illustrates the message of grace with the description of two opposing powers, with one power overcoming the other.
  - a. He described sin as an invading, conquering power (5:12, "sin entered"; 5:21, "sin ruled)."
  - b. Now grace "rules through righteousness" (5:21), overcoming the power of sin.
  - c. In baptism, the Christian died to one power (sin) and entered the other (grace).
  
3. All of chapter 6 is a response to the question, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (6:1) and "shall we continue in sin because we are not under law but under grace" (6:15).
  
4. The imagery of the two competing powers dominates 6:12-23, as Paul turns from the indicative (what God has done) to the imperative (what we should do). While 6:1-11 declares what God has done already, 6:12-23 is a command. Note the paradox that Paul says in 6:2, 10 that we died to sin, but that in 6:12-23 Paul instructs the Romans to put sin away. That is: Paul invites readers to "become what they are"—to demonstrate in their lives what God has already done.
  - a. Note also the paradox in 6:12-14: first the parallel commands, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies" (6:12) nor "present your bodies as weapons to unrighteousness" followed by the statement, "sin will not reign over you" (6:14). Paul gives the commands in 6:12-13 followed by the basis in 6:14 ("sin will not reign over you").
  - b. Note the metaphors.
    - i. Sin is a power that "reigns" (6:12; cf. 5:14).
    - ii. Paul instructs Christians not to "present their bodies as weapons" to unrighteousness in a military conflict (6:13).
    - iii. The Christian has only two alternatives; note the verb "present," which has the connotation of "place at the disposal." The verb entails the freedom of decision to "become what we are."
    - iv. The two alternatives indicate that everyone will be at the disposal of one of the two powers and is left with the decision which power will rule.

- c. Having earlier described unredeemed humanity's enslavement to the passions of the body (cf. 1:24-26), Paul now encourages Christians to overcome the impulses of the body (6:13). Note later that Paul encourages Christians to present their bodies a living sacrifice (12:2).
  - d. Paul responds to the question of 6:1 by indicating that the Christian, who exists between two powers (sin and righteousness) is asked to choose which power will rule.
  - e. *Discussion: The age-old question is how one is able to do the good. What is the role of human choice? What is the level of human responsibility when one considers these competing powers?*
5. In 6:15, Paul returns to the question of 6:1, and offers a new answer, using the images of slavery and freedom. In verses 15-18 Paul speaks in the indicative, declaring what God has done.
- a. V. 16 is a general statement about slavery: one belongs to the power to which one submits himself/herself. Paul assumes that everyone is a slave.
  - b. Verses 17-18 speak in the past tense, indicating that Christians have changed masters.
  - c. If we have a choice between powers, our ethical lives are not the result of our own doing, but of our placing ourselves at the disposal of the power that enables us to do good.
  - d. "Righteousness" the subject of chapters 1-5, is here described as a continuing power.
  - e. *Discuss the nature of freedom and slavery in light of Paul's description of being "free from slavery and enslaved to righteousness." Discuss the common definitions of freedom. What do you think of Paul's view that freedom can be slavery to righteousness? Do we know of instances where freedom can be slavery? Discuss examples where freedom is a form of slavery.*
6. In 6:19-23 Paul returns to the relationship between the indicative and the imperative, suggesting that we "become what we are."
- a. The imperative in 6:19 repeats what Paul said in 6:13. Paul's contrast between "then" and "now" indicates that Christians have changed ruling powers; now they should be at the disposal of the new power.
  - b. He mentions sanctification (or *holiness*) twice (6:19, 22). Drawn from Lev. 19:2 ("you shall be holy as I am holy"), it indicates that Christians are involved in a process of becoming holy.
  - c. *Discussion: Paul's description of a "once-now" in the Christian life seems to assume that Christians have been rescued from addictions, sinful behavior, and slavery to the impulses. Why do Christians not look as redeemed as Paul suggests? Our experience suggests that this "once-now" is not as clear as Paul indicates. Churches of filled with people who struggle with various "demons." How do we explain how our experience seems not to correspond to Paul's clear statements in 6:19-23?*

### THE SLAVERY OF THE WILL (Romans 7)

1. Chapters 1-4 described what God *has done* in Christ: In the death of Christ God has revealed his righteousness=justice=covenant faithfulness.
2. Chapters 5-8 introduce what God will do; the one who *has saved* us *will save us* in the end. Note the reference to the future in 5:9-11 and 8:31-39.
3. Chapters 6-8 answer potential objections to Paul's doctrine of righteousness without the law. [The diatribe, a technique in the schools, appears in 6:1, 15; 7:1, 7.]
4. After introducing the metaphor of slavery in chapter 6 to say that we are free from sin, Paul introduces the metaphor of marriage in 7:1-6 to say that Christians are free from the law.
  - a. In 7:1-3 Paul offers an illustration from marriage law, continuing the theme of death and life from 6:1-11. (In each case, a death involves a change of status.)
  - b. The statement that "you died to the law" in 7:4 is parallel to "dead to sin" (6:11).
  - c. 7:5-6 repeat the theme of the radical break from the past that we saw in 6:1-11.
    - i. 7:5 seems to equate the listeners' past life with the sins listed in 1:18-32.
    - ii. 7:6 introduces the theme of the Spirit, indicating that the new slavery (cf. 6:15-23) is under the power of the Spirit.
5. One of the most puzzling passages of Scripture is the unit in 7:7-25, which now uses the first person singular to describe the "wretched man."
  - a. Opinion is divided on the identity of the "I" of 7:7-25.
    - i. One view is that this is the present experience of Paul (and of every Christian—a constant struggle to do the good.
    - ii. Another view is that this was Paul's experience before he became a Christian—that Paul, under law, was tormented by the attempt to do the good.
    - iii. Another view is that this is a portrayal of the individual under the law.
  - b. Note the question that introduces the section in 7:7. "Is the law sin" was the inevitable result of statements that we "died to sin" (6:2) and "died to the law" (7:4). This sounds like an equation.
  - c. The use of "I" was a well known literary technique in which one put thoughts into the mouths of imaginary characters.
  - d. The key to understanding 7:7-25 is to note the introduction in 7:5-6, where Paul contrasts the old existence under the desire of the flesh and the new existence under the Spirit. 7:5 introduces 7:7-25. 7:6 introduces Romans 8, which describes life in the Spirit.
  - e. Paul's initial answer to the question in 7:7-11 is in the past tense.
    - i. Paul's major point is that the law is not sin; the law only awakens sin.
    - ii. The experience of the "I" parallels the Genesis story of the fall (cf. 5:12-21). Hence this is the story of humanity.

- (1) Sin's entry through the commandment recalls the experience of Adam, who "died" after disobeying the commandment.
  - (2) The word "covet," which recalls the tenth commandment, covers a range of meanings, including "desire," "lust" and "passion." It is the same word used in 1: 24 for "lust." Thus Paul's statement that "I would not have known to covet . . ." can refer to the ten commandments or to Adam's sin (or to our own).
  - (3) The statement that "sin deceived me" is a direct echo from Gen. 3:13 (Sin "deceived" Eve).
- iii. Discussion: The class may discuss Paul's suggestion that the prohibition actually evokes the rebellion.
6. In 7:14-25 Paul moves to the present tense, continuing to claim that the law is not the problem; the problem is "I am sold under sin." This highly repetitive section introduces the contrast between willing and doing, describing the tormented person who cannot do what he/she wants to do.
- a. This is a part of the age-old discussion of why people do not do the good that they know.
  - b. Paul's passage seems to respond to an ancient discussion about Medea, the mythical person in a play by Euripides. When she murdered her children, she said, "I know what evil I intend to commit, I see it well; but passion is stronger in me than reason." This became the basis for extended discussion by philosophers.
    - i. Socrates claimed that no one does wrong knowingly; the answer is education.
    - ii. Others talked about the individual's need to conquer the passions by the force of the human will.
  - c. Paul is saying that the person under the law is unable to do the good. Something else is needed.
  - d. Romans 8 gives a totally different picture; not "wretched man" in Romans 8, for the Spirit is the major actor in Romans 8.
  - e. *Discussion: If Paul is not talking about his present experience, but about the person under law, many of us will be disappointed, finding it an encouragement to think that Paul faced the same temptations we face. When I presented this interpretation (that Paul is describing life under law) in class, a young woman said, "You took my passage away. I had found encouragement in thinking that Paul is talking about every Christian." We return to the questions: Given what Paul is saying, why don't we do the good more than we do?*
  - f. On the subject of "willing" and "doing," compare Phil. 2:12, "It is God who works in you both to will and to do his good pleasure. Paul insists that we do the good only when we are empowered by God.

## GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND GOD'S SPIRIT (Rom. 8:1-17)

1. Paul's doctrine of the righteousness of God apart from works of the law has evoked a question that he began to answer in chapter 6: Does righteousness/justification undermine ethics?
  - a. Rom. 6:1-11 answers: When you die to something (sin), you don't still live in it.
  - b. Rom. 6:12-23 answers: Place yourselves at the disposal of righteousness.
  - c. Chapter 7 has argued that the person under the law cannot do good, for that person experiences the gap between willing and doing.
  - d. Chapter 8 (especially vss. 1-17) must be read alongside chapter 7 as the solution to the problem that the tormented person faced.
  
2. Verses 1-2 should be juxtaposed with 7:24-25 as the opposite situation.
  - a. "Condemnation" continues the judicial metaphor that we saw in the word "righteousness/justification." To say "there is no condemnation" is to say there is justification (condemnation would be the same as "wrath" in 1:18).
  - b. "No condemnation to those who are *in Christ*" reinforces the view that the person in chapter 7 is not a Christian.
  - c. Verse 2 continues the theme of liberation from ch. 6; we are liberated from the condition in chapter 7 ("the law of sin and death").
  - d. In the parallelism between "law of sin and death" and "law of the Spirit" Paul introduces the Spirit into the conversation (note that no reference to the Holy Spirit was made in 7:7-25; this person was dependent on his own resources), introducing the theme that will be the focus of 8:1-17.
  
3. Verses 3-4 explain why there is no condemnation.
  - a. According to 8:3 God sent his son into the realm of flesh to condemn sin in the flesh (i.e., he condemned the "condemnation" [8:1]).
  - b. The answer to the problem of ch. 7 is given precisely in 8:4: those who walk according to the Spirit fulfill the requirement of the law!
    - i. The phrase echoes Jeremiah 31:31-34. When the prophet was frustrated that God's people had not kept the law, he prophesied a new covenant when God would put the law in their hearts.
    - ii. Ethical living is possible only for those who are empowered by the Spirit. Compare the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22; ethical living is the "fruit" of the Spirit.
    - iii. *Discussion. This would be the point at which we ask the class what they believe about the work of the Spirit. For some, the Spirit is associated only with spectacular occurrences. Here (and in Galatians 5) the Spirit's primary function is empowerment for ethical living.*
    - iv. *We might also discuss Paul's assurance that those who have the Spirit of God actually keep the requirements of the law. How does this claim correspond to the reality we know? Where do we see this empowerment to do good?*

4. Having mentioned the two powers (flesh and Spirit) in v. 4, vss. 5-8 digress to elaborate on continuing opposition between flesh and Spirit. Emphasis is: two types of people, two types of mindsets. Cf. Gal. 5-6. The flesh remains a possibility for Christians. Spirit is no mechanical power. The mind of the flesh that “cannot please God” (vss. 7-8) refers back to chapter 7.
  - a. After Paul has stated general principle in 5-8, in 9-11 he addresses Christians. The dominant image is of a dwelling or house contrasts the believer with the tormented person of chapter 7.
    - i. Note the image of the dwelling in 7:17, 18, 20 (sin “dwells” in the person).
    - ii. In 8:9-11, the Spirit “dwells” in you (v. 9, 11).
    - iii. V. 11 is an assurance similar to 6:1-11. It describes the possibility for doing the good.
    - iv. Although the discussion about the body here suggests that the Spirit lives in individuals, note that “you” is plural always; i.e., the Spirit belongs to the church, the community of the Spirit.
  
5. Vss. 12-17 state the ethical consequences of the possession of Spirit.
  - a. Vss. 12-13 state the ethical consequences, as in 6:12-14.
    - i. “We are debtors” indicates that the Christian is not overwhelmed by the Spirit, but that Christians face a choice. Of the two powers indicated in vss. 9-11, the Christian can choose the existence of ch. 7 (flesh) or the new existence.
    - ii. Vs. 13 presents 2 choices. To put to death deeds of the body; cf. the language of 7:24-25. Body is not evil, cf. 12:1-2. Deeds of body listed in 6:12-13 are in mind. “Deeds of body” are actions which express undue dependence on bodily appetites.
    - iii. Vss. 14-17 reinforce why we are debtors to live the ethical life.
      - (1) According to v. 14, you “received” the Spirit (the past tense suggests a single moment; i.e., baptism).
      - (2) The dominant image in vss. 14-17 focuses on a family relationship. In a world that knows the sharp distinction between slaves and legitimate children, Paul says that baptism was our “adoption”; that is, those with no rights were given full rights in the family.
      - (3) To cry “abba father” is a great privilege. [Note that the Aramaic *abba* is known in the Greek-speaking churches]. This probably refers to corporate prayer.
      - (4) “The Spirit bears witness with our Spirit” refers to the regular confirmation of the community’s status in Christ. He does not specify how this happens.
      - (5) In verse 17, he continues the family image: note the emphasis that is evident in the repetition: *children, heirs, joint heirs* of Christ. The emphasis indicates Paul’s accent on an unbelievable privilege of being united with Christ.

- b. In the last phrase of v. 17, Paul indicates that being united with Christ involves sharing both his suffering and his resurrection.
6. Lest we become lost in the turns in Paul's argument, we need to return to the opening question: Does justification undermine ethics? The answer: We respond as recipients of an extraordinary privilege. We are "debtors" because we have been adopted into God's family and empowered to do what is good. *Discuss what is the primary motivation for doing good. What motivations do you recall that were most used in the church? How does this compare with the motivation of indebtedness that Paul describes?*

## GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND GOD'S TRIUMPH (Rom. 8:18-39)

1. Context for today's lesson
  - a. Chapters 1-4 have focused on the past, describing how God's righteousness has already redeemed those who have faith, placing both Gentiles and Jews on the same level.
  - b. Chapters 5-8 focus on "living between the times"—between what God has already done and what God will ultimately do.
    - i. In 5:1-11 Paul turned from the past to the future hope: "How much more *shall we be saved* (5:10-11).
    - ii. In 6:1-8:17 Paul has described how Christians live *now* between what God has done and what God will do.
      - (1) Living between the times, Christians have a choice as to their ethical conduct (cf. 8:1-17).
      - (2) Christians also suffer as they wait for the ultimate redemption (5:2-5; 8:17).
  - c. The section 8:18-39 forms a "bookend" with 5:1-11, declaring that what God has done in the past guarantees God's triumph.
  
2. Having introduced suffering with Christ as the basis for future glorification (8:17), Paul announces that the present suffering is not to be compared to future glory; 8:18 is the thesis statement for 8:18-30.
  - a. In 8:19-22 he indicates that this suffering even involves the creation, which "groans."
    - i. The contrast between *creation* (vss. 19, 20, 21, 22) and "we ourselves" (8:23) indicates that Christians are not included in the description of creation.
    - ii. *Creation* apparently refers to the physical world which, according to Genesis 3:17-19 (and rabbinic discussion), shared the consequences of Adam's sin.
    - iii. *This suggestion of solidarity between the physical creation and humanity could be the basis for discussion about our responsibility for creation and attitude toward the environment. We could discuss our responsibility for the care of the physical world.*
  - b. In 8:23-30 Paul turns to Christians who live before God's ultimate triumph and wait for the redemption of the body.
    - i. In 8:23-24, the emphasis is on the fact that we do not see God's triumph, for we "groan" with creation.
      - (1) Even people who experience the "down payment" (NIV "first fruits") of the Spirit do not see the ultimate victory.
      - (2) Although we have received "adoption" (8:15), we wait on adoption (8:23).
      - (3) Those who do not see the ultimate victory *hope and wait*.

- (4) *Discussion: Paul's honesty about Christian experience is the occasion for us to reflect on the challenge to faith that we do not see all of the signs of victory. Nor do we like to wait for the triumph. Instead, we want instant assurances. We could discuss the experience of unanswered prayer or the unfairness that we see in the world.*
  - (5) Verses 27-28 focus on God's assistance in the midst of our weakness, helping us as we pray.
  - (6) *Rom. 8:28 should be placed in context. It says that, despite the appearance, God is working in human affairs to bring about the good. Discuss the misuse of the passage. It does not say that God micro-manages, and that we can determine that every single event works for the good.*
  - (7) In vss. 29-30 recalls what God has done (cf. chs. 1-4). The past tense in the series of verbs indicates the gift that Christians have already received. Note that each verb builds on the previous one. [On "foreknowledge," see also Jer. 1:5; Am. 3:2; Israel considered herself known from creation. "Foreknowledge" is not individual, but corporate.]
3. Verses 31-39 are a rhapsodic conclusion to Paul's declaration of the triumph of God, as he moves from the past tense of vss. 29-30 to the future.
- a. Paul first introduces a courtroom scene in vss. 31-34, indicating how we know that God is "for us": He did not spare his own son (language that echoes the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, Gen. 22:16).
  - b. V. 34 uses the courtroom scene to say that Christ presently intercedes for us.
  - c. Verses 35-39 refer to the love of God (or Christ) at the beginning and end of the section (note earlier reference to God's love in 5:7-8).
    - i. V. 35 lists the sufferings of this age (cf. 8:18), asking if they will separate us from God's love (cf. 2 Cor. 6:4-6; 11:23-30).
    - ii. V. 36 quotes Ps. 44:22, which describes the sufferings of righteous people.
    - iii. Vss. 37-39 are a ringing declaration that none of the forces that threaten our lives will separate us from the love of God. "More than conquerors" is a remarkable image (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-57). This claim of victory is made in the context of suffering and anguish. *Discussion: "Victory" language can be used in inappropriate ways when it is divorced from the anguish of faith. It is an assurance for those who are seeing no victories. And old problem is the desire for victory without suffering.*
    - iv. Vss. 37-39 describe the threatening forces that ancient people felt (cf. Col. 1:15-20). We might substitute our own threatening forces that call God's love into question.

## GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL (Romans 9-11)

1. Romans 8 ended with the joyous celebration of the triumph of God for those who are in Christ.
  - a. According to Romans 8, although we live in the midst of suffering, we can rejoice in God's ultimate triumph.
  - b. As we await God's ultimate triumph, we are empowered by the Spirit.
  - c. The subject of 1-8 is the righteousness of God through faith *for all*, which has resulted in a Gentile church.
  
2. The abrupt change of mood in 9:1-5 indicates that those who celebrate God's triumph in ch. 8 are the Gentiles who await God's triumph.
  - a. Paul expresses grief for Israel—those who have not believed that Christ is the Messiah.
  - b. Paul's intercession recalls Moses' intercession in Ex 32:32.
  
3. Romans 9-11 is being treated together because the entire unit is intended to answer the question that was first raised in 3:1-3 ("What is the advantage of the Jew?" "Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?"); that is, did God's word (that called Israel into being) fail (9:6)? Is God unjust (9:14)? If Paul's message has resulted in the exclusion of the Jews whom God had called for a purpose, is God not unjust? Paul answers these questions in three stages (9:6-29; 9:30-10:21; 11:1-36)
  - a. *Discussion: We may have similar questions: Why don't we see the triumph described in 8:32-39? Is Christianity losing ground here and elsewhere? Or: if God's promise of victory is true, why do we seem to be diminishing in numbers and influence in the world?*
  
4. Paul's answer in 9:6-29 focuses on the sovereignty of God; i.e., God's ways are mysterious to us, but we know that God has always taken the initiative to call his people. God does not have to give us an explanation.
  - a. Jewish readers would have agreed with Paul's claim that God *calls* (9:7, 12) and *elects* (9:11) whomever he wants.
  - b. God has mercy on whomever he chooses (9:15, 16).
  - c. The classic text for the doctrine of election was Deut. 7, which indicates that one cannot explain why God chose Israel.
  - d. Paul indicates in 9:6-18 that the presence of Gentiles is simply another example of God's freedom to *elect* whomever he wanted to.
  - e. God took the initiative—apart from any human activity (9:11-12, 16)—to choose Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and even to raise up Pharaoh.
  - f. Note that this idea of election is not to be confused with the Calvinist view that some individuals are elected to salvation and others for damnation. The doctrine of election is election for a mission, and it includes an entire people (Israel), not individuals.
  - g. In 9:19-30 Paul answers the questions of those who question the justice of God.

- i. The image of potter and clay (cf. Isa 29:16; Jer 18:6) was commonly used for the sovereignty of God and Israel's incapacity to understand God's ways.
  - ii. According to 9:22-29 the potter-clay image explains what God is doing.
    - (1) According to 9:24, God has called not only Jews, but also Gentiles.
    - (2) In 9:25 he cites Hosea 2:23, a passage which traditionally had referred to Israel, to say that those called included Gentiles.
    - (3) In 9:27-29 he introduces the old concept of the remnant (Isa. 10:22-23; Hos. 1:10) to explain why not many in Israel have obeyed; that is, the prophets mentioned occasions when only a remnant of Israel was faithful.
  - iii. To summarize 9:6-29: God's mysterious ways have resulted in the grace extended to Gentiles who had nothing to deserve their new status.
  - iv. *Discussion: Most of us would want a God that we could "figure out." What is the role of human planning and projections if God is beyond our calculation? What about our reliance on techniques for missions and evangelism in light of Paul's emphasis on God's sovereignty in missions?*
5. In 9:30-10:21 Paul offers a second answer to the question of why the church is predominantly Gentile: the Jews had the opportunity, but they tried to establish themselves on the basis of works rather than faith.
- a. According to 10:4, Christ is the end of the law for *everyone who believes*.
  - b. According to 10:5-13, the appropriate response—whether Jew or Greek (10:12)—is to believe (v. 10, 11, 13).
  - c. According to 10:14-21, the word has gone out, but not everyone believed (10:16); Israel heard and Israel knew (v. 19), but was disobedient (10:21).
6. Chapter 11 gives the ultimate answer to the question, is God just?
- a. In 11:1-10, Paul recalls the story of Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:10, 14) to say that some (a remnant) have believed [*It would be unwise to think that we can count all of the faithful!*].
  - b. In 11:11-24, Paul addresses Gentiles, telling them not to be arrogant about their status, for God in his sovereignty can again graft the branches of the tree (Israel) back onto the tree, and God can remove the branches that have been grafted on.
  - c. This argument may be the climax of Romans. Just as the Jew who has the law cannot boast (3:27-4:2), the Gentile who has come into the faith cannot boast of anything, for everything is from God's grace.
  - d. The climax of the argument and the answer to the question raised in 9:6, 14 is given in vss. 25-26.
    - i. V. 25 restates the caution against arrogance.
    - ii. V. 26 says that the problem described in 9:1-5 is not final: the "Israel" over whom Paul grieves (9:1-5) "will be saved." [That is, Paul has not redefined Israel to be something other than the ones he has been describing throughout chapters 9-11.]

- (1) Based on the argument of chapter 10, the conditions of salvation have not changed (cf. 10:9-10).
  - (2) Paul does not say how they will be saved; i.e., will it be through world missions? Or will they come to faith at the last day?
  - (3) Paul does not say how this event will occur because he is more interested in pursuing the logic of the justice of God. If God is just, those who will be saved will not exclude any ethnic group.
- iii. It is appropriate that ch. 11 concludes, as did ch. 8, with a rhetorical flourish—a doxology. The only response to God’s mysterious ways is not to grasp the mind of God, but to break out in song.
- e. *Remember that the entire rhetorical thrust of this section is to keep Gentiles from being arrogant about their status. Paul says that any understanding of the mysterious ways of God undermines human pretension and arrogance. In what way is arrogance still the “occupational hazard” of Christians?*

## LIVING OUT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN THE COMMUNITY (Rom. 12-13)

1. In Romans, as in most of the letters, Paul moves from theological discussion to practical consequences of his message in the life of the church (cf. Gal. 5-6; 1 Thess 4-5; Eph 4-6; Col. 3-4); i.e., all theology has practical consequences. All of 12:1-15:13 is the practical consequence of what Paul has said in chapters 9-11. Note the relationship between this ethical section and chs. 9-11.
  - a. “Therefore” in 12:1 points back to the preceding discussion.
  - b. “I appeal to you by the mercies of God” (12:1) refers to Paul’s discussion of the mercies of God in chs. 9-11.
  
2. We may consider this ethical section (12:1-15:13) as the opposite of 1:18-3:20.
  - a. In 1:18-3:20 Paul has described the humanity that is “without excuse” and enslaved to the passions of the body (1:24-26).
  - b. The call to “present your bodies a living sacrifice” (12:1) portrays a community that no longer is enslaved to the passions.
  - c. Whereas some have suggested that Paul’s doctrine of the righteousness of God undermines ethics, 12:1-15:13 describes the conduct of those who live under God’s righteousness.
  
3. The heading for the ethical section in 12:1-2 provides the framework for understanding Christian ethics.
  - a. In 12:1, Paul describes the ethical life as “worship”; i.e., Christians worship in everyday life as well as in the assembly.
  - b. The imperative, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed into the renewing of your mind,” suggests that all of the commands that follow it are descriptions of a distinctive Christian lifestyle.
    - i. In 1:28, Paul has described the “corrupt mind” of the pagan; here he describes the “renewed” mind.
    - ii. The command suggests that Christians, who have already entered the new age, will distinguish themselves from the behavior of the old age in which the world lives.
  - c. *Discussion: Paul’s command raises the question: What is distinctive about Christian morality? Since we know many good people who are not Christians, what distinguishes Christians?*
  
4. According to 12:3-8, the distinctive Christian lifestyle is community-centered, focused on love (note the repetition of love in 12:9-10; 13:8-11).
  - a. Note that Paul’s first specific instructions about the Christian life is “do not think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think” (12:3)—the practical consequence of being saved by grace. Note the previous references to arrogance chapters 9-11 (3:27-4:2; 11:20-25). Cf. 12:16.
  - b. According to 12:3-8, the new community that crosses ethnic boundaries can live together as a body, acknowledging the gift of each.

- c. No one can live this Christian ethic alone!
5. Verses 9-21 describe the Christian life that is determined by love toward both insiders and outsiders.
- a. Verses 9-14, 16 describe a rich family life for those who have no ties of ethnicity or family connection. In a world where people had lost family ties, this multi-ethnic community takes the place of the natural functions of the family. “This too is part of the redefinition of boundaries in which Paul engages -- a sense of family “belongingness” which transcends immediate family ties and do not depend on national or ethnic bonds” (James Dunn).
- i. The emphasis on love indicates that this family has taken over the function of the family in providing a social safety net. Note that the ethical instructions are framed by the call to love (12:9-10; 13:8-10) as the distinguishing feature of this counterculture.
  - ii. “Brotherly love” (*philadelphia*) in antiquity referred to the care taken for members of one’s own family (cf. 12:10).
  - iii. Contributions (Greek *koinonia*) to the saints (12:13) refers to the “welfare” program of this new family.
  - iv. Hospitality (*philoxenia*, lit. “friendship with strangers”) was an important Christian virtue, referring to the way Christians opened their homes to others (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; Heb. 13:2 1 Pet. 4:9).
  - v. V. 16 returns to the constant warning against arrogance (cf. 11:25; 12:3) within the community.
  - vi. *Discussion: One can imagine how this family-type atmosphere worked in the intimate circles of the ancient house church. How can they be implemented in the church of several hundred or a thousand members?*
- b. Verses 14, 17-21 describe the community’s relationship to those who are not members of the family.
- i. We are not sure what form of persecution is involved in v. 14 (cf. Matt. 5:44); he probably refers to those who corporate rather than individual persecution.
  - ii. Vss. 17-21 presents the church as a true counterculture that rises above the normal response to personal affronts.
    - (1) Vss. 17-19 are reminiscent of Jesus’ teaching in Matt. 5:43-48 and his own personal example of not seeking revenge.
    - (2) Vss. 20-21 are reminiscent of the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46); in this case, the Christian takes care not only of the poor, but of enemies as well.
  - iii. *Discussion: Can you think of examples where Christians insisted on returning evil with good? Give examples where Christians have been countercultural in their refusal to demand retribution.*

6. We should read 13:1-7 within its context, observing that it appears between the call to “overcome evil with good” (12:21) and the love command (13:8-10).
  - a. In the original context, Paul assumes that Christians are not among the governing powers; their only option is to submit or rebel.
  - b. Paul’s statement is a generalization; he does not refer to extreme cases where the Christian must decide between obedience to God or obedience to humankind.
  - c. To be submissive to the government, in this case, is to seek the public good.
  - d. *Discussion: Paul’s advice raises many questions for people who have lived under conditions different from those of Paul; i.e., when should one not be submissive? Whereas Paul writes when Christians are a small minority and are not a part of government, what is the Christian response when they are in the majority and assume roles within the government?*

### THE STRONG AND THE WEAK (Rom. 14:1-15:13)

1. Romans 14:1-15:13 addresses the strong and the weak and the problems that face churches when different cultures are brought together.
  - a. When different cultures come together, the result here is “disputes about opinions” (14:1).
  - b. These “disputes about opinions” involve the disagreements between those who “eat meat” and those who only eat only vegetables (14:2); cf. also the reference to drinking wine in 14:21.
  - c. Although Paul does not say that “strong” and the “weak” are equivalent to Gentiles and Jews, the context of the book suggests that Paul is referring to the problems between the two groups (cf. especially 15:7-9).
  - d. Many scholars interpret the passage as a reference to the difficulties that occurred when Jewish Christians returned to Rome after being expelled by Claudius in AD 49 (Claudius died in 54; Jewish Christians would have returned after that time, only to discover a very different church).
  - e. *Discussion: This would be the occasion for discussing the challenges when different cultures come together in church. Basic cultural differences create a variety of tensions. We have a cultural difference between rural and urban churches when the suburbs expand into rural areas where urban and rural values collide. Our churches have a cultural divide between young and old. Different ethnic groups have difficulty in meeting together.*
  
2. Although Romans 14:1-15:13 has a superficial resemblance to the discussion of the strong and weak in 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:22-1, one should note the differences: nothing in Romans is said about meat offered to idols.
  
3. The imperative “welcome” (NIV “accept”) appears at the beginning (14:1) and near the end (15:7) of the unit, providing its frame.
  - a. The term was commonly used for welcoming someone into one’s home (18:26; 28:2 (into houses); Phlm 17); here it would refer to welcoming people of different opinions/cultures into one’s own house church.
  - b. Paul defines “welcoming” further with the parallel “do not look down upon” (14:3).
  - c. Paul acknowledges that people in Christian communities will not be of the same opinions on many matters that are considered serious, and he insists that they respect each other. *Discuss the implications of Paul’s statements for us in light of our own differences of opinion.*
  - d. Paul elaborates on his instruction in 14:1 with three separate sections (14:1-12; 14:13-23; 15:1-13).

4. 14:1-12 is advice to the strong and the weak.
  - a. The “weak in faith” is the one here who is especially scrupulous (i.e., a vegetarian, 14:2; probably a reference to those who refused meat because they did not know if it was ritually pure or clean).
  - b. Paul instructs the strong not to “look down on” the overly-scrupulous person (14:2).
  - c. The primary instruction in 14:1-12 is to the weak: do not judge the brother (14:3-4, 10).
  - d. The reason one should not judge is that God is the judge, and the individual will ultimately stand before God (14:4b, 7-12).
  - e. *Discussion: This language of not judging is often a cover for mere relativism in which we will not condemn any behavior or idea. Discuss how we might implement Paul’s instructions without falling into our culture’s relativism.*
  
5. 14:13-23 is advice to the strong (i.e., the less scrupulous).
  - a. Paul agrees with the strong (cf. 14:14), but indicates that the strong have a special responsibility: not to make the weak stumble.
  - b. The image of the “stumbling block” (14:13, 21) is drawn from OT references (cf. especially Lev. 19:14, “place a stumbling block in front of a blind man.”). The image is that of a literal rock that could cause someone to stumble and fall.
    - i. According to vss. 15, 20 Paul is talking about conduct that would “destroy” the brother.
    - ii. Vss. 22b-23 indicate that one who is drawn into participating in conduct that he (or she) considers sinful falls into uncertainty and doubt. Behavior that violates one’s own sense of right is sinful.
  - c. The responsibility of the strong is to be guided by love (14:15), which is defined by Jesus’ sacrifice of himself on the cross (14:15).
  - d. According to 14:17, the kingdom “is not eating and drinking”; i.e., such matters as eating and drinking are not ultimate matters; hence living by the cross means not making these issues matters that could injure others.
  - e. *Discuss the challenges of implementing this. Do we defer to every objection that the “more scrupulous” might have? What are the criteria by which we determine to defer to those who disagree with us?*
  
6. In 15:1-13 Paul summarizes the argument, appealing to Christ as the model for the behavior that creates unity.
  - a. In 15:1-6, Christ is the model of the one who “did not please himself.” This reference to Christ’s sacrifice resembles Phil. 2:6-11 (“he emptied himself”).
    - i. The quotation in 15:3 is taken from Ps. 69:9, a passage commonly applied to Christ. Here Paul cites it as a summary of the story of Christ.
    - ii. Those who are shaped by this story are able to have a “spirit of unity” (lit. “Have the same mindset”).
    - iii. To “glorify God with one voice” is to cross ethnic boundaries in worship.

- iv. *Discussion: Differences on how to worship tempt us to have separate worship services for different cultural tastes. Discuss the importance of maintaining a united worship service where we “do not please ourselves.”*
- b. In 15:7-13 Paul again indicates that Christ’s sacrifice is the model that will resolve the tensions between Jew and Gentile.
  - i. According to 15:7, we “accept” (cf. 14:1) those who are different because Christ accepted us.
  - ii. In 15:8-13 Christ became a servant of the Jews so that the Gentiles might glorify God. The Scriptures that Paul cites all contain the word “Gentiles” (literally “nations” or “peoples”) to indicate that the Jewish faith was meant to reach to Gentiles.
  - iii. The result is that Jews and Gentiles should come together as a community of faith. The truth that God’s righteousness for all is not an abstraction, but should be implemented in communities where the barriers are broken down.