



**The Book of Romans:
New School
Vs.
Old School
(See which one you prefer)
Read on...**

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Old School

**The Letter of Paul to the Romans
(An Outline for study)**

New School

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“Old School” Versus “Newer School” Bible Study The Letter of Paul to the Romans

The letter to the Romans is Paul’s “**most considered writing**” and it has influenced subsequent Christian thought probably more than any other Early Christian Writing. It is difficult to understand because it deals with objections and misunderstandings arising out of Jewish opposition which was part of Paul’s situation then but is not part of the situation today.

Difficulty also stems from the personal factor of Paul’s intellectual vitality. A quick-moving mind like his does not always provide his chain of argument with as many links as his interpreters would like, but wrestling with his work is rewarding because of the majesty and continued relevance of his theme: GOD’S JUDGMENT AND MERCY addressed to man’s disobedience.

Romans is a restatement, in the light of Christ, of the biblical insights into God’s righteousness applied to “the moral failure of man and society,” both then and now.

THE OCCASION AND THE PURPOSE OF HIS WRITING

Paul wrote in the first instance to introduce himself to the Roman Church and to acquaint its members with his desire to visit them and his plan for apostolic journeying farther West. But self-introduction was no merely personal matter for him, it meant more than explaining his movements and his strategy as a church builder. It meant no less than an exposition of God’s good news as he understood it, or rather as he had experienced it in the face of Jewish misunderstanding.

Paul was the chief architect of extra-Palestinian Christianity, known as Gentile Christianity or as the Gentile Church. He was by no means the only missionary, as the very existence of the Roman Christian Community attested.

Paul did not start the church in Rome. He was himself ready to admit that “others had laid the foundations” which he respected.

But Paul did have a conception of one gospel, one church, one empire.

The saving righteousness of God which Paul discerned dynamically at work in and since the passion Christ (not Jesus) had the whole of mankind (humankind) in its purview. Just a note, the word, Christ means Messiah or “Anointed One.”

Moreover, the time was limited. Such a revelation of righteousness and manifestations of spiritual power was evident to Paul in the ministry of Christ (not Jesus) and its effects signified the imminence of the end of history.

The uniqueness of Christ (not Jesus) meant the finality of revelation, and this must be the prelude to the climax of God’s purpose.

To put this in more exclusively Jewish terms: if Jesus was the Messiah, the messianic age was present, and the final act of the human drama was being played. When the full objective of the Messiah’s coming had been achieved – the gathering in of unbelieving Gentiles as well as recalcitrant Israel, and the triumph of the everlasting mercy of God – that would be the glorious consummation divine wisdom had planned.

The proclamation of this was the special responsibility of the churches, in fact, their sole justification, and there was urgency about it.

Paul saw his own “divine commission” as the APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES in relation to this proclamation. IT motivated his letter and put a cutting edge on his words.

THE NEW THEOLOGY

Paul used the occasion of his anticipated visit to set this conception of WHAT GOD IS DOING FOR MANKIND, in spite of the insensitivity of both the Jews and the Greeks. The mighty act inaugurated in the life of Christ (not Jesus) is continuing in its effects.

It is primarily a revelation of righteousness, directed to man's age-old need for righteousness. This was evidenced in the corruption of the pagan world and also in the failure of the favored Jews – the church-going section of mankind, so to speak---to recognize the presence of their Messiah.

Thus, in the second place, God’s action has reference to human sin. Man is in the grip of sin and cannot free himself; his moral sense, conscience, and categorical imperative convict him of sin but do not liberate him.

But liberation is God’s gracious gift, and it is available, men can be sure of that if they look into the self-sacrificing love of Christ (not Jesus) – which IS the love of God.

To respond to this love, to open one's mind to it, is what Paul calls FAITH. It is the "essential preliminary" and it is open to all. Once this is done, new life begins, a new start in the realization of that righteousness that God demands.

Thirdly, God's power deals with the death that accompanies sin. The new life that Christ (not Jesus) makes possible is freed not only from sin but from death. There is inaugurated a new humanity, reconciled with God, emancipated from sin and death, morally empowered, and spiritually privileged as no previous generation has been.

The era of law and the preeminence of Judaism are over. Man cannot live on moral imperatives alone and no longer needs to try to...

Judaism's position is unusual, and Paul feels obliged to discuss this at length. He holds to the conviction that the Jews will by divine mercy be delivered from their stubborn resistance and find their place with Gentiles in the final redeemed society.

These convictions were the result of Paul's mature reflection on his experiences as a missionary and church builder during the period which occasioned the writings of Galatians, I & II Corinthians, and possibly other letters.

His work has been done in the teeth of pagan opposition. Equally, Jewish opposition was real and it demanded Paul's subtlest argument. The middle chapters of Romans reflect not only his own thoughts but actual debates in the churches and synagogues concerning the Mosaic Law and the priority of Jews to Gentiles.

Romans shows a "far deeper" reflection on the "Jewish Problem" than is mirrored in I Thessalonians 2. 14-16.

THE CHURCH AT ROME

Paul addressed a well-established Christian community that was already becoming famous to the Christian world and obviously destined by its locale in the metropolis to be an "important church."

Its founder, preacher, and the details of its origin are unknown. Converts from Palestine whose business took them to Rome must have sown the first seeds of the "GOOD NEWS OF GOD."

Conceivably the expulsion of Jews from Rome by CLAUDIUS may have been occasioned by DISPUTES in the synagogues over this new teaching...about a MESSIAH.

A reference to it by the ROMAN HISTORIAN Suetonius can be understood in this sense. It is thus a good guess that the ROMAN CHURCH was formed before that time. It was GREEK-speaking until the end of the second century and probably recruited its membership from GREEK FREEDMAN and SLAVES as well as JEWS.

ROMAN CATHOLIC “tradition” ASS-U-MES a visit of PETER, possibly in the year 42 CE to found the church in Rome. This claim cannot be proven.

THE DATE AND PLACE OF COMPOSITION

The stage in his career at which Paul writes and plans his APOSTOLIC CAMPAIGN WEST of Rome is clear from 15. 19-28.

He feels that his work in the EAST region is complete. He still, however, must deliver at Jerusalem the financial contribution he has raised among his GENTILE converts for the relief of the Jerusalem CHRISTIANS, in fulfillment of the agreement made a few years previously at Jerusalem. In that agreement, Paul won recognition of his preaching to GENTILES without requiring CIRCUMCISION as a condition of membership in the church, but in return, he admitted that GENTILE converts should be made aware of the obligation to the original Jewish members.

This was not a mere quid pro quo in Paul’s understanding of the relationship between JEWISH to GENTILE Christians; it involved the responsibility of each for unity and mutual edification. Paul attached much importance to this. In addressing the ROMANS a “mixed church” in which GENTILE members probably outnumbered JEWISH – he expects to be understood when he explains that this task must be accomplished before he turns his face to the WEST.

For DATING THIS PERIOD of Paul’s career, the only contact with outside historical sources is the statement of Acts 24.27 that after TWO YEARS FELIX was relieved by FESTUS as procurator of JUDEA. Unfortunately, the sources are contradictory, so the date of this event is still uncertain.

If we ASS-UME it was 59, and that the two years are counted from Paul’s arrest, the date of his three-month stay in GREECE becomes the winter of 56-57 CE. Other estimates have placed the date as early as 55 and as late as 59.

ROMANS thus belongs among the letters of Paul’s middle period (I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Philemon, and possibly Colossians) if as some believe, they were written from an imprisonment in Ephesus.

Its greatest affinity is with GALATIANS, especially in relation to the meaning of FAITH and JUSTIFICATION, the subordinate place of LAW in the divine dealing with sinful man, and the antithesis of SPIRIT and FLESH.

AUTHENTICITY AND INTEGRITY

There has never been any question about the “genuineness” of ROMANS as a writing of Paul’s. Even the most radical criticism has taken as axiomatic the authenticity of ROMANS.

Some peculiarities in the transmission of ROMANS in the early church are revealed in the manuscripts, however, which raise questions about certain positions.

The DOXOLOGY (16. 25-27) is found in the majority of manuscripts at the end of chapter 14; in one manuscript and the earliest written and therefore very trustworthy at the end of chapter 15...and in some of the most trustworthy at the end of chapter 16.

This suggests that copies were in circulation which ended at these points.

It has been argued that the DOXOLOGY is by a later hand than Paul’s. That is reasonable on internal evidence, and would partly explain its varying it may have been to provide a conclusion for the whole collection of PAULINE LETTERS, as there is evidence that ROMANS was sometimes placed at the end of the PAULINE SECTION OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS.

The above considerations indicate that not all copies of ROMANS contained chapter 16. Though very few scholars have viewed this chapter as an addition by another hand, the vast majority have seen no reason to doubt that it is Paul’s work; the question is whether it was originally a part of ROMANS or a part of a letter to another church.

The contents are more naturally explained on the latter view, and a plausible case can be made for EPHESUS as its destination.

One manuscript with patristic support lacks “IN ROME” in 1.7, 1.15.

This indicates attempts in some areas to remove traces of reference to a particular church and thus make the letter more obviously universal in its range. Such motives would also explain the removal of Chapter 16 --- if it was removed rather than added to its original shorter form. It is not impossible that Paul himself approved a longer and a shorter edition.

Now, a brief outline of the letter for further individual study!

Greeting and Thanksgiving

1.1-7, THE SALUTATION

1.8-17 PERSONAL ADDRESS

THE HUMAN SITUATION

(1.18—3.20)

- A. PAGANISM (1.18-32)
- B. JUDAISM (2.1-3.8)
- C. THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN (3.9-20)

THE DIVINE OFFER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

(3.21-26)

THE HUMAN RESPONSE: FAITH

(3.27-4.25)

- A. FAITH REQUIRED OF ALL (3.27-31)
- B. ABRAHAM AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH (4. 1-12)
- C. THE PROMISE TO ABRAHAM (4. 13-35)

THE EFFECTS OF FAITH

(5.1-8.39)

- A. RECONCILIATION (5.1-11)
- B. FREEDOM FROM SIN AND DEATH (5.12-6.14)
- C. GOD'S HOLY SERVICE 96.15-23)
- D. FREEDOM FROM THE LAW 97.1-25)
- E. SPIRITUAL ENDOWMENT 98. 1-17)
- F. CERTAINTY OF FINAL REDEMPTION (8.18-39)

THE PROBLEM OF ISRAEL'S UNRESPONSIVENESS

(9.1-11.36)

- A. GOD'S SOVEREIGN SELECTIVITY (9.1-29)
- B. GENTILE ADMISSION AND JEWISH EXCLUSION (9.30-104)
- C. THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST (10.5-13)
- D. THE NEED TO PREACH THE GOSPEL (10.14-21)
- E. THE REMNANT CHOSEN BY GRACE (11.1-6)
- F. ISRAEL'S TEMPORARY OBTUSENESS (11. 7-12)
- G. THE FINAL RECONCILIATION (11.25-32)

GOSPEL ETHICS

(12.1-15.6)

- A. GENERAL PRINCIPLES (12.1-21)
- B. THE CHRISTIAN'S CIVIC DUTY (13.1-10)
- C. IMMINENCE OF THE END TIME (13.11-14)
- D. PATIENCE WITH SCRUPLES (14.1-15.6)
- E. WELCOME FOR BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES (15.7-13)

PAUL'S OWN MISSION

(15. 14-33)

AN APPDENDUM

(16.1-27)

THE CLOSING DOXOLOGY

(16.25-27)

The closing doxology has its own impressiveness, but the fact that it appears in the manuscript at various places raises questions not only about its place but also about its authorship. It may be the work of a 2nd-century copyist making use of Pauline phraseology.

To declare that the only wise God commanded his saving purpose, which had been a mystery, to be revealed in Christ (not Jesus) is the root of Pauline and Christian Orthodoxy. But the stress on THROUGH THE PROPHETIC WRITINGS reads a little awkwardly as if the phrase was deliberately interpolated to meet heresy like that of MARCION (AD 140), who rejected the Hebrew Bible. On the whole, it lacks the full Pauline impact.

NOW, that you have so kindly looked over this material, let's try to bring the BS (🤪) up to date and modernize it a wee bit.

See which version you prefer...

**The Book of Romans:
New School
Vs.
Old School
(See which one you prefer)
Read on...**



We Begin With the “Man”

(NO, Not Jesus!)

But with Paul of Tarsus, of course!

The New Testament is all about Jesus, right?

Well, when you consider that 15 of the 27 New Testament books are said to be written by or about Paul, then you've got a serious contender for second most important guy in the Bible.

But Paul's not “just a biblical character,” he's also our author.

With letters like this one to the Romans, Paul was able to shape the early Christian church into what it is today—a powerhouse with 2.1 billion followers.

His “theology” (literally the study of God’s Word) has been unbelievably influential and his writings have inspired billions around the world.

Pretty impressive, right?

So, just who the heck is this guy?

Paul in Romans

Romans actually throws out quite a few random biographical details for Paul.

We know from his letter that:

he's "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God" (1:1). No biggie;

he's never been to visit the church in Rome, but definitely wants to get there real soon (1:13).

The guy loves to travel;

he considers himself a Jew above all. A Jew who just happens to accept Jesus as Lord (11:1). Other Jews are not pleased;

Does this make Paul, the original Jew for Jesus?

some people have called him "an apostle to the Gentiles" (11:13). Not that he's bragging or anything;

he has spread the word about Jesus "from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum" (15:19).

In other words, the eastern part of the Roman Empire;

he's done with evangelizing in the east and wants to move west to Spain (15:23-24).

Paul gets around;

he has to first drop off a collection in Jerusalem that he's been gathering for quite a while (15:25-26).

Small road trip;

he's also a tiny bit worried about what's going to happen when he gets to Jerusalem (15:30-33).

Spoiler alert: he should be;

he's also been in sticky situations before (16:4). Actually many times before.

Okay, so what does all that mean?

First, it's important to point out that the Roman Christians reading Paul's letter wouldn't have needed “any other background information because they would have already had it.”

These guys and gals would have “known Paul by reputation,” because, believe me, the dude had quite a reputation.

But we're not the Romans, so let's delve into some back story.

Nice Jewish Boy

Paul was actually born Saul.

Scholars think he was probably a few years younger than Jesus, so the two men, who were both raised in the Roman Empire around the same time in Jewish homes, would have been contemporaries.

And even though Paul would spend the majority of his life writing, preaching, and teaching about Jesus, he never actually met the guy while he was alive.

Weird, huh?

Unlike Jesus, Paul grew up in a big city called Tarsus, which is located in modern day Turkey.

While Jesus spent his whole life in the Jewish homeland, Judea, Paul was part of the Jewish Diaspora around the Empire.

He would have had access not only to a great Jewish religious education (he eventually joined up with the

Pharisees—those dreaded legalists from the Gospels) but would have been exposed to “Greek universities” in the area as well. Go, GREEK U!

It's really, really, really, really, super important to note this: Paul was born a Jew and remained a Jew his entire life.

It wouldn't be correct to say that Paul "converted" to Christianity because there was no Christianity to convert to...

The earliest followers of Jesus would have considered themselves Jews and their message an off-shoot of the Jewish religion.

Paul lived and died believing he was leading the Jewish faith in the right direction.

The Jews of his day didn't really agree.

Act Like An Apostle Already

Acts of the Apostles tells Paul's story most fully and I suggest taking a minute to cruise over there and get the full scoop (okay, it'll take more than a minute).

But here's his deal in a nutshell.

Paul (or Saul, as he was still known then) was a devout Jew who actually persecuted Christians.

Acts says that he was present when Stephen, one of the followers of Jesus, was martyred.

(That's just a fancy way of saying he was bludgeoned to death by big freakin' rocks.) The dude got stoned ta death, man!

Then, one day, as Saul was traveling to Damascus to go terrorize some more Christians, he was “blinded by a light” on the road.

Yeah
 I've been tryna call
 I've been on my own for long enough
 Maybe you can show me how to love, maybe
 I'm going through withdrawals
 You don't even have to do too much
 You can turn me on with just a touch, baby
 I look around and
 Sin City's cold and empty (oh)
 No one's around to judge me (oh)
 I can't see clearly when you're gone
 I said, ooh, I'm blinded by the lights
 No, I can't sleep until I feel your touch
 I said, ooh, I'm drowning in the night
 Oh, when I'm like this, you're the one I trust
 (Hey, hey, hey)
 I'm running out of time
 'Cause I can see the sun light up the sky
 So I hit the road in overdrive, baby, oh
 The city's cold and empty (oh)
 No one's around to judge me (oh)
 I can't see clearly when you're gone
 I said, ooh, I'm blinded by the lights
 No, I can't sleep until I feel your touch
 I said, ooh, I'm drowning in the night
 Oh, when I'm like this, you're the one I trust
 I'm just walking by to let you know (by to let you know)
 I can never say it on the phone (say it on the phone)
 Will never let you go this time (ooh)
 I said, ooh, I'm blinded by the lights
 No, I can't sleep until I feel your touch
 (Hey, hey, hey)
 I said, ooh, I'm blinded by the lights
 No, I can't sleep until I feel your touch

He heard Jesus's voice say: "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 22:7)

Um, good question.

Anyway, later Saul regained his sight, changed his name, and became a devoted follower of Jesus.

Man on a Mission

For the next thirty years Paul traveled around the eastern half of the Roman Empire spreading the good news about Jesus Christ and trying to convince people that Jesus was the Messiah.

By all accounts, he was pretty successful.

He set up churches in Corinth, Phillipi, Galatia, and Thessalonica (and also wrote some pretty fabulous letters to them every once in a while).

It's worth noting that he DID NOT start the church in Rome.

It should also be noted that some say both he and Peter started the church in Rome, which is also incorrect!

He's actually just being a good pen pal to those lucky letter recipients.

Unlike the other main apostles, such as Peter and James, Paul is a lot more interested in spreading the good word about Jesus to the Gentiles (or non-Jewish folks).

He kind of has a knack for it, which is why HE CALLS HIMSELF the "apostle to the Gentiles."

He also **PRIDES** himself on working to improve Jewish-Gentile relations within the churches he writes to.

In Romans, he maintains that people who follow Christ don't also have to follow every single Jewish law (like being circumcised or keeping kosher).

Male converts and bacon lovers rejoice!

Pork chops all the way around!

Plus, you get to keep your foreskin! YAY!

Next Year in Jerusalem

Paul's plan at the end of Romans is to move westward toward Rome and Spain after he brings the collection to Jerusalem.

He's been collecting money from the churches around the eastern part of the Empire and is now looking to deliver it to the center of it all—the church in Jerusalem.

Just a quick drop-off and then onto bigger and better things, right?

But Paul's letter also contains a little foreshadowing.

He's a teeny bit worried about what's gonna happen when he goes to Jerusalem.

He asks the Romans to pray that not only will he not fall victim to some of the anti-Christian forces in the city (he knows they're nasty—he used to be one, after all).

Paul's also nervous that the Christians there won't take too kindly to his offering because it comes from some of the Gentile churches.

Acts tells us that when he does visit Jerusalem, the Christians there do question his Jewish credentials a bit and insist he perform a ritual in the temple to prove to everyone that he loves and upholds Jewish law.

While he's at the temple, the anti-Christian folks spot him and—BAM!!!!!!—within a few days he's been arrested.

Paul eventually makes his way to Rome... as a prisoner.

Not exactly traveling in style.

Acts ends with Paul preaching in Rome while awaiting trial.

And that's the end... or is it?

Paul Is Dead

So, what happened in Rome?

Was Paul executed there?

Was he released to make his way toward Spain?

Did he live to a ripe old age playing pinochle in his living room with other disciples of Christ?

No one actually knows.

The Bible is silent on the subject and church tradition says that Paul was beheaded in Rome in 64 CE when Nero decided to start persecuting him some Christians.

Lots of religious icons and paintings will show him holding a sword, even though we can't imagine he would have been too excited about carrying that around.

That's because, if Paul was a Roman citizen, like it says in Acts 22:25, then he would have been entitled to a quick and (relatively) painless end by having his head chopped off.

Of course, it's also possible he wasn't a Roman citizen (Paul never says so in any of his letters).

If he were an average Joe, he could have died like the other Christians in that persecution.

According to the Roman historian, Tacitus, the Christians were "covered with the skins of beasts [...] torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired" (*Annals* 15.44.4).

The sword thing is looking pretty good right now.

Last Will and Testament

What is epistle to the Romans about and why should I or anyone else in the world care?

When you think of “the first Christians,” do you imagine:

- People running through a field of wild flowers with Jesus?
- Lions falling in love with lambs?
- Guys and gals holding hands skipping down the street?
- Everyone sitting in a circle around a fire singing “Kum baya” and “They’ll know we are Christians by Our love?”

Then we're sorry to burst your bubble, but you're in for a pretty big shock.

See, the beginnings of Christianity were actually messy.

Really, really messy.

While everyone mainly agreed that Jesus was awesomesauce, well... that was about all they agreed on.

Romans is all about these big conflicts. After Jesus was crucified and couldn't settle everyone's squabbles for them anymore, Christians pretty much spent the next twenty years or so fighting about everything he said or did.

Are the Jews still God's right-hand people?

Is it okay to let Gentiles become Christian (because, yuck, Gentiles)?

If yes, then do all these guys really have to be cut or do they get to keep the junk in their trunk that they were born with?

What day of the week should this church thing go down?

And how about keeping kosher?

The whole no bacon, no pork chops, no lobster, no “bat wings thing” or eye of a newt was really a bummer.

Paul spends most of his letter trying to settle all these **fight...arguments, disagreements, or discussions.**

He wanted to have the final word and be the **big cheese.**

Basically, his big goal is to have everyone living in peace and harmony and eating delicious ice cream sundaes together.

No, the sundaes don't need to be **kosher.**

And, yes, they can actually be eaten on Sunday. Sundaes on Sunday's, **Culvers** here we come...

Paul is kind of like the head of “**the Get Along Gang**” or so, he thinks.

He just wants to smooth things over so Christians can get on with the most important thing in the world—being faithful to their main squeeze, Jesus.

Did Romans settle all these fights once and for all? Nope.

Did Romans actually go on to cause lots of other unrelated arguments? **You betcha!**

Sorry.

But really, arguing over whose beliefs are right and whose are wrong is what humans do best.

Poor Paul never even had a chance. But he did like getting right in the midst of the **fray**.

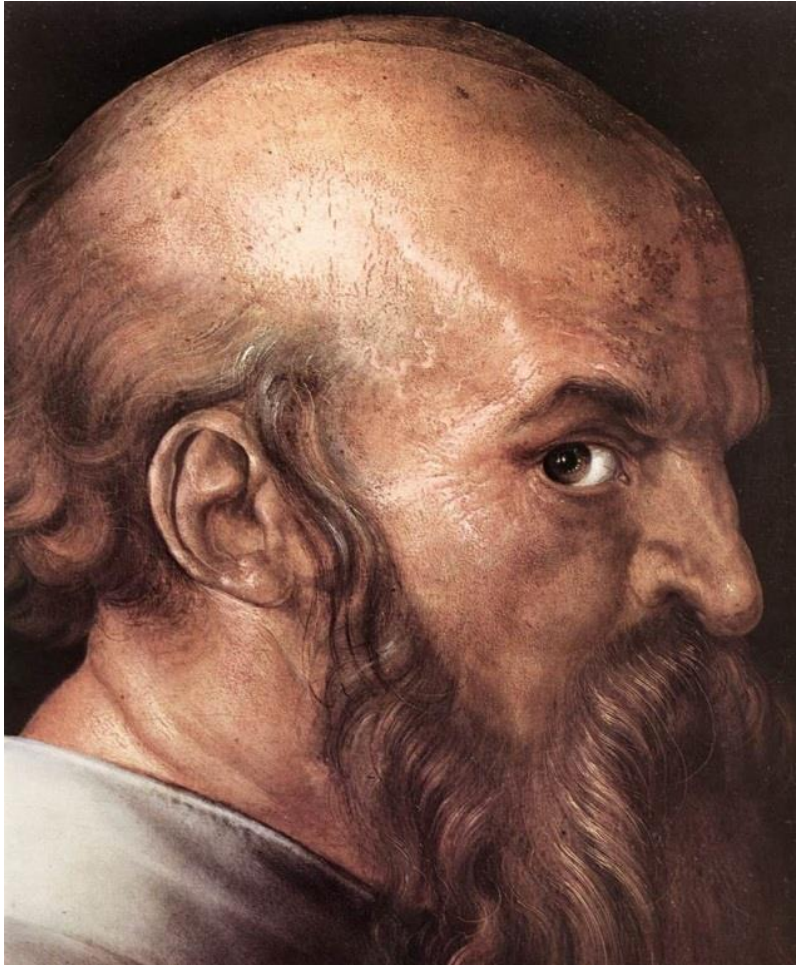
There, **Onesiphorus** sees Paul as “a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.”

So, what did the guy look like?

... **He wears tan shoes with pink shoelaces**

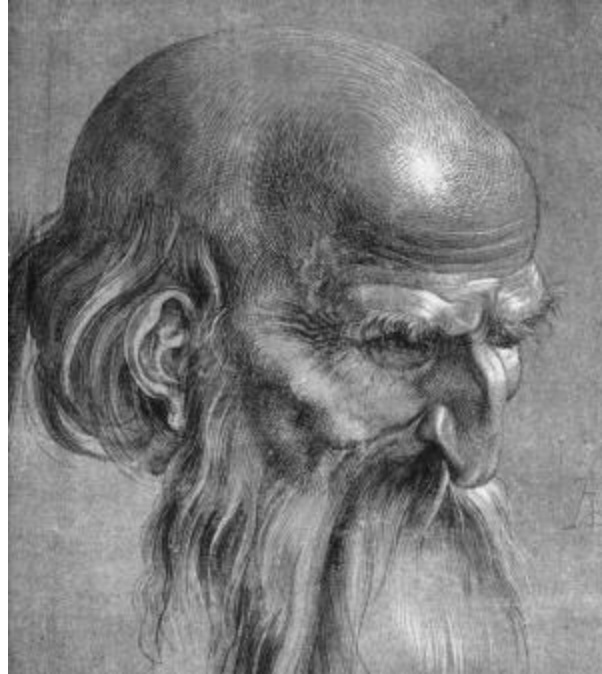
A polka dot vest and man, oh, man
He wears tan shoes with pink shoelaces
And a big Panama with a purple hat band

... **Ooh-ooh, ooh, ooh**
Ooh-ooh, ooh, ooh



**This is one picture...remember there were no
POLAROIDS!
No I-Phones with incredible cameras!
Not even one of those old "BROWNIE cameras!"**





Here's another!

Epistle to the Romans here is a brief summary...

Paul's letter starts with some basic introductions. Hey! Paul here. What up, Romans?

As it turns out, Paul's never been to Rome, but he wants to go. Really, really badly.

He's sending this letter ahead of him as a way of introducing himself... and of sharing lots (and I mean lots) of theological goodies....

Paul's big concern is Jesus.

He died so we could live the good life with God.

All we have to do is believe in him and all our dreams will come true. I'm talking **magical unicorns** and **rainbows** made of **Skittles**. Okay, not really.

It's more like the death of sin and the promise of eternal life with God. That's pretty good, too, right?

And what do people have to do to claim these fabulous prizes?

Just put their faith in Jesus.

But that's why Paul is so down.

It's only been twenty years since Jesus died, and not everyone is faithing it up quite yet.

Come on, guys. Get with the program.

Paul is especially worried about the Jewish people.

See, Paul's a Jew himself, and he believes that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and the continuation of all Jewish life and thought. But not every single Jew accepts this.

Paul spends this entire letter struggling with the idea that non-believing Jews can't possibly be on God's good side.

But he also can't quite shake the feeling that since they're "God's chosen peeps," **the Big Guy** is gonna do something for them.

Paul sure has his fingers crossed.

There is a silver lining to all this non-believing, though.

Because the Jewish people aren't all cool with Jesus, God has moved onto recruiting the Gentiles. Paul's kind of like the apostle to the Gentiles, so he's pretty psyched about this.

He's come out hard in favor of the Gentile-Christians being just as good as the Jewish-Christians.

Paul's also really done them a solid by telling them they don't have to worry about obeying every single Jewish law.

No circumcision?

No kosher food?

No problem.

If your heart is good, you're good. The other stuff is no big deal.

Okay, so everything is looking good, right? Not quite.

The Gentile-Christians in Rome can be a little, well, full of themselves sometimes.

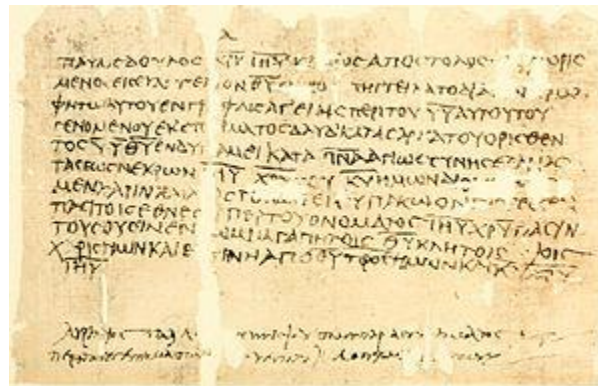
They don't like the Jewish-Christians because they think that God rejected the Jews and Jewish law. No way! Paul tells them.

He wants every Christian, regardless of their background, living in peace and harmony.

Come on, guys. Can't we all just get along?

Paul closes his letter with some helpful advice for the Romans and some shout-outs to his friends in Rome.

And, as always, he gives full credit for every good thing to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Peace. Paul, out.



So, this is what the original letter looked like!

1 Παῦλος δούλος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος, ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ² ὃ προεπηγγείλατο διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφαῖς ἀγίαις³ περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα,⁴ τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν,⁵ δι' οὗ ἐλάβομεν χάριν καὶ ἀποστολὴν εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως ἐν πάσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ,⁶ ἐν οἷς ἐστε καὶ ὑμεῖς κλητοὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,⁷ πάσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἀγαπητοῖς θεοῦ, κλητοῖς ἀγίοις· χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

I know, I know, its all Greek to you!

Πρῶτον μὲν εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ⁸ περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν, ὅτι ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καταγγέλλεται ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ.⁹ μάρτυς γάρ μου ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, ᾧ λατρεύω ἐν τῷ πνεύματι μου ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, ὡς ἀδιαλείπτως μνεῖαν ὑμῶν ποιούμαι¹⁰ πάντοτε ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, δεόμενος εἶ πως ἤδη ποτὲ εὐδομηθῆσομαι ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς.¹¹ ἐπιποθῶ γὰρ ἰδεῖν ὑμᾶς, ἵνα τι μεταδῶ χάρισμα ὑμῖν πνευματικὸν εἰς τὸ στηριχθῆναι ὑμᾶς,¹² τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν συμπαρακληθῆναι ἐν ὑμῖν διὰ τῆς ἐν ἀλλήλοις πίστεως ὑμῶν τε καὶ ἐμοῦ.



Paul starts off the letter like he does all of his letters, with a little hello.

Hey, Paul
 I've been waiting for you
 Hey, hey, hey Paul
 I want to marry you, too
 If you love me true, if you love me still
 Our love will always be real
 My love, my love

"HEY PAULA" Paul and Paula - 1963

Hi. My name is Paul. I am a servant of Jesus. And I am an apostle. He's hinting pretty hard at the fact that he's kind of a big deal.

Paul goes on to offer some short little reflections on **WHO** Jesus is. He throws in a bit of Jewish imagery—Jesus is descended from King David—and Christian language, too—Jesus is the Son of God. Oh, foreshadowing important themes...

Finally, Paul tells us that this letter is dedicated to a **very special little church in Rome**. Let's put this record on.

Paul tells the folks in the Roman church that **he says a little prayer for them every day** and that he really, really wants to visit them.

... The moment I wake up
Before I put on my makeup (makeup)
 I say a little prayer for you
 While combing my hair now
 I'm wondering what to wear now (wear now)
 I say a little prayer for you (for you, ooh)
 Oh, baby

But Paul doesn't just want to see the sights in Rome (**Christians don't actually like the Colosseum much**).

The lights are much brighter there
 You can forget all your troubles, forget all your cares
 So go downtown, things'll be great when you're
 Downtown, no finer place for sure
 Downtown everything's waiting for you...

He's actually hoping he and the church will really hit it off if he visits.

And he's got loads of things to tell them. **Rich and poor, smart and stupid, Gentile and Jew**—doesn't matter. This letter is for everyone. And Paul's gonna lay out all kinds of “kickbutt new wave theology.”

Paul is pretty confident that the Gospel is going to do its good work. **God is going to save everyone.**

Well almost everyone, some of us have been wondering about YOU!

It doesn't matter if they were **Gentile or Jewish** before they became Christian—**everyone will be saved.** This is all because God is so righteous. And **gnarly.** And **totally tubular.**

Quick theological footnote: When he says **God is "righteous,"** Paul just means that God is always looking to do the right thing. Yeah, God is cool like that.

Paul tells us that there's one thing God doesn't like (one group of people he's not going to save): non-Christians.

And Paul knows this **HOW?** Asked my aunt Millie.

These folks know the truth about God, but they've turned their back on him. How rude.

Everything God has ever done all the way back to creating the world has been like **a big huge neon sign flashing "Follow God"** over and over again.

But do these guys listen? Nope.

Instead, they **worship idols** (like Billy Idol?) and **other humans.** They do all kinds of **immoral things.** We're talking **lying, murdering, gossiping, boasting,** and **disobeying,** just to name a few.

Even people who engage in “sexual rituals” with members of **the same sex** are suspect. **Uh-oh!**

(More on that later...)

And God has pretty much just shrugged his huge, holy shoulders and let them go on with their “evil business.”

What's a deity to do?

What's a God to do, when humankind won't listen?

Because of all this, Paul says “**they deserve to die.**”

Harsh, Paul. Harsh.

I can just picture him showing two thumbs up for Christians and then, two thumbs down for the non-Christians...

Paul apparently has been to the Colosseum before.

Down with them!
Down with them!
A brat and a beer over here, please!
Get 'em!
Kill 'em!
You want any peanuts?

Okay, but before we get “all judgmental about others” (wait, didn't Paul just do that?), there's one important thing to remember. **When you pass judgment on someone else, that makes you just as bad as them.** Wait, what?

So, don't do that stuff! Keep your judgments to yourself...

You know those filters in your head? Try using them!

Oh no, you say. That can't be right.

I totally know that **God hates** all these things, so it's fine for **me** to judge the people doing them, right?

I thought God was Love.

Now you are telling me God hates?

Which is it?

Love or hates?

Wrong, Paul says. **(Nice try though.)**

When you judge someone else, it's like you're saying you've never done anything bad. We all know that's not true. (Remember the time you stole that quarter from the lunchroom counter in third grade?)

Basically, the idea is that you shouldn't call other people out for doing something wrong, when you're doing stuff wrong, too.

But judging is so fun...and some people are so deserving!!!!

Look, God is a kind and gentle guy.

He's trying to help you be kind and gentle, too.

But if you spend all your time **getting angry about what other people are doing**, then he can't really make a dent in that.

Anger is a tough armor to crack.

Hatred is worse.

Don't get angry and don't hate!

And once you've filled your heart up with anger, God's gonna have to give that right back to you on Judgment Day.

Sorry, **angry hearts**, it's not looking good for you.

God rewards people **who do good and punishes those who do bad**. It's a pretty simple formula.

So therefore, we should do good, right?

Like all the time.

Like "goody two shoes!"

Paul assures us that it doesn't matter if we're Gentiles or Jews. God sees us all the same way. He has the same rules for everyone. God's so fair and balanced.

And the most important thing to God isn't just that you hear what he has to say, but that you **act on it**.

Hey, wait a minute, is he proposing **good works**?

Good works, good deeds will get in you in God's grace and into heaven...

For example, Jews are supposed to be following Jewish law in order to be good people. But if a Gentile also unknowingly follows the law (and in the process becomes a good person), won't God be happy about that, too? Paul thinks that answer is **a big fat yes**.

The same thing goes for **circumcision**.

Jews who are circumcised have an outward sign of their relationship with God.

But if they don't have a relationship with God in their hearts, what does that **circumcision** really mean?

On the flip side, a Gentile who **isn't circumcised** might love God with all his or her heart. Isn't that person **symbolically circumcised**?

If that's the case why didn't someone tell the doctor I wanted to be symbolically circumcised! No clip-jobs, for me!

Paul thinks it is ok to be "symbolically circumcised"...sure now, he tells me...

Too late, buddy, the deed has already been done, thanks a lot!

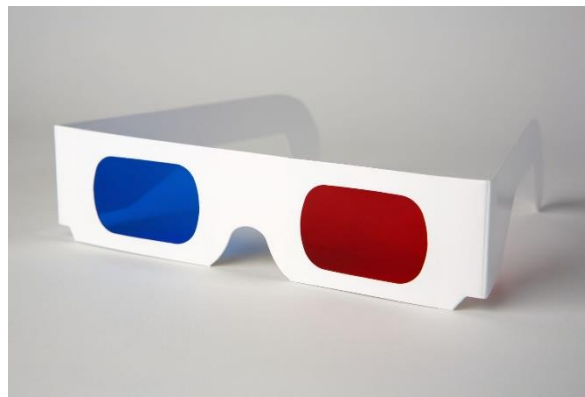
Paul's main point is that **it's not about** what a person seems like on the outside, it's what they **truly feel inside that counts**.

And who would know that?

Only the person right?

And a person who truly follows God will be praised by God because **only God can see what's in our hearts.**

We're guessing he has **special 3-D glasses or something.**



God is such a star!

It's not that Paul's saying that being a Jew who follows Jewish law and is circumcised is not a big deal, because it totally is. It's great actually! Twenty points to the children of Israel! Maybe even more points than that...

Paul tells us that the Jews were **the first people God shared his wisdom and laws with**, so he knows they're cool in the Big Guy's eyes.

Sure, it's true that some Jewish people have been unfaithful to God over the years.

For example: there are all those Jews who still stubbornly refused to believe Jesus is the Messiah. (Not cool, according to Paul.)

But everyone lies.

Everyone sins.

No one really knows God.

Way to bring us down, Paul.

The good news is this doesn't make any difference to God. "The crappiness and all the garbage, and the drama" of the world just reveals "how awesome God actually is."

Sweet. Time for a song break...

Our God is an awesome God
He reigns from heaven above
With wisdom, power, and love
Our God is an awesome God.

Our God is an awesome God
He reigns from heaven above
With wisdom, power, and love
Our God is an awesome God.

Our God is an awesome God
He reigns from heaven above
With wisdom, power, and love
Our God is an awesome God.

Again, Paul stresses that Jews and Gentiles are on the same footing.

No one gets a head start in the "race to salvation."

I bet you didn't know it was a race, did you?

This is basically because **God sent Jesus to save everyone in the entire world.**

Only he can help us stop being **so sinful and jerky all the time.**

Yes, Paul says, Jewish law tells us what sin is and that's super important. (So, don't chuck out those Torahs just yet, guys!)

But “the most important thing now is” that God has sent Jesus.

This is “the natural continuation of Jewish law,” but it's also outside of it. Whoa, Paul's blowing our minds.

Look, basically, **God is going to save everyone** who believes in Jesus no matter what their background was before they came to believe.

Everyone sins. (Including you!) Yep, you little sinner, you!

That means **everyone needs Jesus.** It's pretty simple.

God did all this **for us** because **he's a totally forgiving guy.** (Unlike you, **ahem!** Clears throat again for emphasis, **ahem!**)

I think you probably still have some forgiving to do...

Don't hang on to that stuff...it aint healthy! Forgive and move on! Life is too short...

GOD essentially just erased all our previous sins from his “heavenly ledger” and decided to give us a “do-over.

Now we're “**SQUARED AWAY**” with him again.

Bet, you didn't know God was into golf, did you? Yep, he's an “Old duffer” from way back when...



God believes in DO-OVERS! Yep God just gave you a Mulligan! You lucky stiff, you!

The word Paul uses to describe this over and over again is we're now "**justified.**"

“Just as if I never lied!”

“Just as if I never sinned!”

“Just as if I never _____ (fill in the blank!)”

So really the big take-away here is that **no one** should go around bragging and shouting from the rooftops that they have some “special access to God.”

God gives everyone access to him through Jesus.
Everyone. Even you, reading this...



But you still have some work to do...this isn't a complete freebee! See the reflection in the mirror? Yeah, you!

Salvation isn't easy, nor is it free...it cost.

How does Paul know all this?

Because of **Abraham**. Remember him from way back in **Genesis**? Good, old father, Abraham...

Paul explains that the Bible tells us that Abraham believed in God, and because of this, God thought he was a swell guy.

Awww.

But God didn't like Abraham because of anything special that he did.

It wasn't because he slavishly followed the law and somehow earned God's grace.

And it certainly wasn't because he was an awesome juggler (he wasn't). Nor could he ride a two-wheeler!

God liked Abraham because Abraham had faith in him.

God is **pretty big** on people putting their faith in him.

Want more proof, Paul asks?

Well, just remember that God was cool with Abraham before he was even circumcised. (Clip, clip, ouch!)

In fact, the main reason that Abraham got circumcised was **to mark himself with a sign of his new relationship with God. A tattoo might have been a whole lot cooler...**

Or maybe a simple piercing...nothing through cartilage ...

An earlobe would do, just fine... 😊

So, Abraham is basically a stand-in for everyone who has ever believed in God but has not been circumcised. Ouch again!!!!!!)

Gentile-Christians, we're looking **DIRECTLY** at you.

Paul is really clear on this point: like Abraham, no one has to work to get on God's good side.

You just gotta have faith.

Really, Paul says, if people could just go around doing nice things and win God's favor, then what would be the point of believing at all?

When God promised Abraham that he would have lots of kids and that he would go on to be "**the father of many nations,**" Abraham didn't doubt God.

Sure, Abraham was over a hundred years old.

And his wife, Sarah, was pretty much barren.

But Abraham still believed it would happen. Because you know, with God, anything is possible...And you know what? It did. Now that's some strong believing.

Abraham figured, if guys like Robert DeNiro, Bernie Ecclestone, Mick Jagger, Ronnie Wood, Al Pacino, Clint Eastwood, Richard Gere, Jeff Goldblum, Rod Stewart and Alec Baldwin could do it and not die of a heart attack in the process, he too, would give it a whirl...

Because with God...well, you know the rest...

So there, Paul says.

Faith! Abraham had faith in God's promises.

That's all he had to do. Just believe.

The same goes for everyone else.

If someone **believes in Jesus**—that he died so that our sins could be crossed off God's ledger and that he came back to life so that we could be square with God again—then that person is **a-okay by God**.

(Maybe...)

This is going to be good....hehehehe

Paul looks down on Christians bragging about their accomplishments, he does say that there are **a few instances** where it's good to get **a little boastful**.

And OMG, he should know...

There is no one that boasts more in the entire scriptures than our old buddy Paul...

He can brag with the best of them. As a matter of fact, if you look up the word BRAGGART in the dictionary...guess whose picture, you're gonna see there?

Yep. I nice big head shot of Paul of Tartar sauce. Bald head, big schnoz and all. Smile Paul, you're on candid camera!

Basically, Christians can brag about **WHAT** God has done for them and **THEIR HOPE** that one day they'll be hanging with him in Heaven.

Note: the word is "**hope**" not "**certainty**."

They can also brag about their suffering because, hey, what doesn't kill you only makes you stronger, right?

Plus, who doesn't want to hear a good **I-was-almost-stoned-to-death-for-my-faith** story?

Oh, and of course, Christians **should talk up** what God has done for them by sending Jesus. This is a big one.

Christians should actually probably be talking about this a **lot**. Paul certainly does.

See, Paul says, back before Jesus, people were **terrible and sinful**, but God loved us so much that he wanted to help us.

Just think, **if God loved the whole world back when we were just huge jerks to him**, just think how much **MORE** he digs us now that we're walking the straight and narrow.



He definitely hearts us now. A lot.

Paul is about to go "**ALL NOSTALGIC**" on us and he is going to take a walk down "**memory lane**."

Okay, but how can just one person's actions (i.e., Jesus' death) change the whole world? Good question, right?

This is not a rhetorical question, Paul's got something up his sleeve!

Well, Paul tells us, just look at **Adam**. Of course, Paul would tell us. This guy knows **everything**. He's got an inside track or something...and when it comes to the scriptures...remember this guy was a Pharisee of Pharisees, he knows a thing or three...

Okay, we're listening...

See, "silly Adam" just [couldn't resist taking a little nibble of that fruit](#) (even though that was literally the one thing God asked him not to do).

Had to go there, didn't you, Paul...way back to the beginning. Back to Genesis. Back in time to pre-history.

Back to the garden.

Back to "**ORIGINAL SIN.**"

Was Paul perhaps a **Roman Catholic** at some point?
Asking for a friend...

And because **Adam** couldn't follow a simple direction, he and **Eve** and **everyone else** that came after them got served **one big eviction notice** out of Paradise.

Oh, and they got to die, too. Nice work, guys!

It's all your fault.

You started it...

Not it! (Remember when you were a kid? And you didn't want to be the one that was "IT") **Not it! Not me! I didn't do it! Nope not me. Someone else...**

After that, **everyone sinned** because of Adam's sin. (How much sense does that make, if you think about it?)

If everyone jumps off **the cliff** are you?

If everyone jumps in the **lake** are you?

You are such "a little follower," you! **LEAD** don't follow!

In fact, sin grew and grew until the situation was about a million times worse than it had ever been.

Even having Jewish law around to follow didn't make it any better. It was a "**sin-plosion.**" (That sounds like terminology made up by the meteorologist's on channel 12!)

But then God sent Jesus into the world. (Boy, did we luck out or what?)

And Jesus gave up his life to wipe away all the sins that came before him. **All in a day's work.**

Just like that! Snap!

So, one guy brought sin and death into the world.
Thousands of years later, another guy brought salvation and eternal life to the world.

Well, we know which one we're addressing the thank you card to. DEAR JESUS...

Okay, **so it's cool to sin, right?**

After all, Jesus did die to erase our sins, so we can just let him work all that out after we get done coveting our neighbor's wife over here...

Thank God for **MULLIGANS** (“Do overs!”)



Um, no, Paul says (and probably **rolls his eyes**).

Look, he explains if you're baptized in Christ, then you're baptized in his death.

Wait, what? Is that a stretch or what?

Oh, I get it, he is talking baptism, as in being **held under the water, total immersion, dying to sin, three times**

for emphasis sake! and being reborn a new creature in Christ Jesus, I get it now...

Let's break it down: when you're baptized, you **symbolically die** and are reborn as a new person. **(GOTCHA!)**

That's because **Jesus died and rose again**. (OIC)

When you die, you leave all your sin behind. Now, you're **fresh and new and super holy**. Very nice. Yay, me!!!!

So, what happened to **my old sin**? Can I give that stuff away to whomever I choose? Again, asking for a friend...

But wait... you still might want to sin because **people kind of love sinning**. **C'mon now, you know you do!**

Paul tells "Christians" that they need to keep presenting themselves as this new person.

Don't go back to being the old person you were.

Don't be a slave to sin.

You are "free at last!"

Okay, but since Jesus kind of does away with Jewish law and not everyone has to follow it, isn't sinning actually kind of fine?

Come on, guys, Paul says.

This time he's really rolling his eyes.

You can only pick one—either you want to serve sin or serve God.

You can't do both.

Besides, what has sin ever gotten you? A nice car? A good job? A hot girlfriend? Or BF? (Let's not be sexist here!) A home on a lake with a hot tub and jacuzzi and a sauna! Sweet!

Okay, but did sin ever get you eternal life with God?

Didn't think so.

Oh, friends, Paul says, "**the wages of sin is death.**"

That Paul, he can be such a downer!

Why work hard to earn death when God is giving out eternal life for free through Jesus?

Act now... even though **supplies are unlimited.**

(Picture the old blue light special at K-Mart!)



Paul goes on to talk more about **the role of Jewish law**.

This guy can talk and talk and talk...I tell ya! Blah! Blah! Blah! This guy talks until he is blue in the face, and then, he keeps on going...

He says that the law **only applies** to people who are **alive**, but that Christians are **dead to the world** and **dead to the law**.

So that means, I can **run red lights? Steal money from the banks? And...still get to heaven?**

Thus, they/ **WE** don't have to obey all those fussy rules anymore. Remember there were 613 Jewish laws that had to be followed every single day.

Now, not so much! **Sweet! AWESOME! Groovy!**

It's kind of like when a man and woman get married—they **have** to stay faithful to each other. But if the husband dies, all bets are off. Huh?

Now the wife can remarry and it's a-okay with everyone.

Plus, she gets double wedding presents.

Basically, Paul's saying that because of Jesus, **Jewish law is dead**. Christians have remarried and belong with God now. He's their dream guy!

Ummm, Paul, where did you come up with this stuff?
Honestly!

Before all that, we were **slaves to the law and sin**, but now we're free to run barefoot in a meadow with the Holy Spirit. How exhilarating.

Now, wait just a second, Paul... it sounds like you're saying **Jewish law is sinful**.

Oh no, Paul explains. **You're misunderstanding!**

Okay, we're listening...I swear, this guy, just likes to talk and talk, and talk some more...

The law isn't sinful, but it does point out all kinds of sin to us... making that sin look **oh-so delicious**. (like a delicious apple?)

See, if no one had ever said, "Don't steal stuff," would we have even thought of stealing? **Um, Paul, you're losing us.**

Look, **the law is good**, Paul says.

Don't get him wrong. It's doing its best, but really it can't hold a candle to **the power of sin**. Ooooh, what's **the power of sin?**

Well, it just means that sin has **major pull over people**.

We may try to follow the law and do good things, but we just keep getting drawn back towards doing bad things.

Blame it on the sin. What about blaming it on the devil?

The devil made us do it! (I like that one!) that way its not my fault!

See, we're just weak, sad little mortal beings who can't help but do bad things.

And sin usually looks pretty good to us.

But the good news is, there's someone who can get us off **this crazy merry-go-round of sin.**

You guessed it—it's **Jesus!**

It's **always Jesus.**

So, Jesus has come, **sin got its butt kicked**, and we're not slaves to the law. Yay us!!!!!!!

Now, Paul explains, **Christians live under "the law of the Spirit."** **Is that Pauline doubletalk? Is he funning us?**

This is kind of like the laws of the Torah, but without worrying about following all **613 individual rules.**

Circumcision, for example, is optional (which is good news for male converts). Ya think?

In Jesus, God did what the law couldn't—he punched sin in the face and reunited the world with him again.

Nice work, God. Go, God!

Non-believers don't share in this, though.

They just walk around like ordinary, puny humans, thinking of ordinary, puny things.

They can't possibly be thinking of God or following his laws because they don't believe in Jesus. Why? Are you sure? Umm, didn't they follow the laws before Jesus or at least try to? (Again, I am asking for a friend.)

But believers have lives and hearts that are filled with the spirit of God. Does this mean to say, that “others” do not?

And ONLY BELIEVERS are going to be “best buds with God forever” because of it.

So, doesn't God care about the rest of them? Should he figure out something in his plan to include everyone?

Believers have been **adopted into God's family.**

Oh boy, here we go...

Paul is going to keep talking and talking some more...

They're his sons and daughters and he would totally do anything for them. ANYTHING?

(If anyone wants to get into Harvard, now's the time. We hear God writes a pretty awesome recommendation letter.)

Sure, it's true, Paul says, people are suffering.

But all that's fine. (Easy for him to say!)

It's gonna work out.

Really.

Plus, later, the rewards are going to far outweigh all the bad stuff everyone has been going through.

Fingers crossed, right?

Every part of creation is waiting for God. He speaks with such certainty!

Soon, **everyone and everything is going to be set free** from sin and death and evil. It's all going to be awesome-sauce. Ummm, excuse me, including non-believers?

Hey over here?

With my hand up...

Call on me...

And the people who are **tight with God now**—well, **things are gonna work out for them big time**, Paul tells us.

Again, he seems so sure of himself...

Seriously, God sent his son to die for us.

Don't you think **he'll help us with all the other stuff we're going through? The Big Guy always has your back.**

It doesn't matter if Christians are **arrested or persecuted** or **condemned** or even **killed**—nothing is going to separate them from the love of God.

Ummm about that killed thing...and the condemned thing...and even the persecuted thing...can we move on?

So, everything is good and happy now, right?

Wrong. Paul is sad. Very, very sad.

See, Paul is a Jew who believes in Jesus, but, unfortunately, **not all Jews are like him.**

Even though Jesus and his original followers were Jewish, and their message was first given to the Jewish people,

Christianity is increasingly becoming a Gentile religion.

Jews are just not getting the message. Maybe try email next time? **Facebook? X? Spaces? TikTok? YouTube? Billi? Whatapp? Instagram? Wechat? Snapchat? Messenger?**

This puts Paul in a real pickle.

He thinks **everyone needs to believe in Jesus**—both Jews and Gentiles—so what's going to happen to all the Jews who don't believe?

Let's see...

First, the Jewish people are obviously very special to God. He gave them the **patriarchs** and the **law** and his

promises. Tons of good things have come from them. Bagels, LOX and cream cheese, for example.

But, Paul concludes, **the ones who haven't accepted Jesus aren't truly God's people then.** (Does anyone else have a problem with this conclusion?) This means that being born Jewish isn't enough to get in good with God.

You can't just follow God's law; you have to **believe** in his promise. (Which one?) (There are many promises made in the scriptures!)

Paul goes **back to Abraham** again.

Abraham **believed** God when he promised that he would have a son.

And that son, **Isaac**, was the second born, but God liked him better. (**Ouch!** So, God “plays favorites?”)

Way to play favorites, Lord. Way to pick and choose!

The same goes for **Rebecca**, who had twins, **Jacob** and **Esau**.

Even though Esau was the first-born, God took a shining to Jacob. Hmmmm....God? Or, the Parents? Or the grandparents? Whose PERSPECTIVE is this?

So, is God allowed to choose sides?

Isn't that like totally unfair?

Nope, Paul replies.

God can like or choose whoever he wants to.

He's God.

It's sort of part of the deal.

Hmm... still kind of seems unfair just a bit...I am not sure that I like the God of Paul...

Hey, Paul says, **who are you to question God?**

He created the world, and he can do what he wants with it.

When a potter makes a clay bowl, does the bowl start complaining, "Oh, no! Why did you make me a cereal bowl?"

Milk makes me chilly."

No, it doesn't. It just shuts up. (So what are you saying here?)

So, if God lets evil people be evil in order to show off his wrath, what's it to you? Huh?

And maybe God smiles on certain people sometimes.

He can totally do that if he wants to.

Um no, he can't. He is fair and just and good!

Paul, you've got some splainin' to do!

Even the Bible says that God loves non-Jews and that not all Jews are going to be saved.

We're sure that's in there somewhere! If it is, I'd bet anything it is in the Early Christian Writings, and in the Pauline writings, to be sure...

Some Gentiles, who weren't trying to do right by God, have now ended up believing.

And some Jews, who are supposed to be doing what God asks, have rejected him.

Hey, don't get Paul wrong.

He really wants all the non-Christ loving Jews to be saved. Boy, he really doesn't act like it...

He knows that they **really love God**, they're just a tiny bit mixed up about a couple important things.

For example, Jews mainly focus on **the saving power of Jewish law**. Umm, because that's what they were taught for thousands of years...

They think living **by the rules of the Torah** is going to get them in good with God.

Wrong, Paul says.

All that is over with.

Christ is the law's end all be all. He's the fulfillment of everything it says, in fact. **Game. Set. Match.**

Yikes!

Still harsh, Paul.

Now, all you have to do is **say you believe in Jesus** and then actually believe those words in your heart and you're golden. It's that simple.

Is that like saying the "JESUS PRAYER"...and your good to go?

"Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior." Every fundamentalist out there knows this prayer, and then they are considered saved!

See? There isn't really any difference between **Jews and Gentiles. God will save them both... if they only call on him, [maybe](#).**

Okay, but the big problem is that you can't call on someone you don't believe in.

We're guessing it's because you keep dialing the wrong number.

And why don't the Jews believe?

Paul's glad you asked. Of course he is, it gives him an opportunity to go on talking...

It's not because they haven't heard the good news. They have.

People have been telling them all about it. Paul is one of them, in fact. No one's had much luck.

And now, because the Jewish people “have turned their back on the good news,” God is giving salvation away to the Gentiles.

Even, if, they haven’t turned their back on God???????

Meanwhile, **the non-believing Jews** are being totally **disobedient** and **rude**. Come on, guys. Get with the program already.

Does anyone else think Paul can come off as being antisemitic for a Semite?

Okay, so God has thrown aside **the Jewish people**, right? It's **Gentile time!**

No, no, no! Paul says.

God most definitely **has *not* rejected the Jews.**

After all, they're his peeps.

His **CHOSEN PEEPS!**

His main squeeze.

His chosen crew.

Paul should know.

He's one of them, after all.

He tells us the story of Elijah to demonstrate.

Oh boy, first Adam, then Abraham, and now Elijah, that Paul sure does know his way around the **HEBREW BIBLE!**

When Elijah's whole community had turned against him and started worshipping other gods, God told him that it was cool.

See, God still saved **a few of those people** for himself.

A few that hadn't totally gone over to **the dark side**.

The same is true now, Paul says.

Some Jews have been chosen for salvation because God is just oh-so-nice like that. It's true.

As a whole, the Jews have **stumbled a bit** when it comes to believing in Jesus.

But Paul is careful to note that doesn't mean they've fallen flat on their faces. **No sireee.**

Sure, they did trip over their own feet while they were supposed to be running the ball in for the touchdown.

But **God hasn't permanently benched them.**

He's just brought in the second team.

Gentiles—start warming up. You're in. Huh?

Look, it's like this.

Jesus came to bring **God's message to the Jews**. Now, because **the Jews don't all believe in him**, God has decided to spread his message out to **non-Jews**.

Isn't this a matter of **someone's perspective**? I am thinking, Paul's perspective...

Paul says that God did this **to make the Jews jealous**.
(Really)

Is this game playing...

God is, apparently, a 14-year-old girl. OUCH!

No lightning bolts, please....

On the plus side, **the Jewish people's loss** is the world's gain!

Now **everyone gets a chance** to be saved. You make it sound like the lottery! C'mon buy a ticket, someone's gotta win!

Thanks, non-believers!

This next section Paul addresses especially to the Gentiles who won this **special believing sweepstakes** because **the previous winners declined the prize**.

No!

Boo!

Paul knows he's kind of known as "**the apostle to the Gentiles**" even though he's a Jew.

But that's fine with him.

Maybe his outreach to the Gentiles will make his fellow Jews **jealous. Maybe that jealousy will lead them to salvation.**

And that would be awesome. Oh, Paul, really????

After all, the Jews are like a tree with holy roots. Each individual person is a branch on that tree. But some of the branches have died and fallen off. Oh, that's sad.

OMG now he's going to talk about grafting...

In their place, God **grafted on some wild olive branches** that didn't belong on the tree (the Gentiles).

Yep, that's right where he went alright!

They're growing and fitting in nicely though so it's all good.

The one problem is that sometimes these new branches can get a bit cocky.

But Paul reminds them **not to get too full of themselves.**

(OMG, how hollow that must ring, coming from Paul, isn't that like the pot calling the kettle black?)

After all, they're not the ones supporting the tree.

That's a job for the **Jewish roots.**

Anyway, they only got a spot on the tree because some of the branches fell off.

They should **be grateful they're even on there.**

Huh?

I am not sure, I like this guy!

Don't forget—God didn't go easy on the original branches.

He may go a little crazy with the hedge clippers next time he hears the new branches gloating.

That's kind of God's deal.

If he wants to chop off all the foreign branches and graft his favorite, most cherished branches back on, he can.

He's God.

He can do stuff like that. (Yikes, again, just saying!)

So don't get cocky, Gentiles. (Says Paul, one of the cockiest ones of them all!)

Don't think you're smarter than you are.

Right now, the non-believers who are Jews are not your friends in Christ, but don't forget that God totally loves them.

He goes way back with him.

He's promised them things.

And God's promises are always **the no-take-back kind.**

He will show them **mercy** because showing people mercy is one of God's favorite things.

Hmmm...

Now that Paul's finished all that, he also has some ideas for Christians who really want to live in harmony with each other and be close to God.

Christians should give their whole being over to God so he can fill them up with everything that is good and wonderful and all around awesome in his eyes.

They do not want to be doing what everyone else is doing (it's so conformist), but they want to be **transformed** into new people who can intimately know God.

Sounds like a plan.

Some pointers to start: don't get cocky, keep a level head, and use common sense. Good ideas... we should be taking notes.

Paul says that Christians are like the different parts of the body.

Every body part—**arm, leg, toe, gall bladder**—has a **different function**, but they all play an important role in keeping your body moving.

I am starting to feel like we're in biology class 101.

Everyone has different gifts, too.

Some people are good at predicting the future, some at ministering to others, some at teaching, some are generous, some are natural leaders, and some are just plain compassionate.

All these gifts are important and a-okay with God.

Overall, Christians should do what's loving and give a big roundhouse kick to the face to everything that's evil.

Figuratively, of course. (Of course!)

They should love each other a lot, serve God, be patient when bad things happen, welcome strangers who need their help, be kind to people who are out to get them, and basically live in harmony with everyone and everything.

Oh, Lord, kumbaya. Everybody hold hands, get in a circle and lets sing!

As for people who tick you off, don't be filled with anger and vengeance.

Leave that up to God.

After all, Paul quotes, "**Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.**"

Is that another perspective?

Do we want God to avenge us?

Are we sure?

You should even be cool to your enemies.

If they need food, give it to them.

If they're hungry, feed 'em, if they are thirsty crack open an ice-cold Coke and hand it over.

Really just kill them with kindness, Paul says.

It's the only way that **you might make them feel ashamed of what they're doing to you.**

Basically, Paul sums all this up with a final piece of advice: don't get taken over by evil.

Instead, take over the whole world with good.

Totally.

Ummm Paul, I am not sure about you...I have to read on...

The Jewish People

Paul is proud to be a Jew...obviously...he is equally proud of his Roman citizenship. This guy is just all things to all people...

But he's also totally depressed that not every single Jew in the world has accepted Christ like he has. He wants it all, I guess. He's got a little bit of a zealous tendency about him...

There are two distinct groups of Jews that Paul is addressing in Romans.

Jews who don't believe in Jesus and Jews who do.

He has different things to say about each of them since they're both getting it wrong in different ways.

What can I say?

Paul really likes "finding fault with people." So, what is your biggest fault right now, you've got ten seconds to come up with it...GO!

Non-Christian Jews

Eww

The Hebrew Bible talks about “a Messiah” that would come and finally fix “ALL the problems” the Jewish people have been having over the years.

Here’s a sampling of just what he will do:

He'll bring all the Jews out of exile.

Bring back law and order.

Get rid of sin and evil.

Reward good people.

And restore the Temple “to its former glory.”

Yeah, he's gonna be pretty great. And he’s got a lot of work ahead of him...

Then there were other things...

He will enter through the “GOLDEN GATE”

He will ride a steed, a white war horse.

He will be religious, secular, with one blue eye and one brown eye, just kidding...

Paul thinks that Jesus fits that bill rather nicely.

Except for that eye thing...

He's pretty positive that “Jesus is the fulfillment of thousands of years of Jewish tradition, law, and prophecy,” and that as soon as he tells people this, adoring crowds will come flooding through his doors.

Any second now...

But many Jews in the first century didn't see it this way.

Though there were “some Jews” who did put their faith in Jesus (like the original disciples and Paul), the majority of Jewish folks “weren't very interested” in throwing their lot in with this Jesus guy.

They had better things to do, like eating, sleeping, working and raising a family...

They'll just keep waiting for “the real messiah” to show up, thank you very much.

This makes Paul pretty darn “sad”...and a little bit mad.

He's been trying to convince the Jews “for years” that Jesus is the best thing “since sliced bread,” but he just isn't making much headway.

These Jews can be a stubborn lot, and something tells me, it is not only the Jews!

And Paul can't understand this.

Why would his “own people turn their backs on THEIR messiah?”

The guy who was sent by God to bring truth and peace to the world?

Sheesh.

What's a Nice Jewish Boy to Do?

Paul is “really struggling throughout Romans” to explain why God's chosen people don't seem to be choosing him right back.

Paul is still holding out lots of hope for the Jewish people, though.

They've got lots going in their favor:

The “good news of Jesus” was given to the Jews before anyone.

So there's always that...

Sweet!

But...first!

Jewish people have tons of advantages because of their “special relationship with God” that goes way back to the very beginning.

That's Genesis, right there.

Jews rock!

God promised his people that he would “save them” and so now he totally has to. No takebacks, Lord!

Okay, so God is cool “with the Jews.”

But you kind of have to scratch your head with Paul and others, what's up with everybody else?

He digs them. They're his main peeps. God's gonna keep his eye out for them.

But on the other hand, Paul also believes that “the only path to God is through Jesus.”

THE ONLY PATH...

There is no other...

You have to believe “in him” in order to get to God.

That seems to leave these Jewish non-believers out.

But it also includes: Hindu, Taoism, Islam, Shintoism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Baha' i Faith, and Confucianism to be more accurate. So, how could this have happened?

Well, Paul has got “some ideas”:

Maybe the Jews who rejected Jesus aren't really Jews deep down in their heart of hearts.

Oh, that's a thought. Huh? Paul, what you been smokin'?

Or maybe God never really planned to save ALL the Jews.

Paul thinks that God might have hinted around this somewhere in scripture. Huh, again?

So now, God is picking and choosing among his chosen people?

Hey, old blue eyes – you're in.

Sorry, baldy!

It's also possible that God went and hardened people's hearts.

God's a pretty big fan of doing this for some reason.

Exodus, anyone? Remember what he did to old Pharaoh?

It could happen again..

Yeah, I think not...

Yeah, one of those things could totally be it.

The main point is that Paul sort of wants to have it "both ways."

No, "non-believing Jews" won't be saved because they're just "hearers of the law" not "doers of the law."

But on the other hand, there is no way in heck God has rejected HIS people.

Wrap your mind around that one. Which one is it Paul?

In the end, Paul has to conclude that someday, somehow, **God will make it right.**

Apparently, it is above Paul's pay grade! And, more importantly, above **OURS!**

Maybe one day, once all the **Gentiles** believe in Jesus, then God will bring the Jews on board...and others, as well...but until then...

We wait...

Jewish-Christians

There's another group of Jews who actually does believe in Jesus, and Paul is pretty psyched to have them in the fold.

He's one of them, after all, and he does think that Jesus came to bring the truth about God to the Jewish people.

So, all is well with these guys, right?

Not quite. This is Paul. So that means, "things" are going to be a bit "complicated!"

There are some issues.

Specifically, with the "**Gentile Christians.**"

Oh-boy, here we go...

Many of the “Jewish Christians” see their faith in Jesus as “an extension of their Jewish faith.”

Jesus + one.

Jews + one.

As a result, they think that anyone who believes in Jesus also has to follow Jewish law. Hmmm.

No bacon? Ever?

It's the Torah, y'all, so let's start showing it “some respect.”

And showing it some love...

All 613 mitzvot of it.

Plus the original ten...

There's also some pretty serious “oral laws” floating around...

All these “rules” are a bit much “for the Gentiles...” and a bit foreign...

Kind of strange...

Some of the biggest conflicts are popping up around “circumcision and food.”

Especially the circumcision laws...can't you just see those guys over there, covering their junk and shaking their heads?

Many of the "Jewish Christians" (who are naturally already circumcised on the eighth day) think that the "Gentile Christians" need to get "snipped, cut and bleed a little" in order to join up.

Of course, they would...they want to know if we are committed or not...

It is a commitment, I tell ya...

A little snip will do ya'

We imagine potential "male converts" saying, "Yeah, I like Jesus and all, but you want me to do WHAT to my man bits?" (The junk in my trunk? Ummm, no!)

What's an Apostle to the Gentiles to Do?

Paul settles the issue in true Pauline style... by "agreeing with everyone."

Attaboy, Paul!

That means that, while Paul thinks "Jewish law is the bomb" and people are totally right to be following it, he also doesn't think "you have to require everyone to keep every single little commandment" in order to get in good with Jesus.

Living “a life of faith” is THE MOST IMPORTANT THING.

So, do you have to be circumcised?

No way: "Real circumcision is A MATTER OF THE HEART—it is spiritual and not literal" (2:9). It's also WAY less painful.

BUT WILL THAT KIND OF RHETORIC SELL IN ZION?

In other words, it's what's “INSIDE YOUR HEART, not in your pants, that counts.”

YAY!!!

Do you have to “KEEP KOSHER?” You know, food and all?

Nope: "Those WHO abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat, for God has welcomed them."

In other words, “Back off, guys.” God doesn't really care what you're eating!

Let's stop beating each other up over ham sandwiches and bacon bits.

Throughout the letter, Paul is “really suspicious” of anyone who thinks “they're better than someone else.”

That definitely goes for Jewish Christians.

If they think that they're earning extra points with God by checking off Torah boxes, then Paul thinks they're completely missing the point.

And that is not gonna be fun to explain come judgment day.

Paul sums all this up rather nicely: "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him."

Preach on, brother Paul.

Preach on.

PREACH!

And of course, you know he will.....

The Gentiles

You know who these guys are!

They don't call Paul "**the Apostle to the Gentiles**" for nothing.

Paul is a Jew, but he really "DIGS those Gentiles."

That's probably because they've been making his job so easy.

And, he is their apostle!

While many Jews are “less than thrilled about Jesus,” the Gentiles are surprisingly “into him.”

Paul takes this and “runs with it... around half the Roman Empire.”

Go Tell It to the Gentiles

It makes sense that Paul would work well with Gentiles. After all, he grew up outside of the Jewish homeland in Jerusalem.

He was just a kid in the Diaspora.

And though he had a Jewish education, he was also “exposed to the Greco-Roman way of life” and would have had contact with “non-Jews” throughout his life.

So, when Paul sees that the Jews aren't exactly “welcoming Jesus with open arms and smelly armpits,” he comes up with other plans.

This Paul guy is just **all things to all people!** And he likes it that way, it works for him.

It works quite well, actually...

Paul believes that, while God “**originally planned**” to bring salvation to the Jewish people through Jesus, now he's gotten tired of waiting and has moved on.

Sorry, guys.

Apparently, the LORD can be a wee bit impatient at times...

You've gotta get up **pretty early in the morning** to catch “that salvation train.”

It doesn't matter to Paul that the Gentiles don't follow Jewish law and teachings.

"Gentiles," he says, "who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it."

Huh???

Say that again!

English, speak English, Paul, maybe it reads better in Greek, but I seriously doubt it...

We'll go with them.

For Paul, this means that there is only "one divine law" and that **everyone "instinctively knows it."**

(Apparently, Paul was not a student of Jeremiah!)

Jeremiah could have taught him a thing or two...

The Jewish people have it written down in books, but the Gentiles have it written on their hearts.

We do?

They do?

Where?

I mean, **we do, we do**...God's good like that. (All the time!)

Really, Paul says, God is the God of "**everyone.**"

Including the people of Islam, the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Confucianists, the people of the Baha'i Faith, the Shinto, Zoroastrians, and all the rest...

He wants the **Gentiles to be saved** just as much "as the Jews," and if he has to "bypass his chosen people to get there," so be it.

Paul is one determined guy, to gitterdone!

They're Not Off the Hook

But does that mean that Paul has only praise and sunshiny smiles for the **Gentile Christians**?

No way. Not Paul!

The situation in the Roman church was actually sort of a "unique breeding ground" for **discord** between Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians.

It all started when, in **49 CE, Emperor Claudius** "threw **all the Jews out of Rome.**"

Ouch!

According to "**ancient sources,**" this was because "the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Christus."

Oh, they probably mean Christ.

Yep, that Jesus guy was trouble alright!

As in Jesus Christ.

Oops!!!

So, all the Jews get “**chucked out**” and aren't able to come back until the emperor dies in 54 CE.

For five years, the “**Gentile Christians**” are running the show in the Roman church.

But when the Jews return home, things get “tense.”

Very tense... (I'm sure!)

All of a sudden, **two different groups of Christians with two different backgrounds are coming together and trying to live in harmony. Uh-oh!**

It's not easy.

That's where Paul comes in.

He settles some “scores” when it comes to “**circumcision and following kosher laws.**”

Basically, he wants everyone to just stop “**freaking out**” over this stuff. **EVERYBODY, RELAX!**

Don't worry, your buddy, Paulus is here!

I've got this!

Good old Paul sees two separate groups. Way to divide and conquer, Paul.

There's us and them.

One group is the “**weak in faith**” even though he calls those who don't keep kosher laws “**we who are strong,**” he stresses that the “weak in faith” are not any less awesome in God's eyes.

No. Clearly not.

That's right. **God shows no partiality, right Paul?**

And ah, neither should we, right?

The Gentile Christians shouldn't get “too full of themselves.”

Paul is clear that even though the Jews have “fallen short,” that doesn't mean the Gentiles are better than them.

He also warns the Gentiles “**not to brag** about their superior position in God's family.” HUH?

Umm, what superior position?

They didn't get this post because they've done anything special; it's just because **God is so generous and amazing and an all-around great deity.**

Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

Good Question, guys!

Basically, Paul's big goal in Romans (and in all his letters, really) is to help all Christians live in **peace and harmony**. Kum baya (you know) is playing in the background somewhere! Let's all hold hands and get in a big circle.

For Paul, that's part of what the collection that he's bringing to Jerusalem represents. (Think money, honey!)

Here he has money that he's gathered from Gentile churches around the Empire. GENTILE! Not Jewish!

Now he's bringing it to support a majority Jewish church in Jerusalem because "the Gentiles have come to share in [the Jews] spiritual blessing, they ought also to be of service to them in material things."

Paul knows that the Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians need to learn **"to live together"** if this Jesus thing is ever going to take off.

In the end, he gives his life trying to bring the two sides together.

That is one dedicated guy.

You go, Paul of Tarsus!

Jesus Christ Super Star!

Paul never actually met Jesus while he was alive.

But that doesn't stop him from becoming **"the foremost authority on his life and death."**

Go figure.

Not Another Gospel

Paul's Jesus is pretty different than the Jesus of the gospels.

I am thinking that is not a good thing...

For starters, the letter to the Romans was written nearly **20 years before the gospels** were ever committed to parchment.

Paul doesn't tell any stories about Jesus's life.

He also doesn't seem very concerned with anything Jesus ever said or did either.

What's up with that?

Well, it's mainly because the people he's writing to—the Roman Christians—would have already known all that stuff.

They're followers of Jesus, so presumably they've heard all the stories about how all-around amazing Jesus was.

Pauls mostly focused on discussing what the life of Jesus means for Christians.

He's taking it to the next level.

He Died & Rose Again

(Jesus - class level 200)

Really the only biographical detail from the gospels that Paul refers to is the idea that **Jesus died and then rose again**.

But Paul moves past all the gory details to answer the question: **What does it all mean?**

For Paul, Jesus's death and resurrection are **the defining parts of Christ's life.**

They make Jesus who he is and reveal his **incredible love for the entire world.**

Sure, Jesus **said a lot of nice things**, but when push came to shove, he gave up his life out of devotion to God. That's so hardcore.

"We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him."

"It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us."

"For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

Okay, we get it. Jesus died and rose again on the third day.

But why?

Even though the traditional answer to the question is, "**Jesus died for our sins,**" this isn't something that Paul ever says.

Though Paul says **Christ died for us** "while we still were sinners," he doesn't say it was **because we were sinners.** A subtle difference.

In fact, he says that Jesus's death proves God's love for us.

Awwww.

But, Paul says, it's not enough to just know that Jesus died because he loved us.

You've got to participate in his death, too.

Say what?

Life in Christ

Paul says over and over again that Christians have **died to their old way of life and are reborn in Christ Jesus.**

Don't worry.

It's metaphorical.

(Mostly. Remember the martyrs?)

Baptism is one symbol for this:

We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

I've heard this somewhere before....

Christians are supposed to be transformed through the death and resurrection of Christ.

They're supposed to be living completely "new lives" as "risen people."

They're like shiny **new creations.**

Paul uses the phrase "**in Christ**" to sum this up a lot.

NEW CREATIONS IN CHRIST...there I said it, er well, typed it...

It's actually one of his favorite sayings. Don't believe me?

"You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and **alive to God in Christ Jesus.**" (6:11)

"There is therefore now no condemnation **for those who are in Christ Jesus.**" (8:1)

"Greet Andronicus and Junia... [who] were **in Christ** before I was." (16:7)

So, what does all that mean? For Paul, **living a life "in Christ" means being radically transformed.**

Doing better.

Living better.

Being honest.

Being righteous.

Loving and forgiving others...

Everything you do is now oriented towards what God and Jesus want for you.

It's a tall order.

You Gotta Have Faith

What to do with all this information about Jesus?

Paul has one answer: **believe**.

Everyone—and he means everyone—needs to be **putting their faith in Jesus**:

"[God] justifies the **one who has faith in Jesus**." (3:26)

"It will be reckoned to us **who believe in him** who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." (4:24)

"If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (10:9)

And yes, that means **if you do not believe in Jesus**, things are not going to work out so well for you.

Paul is constantly struggling with this issue.

Sure, **God loves and desires the salvation of all, but he's not going to give it to you unless you get on board with his Son**.

All-a-board!!!!!!

The Jesus train is about to depart from Gate 3A.

All-a-board!!!!!!

Someone sure likes being withholding.

Is that fair?

Is that right?

In the end, Paul seems to think it is.

Believe or perish.

To him, it's a really easy choice, really.

And Paul will boldly say this to the entire world.

Believe in Jesus **or die** in your state of sin and unrighteousness.

Your choice.

You choose.

You pick.

You decide.

Community

Communities are never nice, neat packages of getting along, are they?

And that's been the case for millennia.

In Romans, Paul makes it pretty clear that the community of Jews in his time found themselves in a bit of a messy situation.

Not only is Paul struggling with his belief that the Jewish people are no longer in God's fold, but he's trying to get a bunch of Jewish and Gentile Christians to get along.

And let's put it this way: it's no easy task.

Questions About Community

1. According to Paul, who is part of God's community?
The Gentiles? The Jewish people? The Christians?

2. How does Paul think should Christians settle their difference in the community?
3. In Romans, is there a clear difference between God's community and a more secular community?
4. Why is Paul writing to the Roman community? Why not people closer to home?

Good questions, right? So do you have the answers?

Humility

God loves us.

That's what Romans says, at least.

So, we should be shouting that from the mountaintops, right?

Well, not exactly.

Paul's really big on everyone acting very humble.

Don't brag about the things you've got.

Aside from being a rude thing to do, it makes it seem like you did something to earn these nice things.

And that's just not the case, according to P Dawg.

God's love?

A clean slate when it comes to salvation?

Yeah, you didn't do any of that.

So, keep the boasting to a minimum, okay?

Questions About Humility

1. According to Paul, is being a bragger the worst quality a Christian can have?
2. Why does Paul think pride is such a bad thing?

3. According to Paul, is it ever okay to boast? (We need to know so we can hang up our Perfect Attendance certificate without seeming full of ourselves.)

Love

According to Paul's letter to the Romans, God's love is the bomb diggity. It's all-encompassing, never-ending, and enduring. In fact, he loves us so much that he'd let his son die for us. Yeah, he's pretty into us—but he still gets annoyed with his people sometimes. Maybe it was something they did? Oh, right. Turning their backs on Jesus. That is high on God's list of pet peeves and will get you cut off from the divine love pretty quickly.

Questions About Love

1. Paul delves into a couple of metaphors to explain God's love. Which one is the most effective?
2. Is God's love for his people conditional? Must they believe in him in order to win his love?
3. Paul says love is the guideline for all Christian life. What does that mean in practice?

Sin

In Romans, Paul tells us that sin means moving away from God and doing things that aren't part of his plan for your life. Before Jesus, this was a big problem. Now, because Jesus came to earth to defeat sin, we get a reprieve. Time to kick sin's butt to the curb! Sigh. If only it were that easy.

Questions About Sin

1. Does Paul define “sin” in his letter to the Romans? How?
2. Does Paul say that Jesus died for our sins or that his death conquered sin? Is there a difference?
3. According to Paul, are sins different depending on your background? That is, are sins different for Gentile Christians vs. Jewish Christians?

Transformation

Paul is really big on change.

According to the letter-writing man himself, Christians become totally new people when they put their faith in Jesus.

They die to their old lives.

They die to sin.

They become like happy, fresh, new babies out there in the world.

But as humans, we know that change ain't easy.

For most of us, change is pretty tough.

Questions About Transformation

1. Why is transformation so important for Paul? What do Christians get when they live "in Christ?"
2. According to Paul, if you die to sin, does that mean you can never, ever sin again?
3. How does Paul's advice in 12:2 not to conform to the world jive with his advice to obey authority in Chapter 13?

Genre: Epistle

Paul's writing is a letter.

Don't worry—epistle is just another word for a letter.

But Romans is different from most letters.

It's actually even different from Paul's other letters, in that the bulk of the message doesn't address any specific questions or concerns from within the Roman community.

In other words, it's not clear that the Romans have actually asked Paul to write to them at all.

I am sending you a letter whether you want one or not, because my name is Paul. So there. Take this letter and read it, or else!

Classic Paul

Some scholars have referred to Romans as a "letter-essay" because it seems to be more of an extended dialogue or diatribe on issues that are running through Paul's head at the moment.

The point of all this is clearly to convince the Romans that Paul knows what he's talking about and to win some support for himself once he finally arrives in Rome.

Good luck with that, Paul.

What's Up With the Title?

The authors of the Early Christian writings didn't title their works.

Maybe they thought that was a little too fancy. But later generations of Christians, who liked fancy names, needed something to help them tell which book was which.

They couldn't use the first line—"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ..."—like they had done for other books, so they went the simple route.

The most commonly used title for this one—The Epistle to the Romans—pretty much says it all.

It just means that this book of the Bible...

- is a letter.
- was sent to the Christian church in Rome.

Sometimes you'll see alternative titles for this one like "The Letter of St. Paul to the Romans" or more simply just "Romans."

These all mean the same thing.

Paul wrote it.

The Romans read it. (or didn't it) hehehe

Then it wound up in the Bible.

Easy peasy lemon squeezy.

Setting

The setting is important.

The setting helps us to set the context.

So, here we go...

Roman Empire in the Mid-1st Century

Romans is a tricky one when it comes to setting.

The title kind of makes it seem like the letter will refer to **Rome** left and right.

But the letter writer, Paul, has actually never set foot in that neck of the woods. (at least not yet)

He's probably sitting in Corinth, near the southern end of Greece, as he writes the whole thing.

Maybe he's even enjoying a non-kosher gyro while he thinks.

Instead, Paul is writing about a *situation* in the Roman church around the middle of the 1st century.

Paul is in his SITUATION ROOM.

It's not exactly clear what's happening in this church because Paul doesn't address it head-on, but his letter does give us some clues.

Let's check this out together...and see what we can find out...

Time and Place

Romans was written around the middle of the 1st century, sometime between 55 CE and 58 CE.

It's the oldest of Paul's authentic letters, but it also predates the **Gospel of Mark** (the earliest gospel) by a couple of years.

That makes it one of the oldest pieces of writing in the Early Christian Writings...

Impressive.

Paul and the recipients of his letter are residents of the **Roman Empire**.

The Romans were pretty much the top dog at that time in the world.

You didn't mess with them. (Just ask Jesus of Nazareth!)

Well, you could, but then they'd probably just crush you like a tiny bug.

They didn't handle dissent very well.

As far as religion goes, the Romans had what's been called an **imperial theology** in place.

This included all kinds of different gods that which Roman citizens were expected to pay homage.

It was for the greater good and all that jazz.

Roman religion was also kind of interesting because it declared that the emperor was the Son of God, Lord, and Savior of the world who had brought peace to earth.

Naturally, Christians had some other ideas about who could better fill out these titles.

The first followers of Jesus lived their entire lives under the thumb of the Roman Empire.

Paul was no different.

And the Christians he's writing to are in the same boat.

In fact, they live in the capital city—Rome.

Roman Fever

By the time Paul was writing to the Romans, their church had already become a prominent one.

We don't know how the church was founded or by whom. It certainly wasn't by Peter and Paul as Christians later claimed (Paul himself says in his letter that he's never been there).

But somehow a group of Christians had sprung up there and seemed to carry some weight with other Christians.

That doesn't mean their church was trouble-free though.

No way.

Jewish-Gentile Tensions

In 49 CE, all the Jewish folks were kicked out of the city of Rome.

One ancient source said this was because "the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Christus."

Some scholars think that this may be referring to Jesus Christ and that the trouble could have been disturbances

caused by fighting between non-Christian Jews and Jewish-Christians.

It's a rumble in Roma.

Get your tickets here for RUMBLEROMA!

Back then, if someone got on your nerves and you were the Emperor of Rome, you just kicked them out of the city.

Or had them put to death.

So all Jews were expelled from Rome and weren't able to return to the city until **Emperor Claudius** finally died in 54 CE and **Nero** ascended to the throne.

Nero would go on to cause more trouble for Christians later.

So, there was that to look forward to.

When the Jewish Christians came back to mix with their Gentile brethren after five years in exile, we can assume things didn't go too smoothly.

The Jewish Christians would have seen themselves as direct heirs to the message of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

Meanwhile, the Gentiles would have seen the Jewish people as predominately rejecting Christ and therefore being passed over as God's favorites.

It was awkward, to say the least.

But it is so important for the setting and the context of the letter.

The background is everything...

Much of what Paul is addressing in his letter to the Romans is about Jewish and Gentile relations, both inside and outside of Christianity.

So, it's possible that there's some tension between Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds that he's heard about and decided to take on.

Oh, that Paul.

He's always trying to mend fences.

Or to sit on them!

Headed for the Holy Land

It's also possible that Paul is a little nervous about his upcoming trip to Jerusalem.

Some scholars think that Romans is kind of a practice run for the kind of arguments he'll have to be making once he gets to Judea.

I bet Paul would really like to take one vacation where he didn't get in a huge fight with someone.

But then again, maybe not, Paul could be quite the pugilist.

He may also be trying to shore up some support in Rome in case he runs into trouble in Jerusalem.

And indeed, when he does, he's arrested and shipped off to Rome where we're told he lived for several years on his own, preaching and teaching around the city.

Fingers crossed that it helped a little.

He's Got Connections

It's clear from the end of Paul's letter that he knows a ton of people in Rome.

He name drops twenty-six all together:

(Let's see who they all are...and good luck with the pronunciations by-the-way)

Phoebe (from FRIENDS)

Prisca

Aquila

Epaenetus - ep-e'-ne-tus

Mary (Not "that" Mary)

Andronicus

Junia

Ampliatius - am-pli-a'-tus

Urbanus

Stachys – stach -is

Apelles

Aristobulus

Herodian

Narcissus

Tryphaena

Tryphosa

Persis

Rufus

(The mother of Rufus)

Asyncritus

Phlegon

Hermes

Patrobas

Hermas

Philologus

Julia

Nercus

(the sister of Nercus)

Olympas...

I am guessing it's probably because he wants to recommend himself to the community and invite those people he named to go ahead and vouch for him.

Hopefully, they were willing.

The first person he names, Phoebe, would have been the one to physically carry the letter to Rome.

She would have then been responsible for reading it aloud when the church was gathered and even answering questions about it or explaining some of the more difficult passages.

We're thinking she had her work cut out for her.

After all, Romans ain't easy.

God the Potter

In the 1st century, clay pots and jars were all the rage.

Why?

Well, they held food and drink and allowed items to be carried more easily.

Oh, and clay pots didn't do a lot of back-talking.

Paul thinks we can learn a lot from them.

Bowls of Clay

One of the most famous images from the Bible of God as a potter shaping his people out of clay.

Paul pays homage to it in Romans:

But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?

This verse is clearly a shout-out to the Hebrew Bible, where the same kind of language is used. Jeremiah has the famous story of the Potter's House.

Isaiah also has several references to God as a sassy potter:

"Does the clay say to the one who fashions it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles?'" (Isaiah 45:9)

"Shall the potter be regarded as the clay? Shall the thing made say of its maker, 'He did not make me;' or the thing formed say of the one who formed it, 'He has no understanding?'"

Okay, this verse seems a little harsh, but the metaphor is a good one for Paul's purpose.

A pot is an inanimate object. It would be ridiculous for it to suddenly spring to life and start criticizing the guy who's spending all this time making it, right?

It is just a pot, after all.

It owes its whole existence to the potter and it's not supposed to get all uppity about the way it was made.

Take that, pot.

Pot of Questions

Of course, this metaphor is also a pretty unsatisfying answer.

It sort of indicates that Paul has reached a rhetorical dead-end.

He's got nowhere else to go, so he's settled it all with a "because God said so" argument.

Not exactly a winning line.

The verse also implies that questioning isn't a healthy part of growing in faith.

After all, if we never second guess God, how can we grow and develop as people of faith? It's also worth note that Paul himself engages in all kinds of questioning.

He even seems to anticipate others' questions about God's motives.

If all this doubt didn't have a place, why include it at all?

After all, without “a sassy pot” like Paul, there would be no Epistle to the Romans.

Shout-Outs

The Book of Job ends with a similar, "Who are you to question God?" argument as God scolds the long-suffered Job from a tempest.

There are various churches around the country named after God the Potter.

And it's just a coincidence that **Harry** (a pseudo-Christ figure) has the last name Potter.

Sure it is...

The Olive Tree

Olive trees were native to the Mediterranean area where Paul and the Romans lived.

Not only did they grow fruit that was used to make all kinds of important oils, olive branches also traditionally represented peace and harmony.

In Romans, Paul has God hack an olive tree to bits.

Not exactly the peace and tranquility we were expecting.

Family Tree

Unfortunately, Paul knew nothing about the following sites:

Genealogy.com

Ancestry.com

Americanancestors.org

1950 census

Census.gov

Census records

Military service records

Immigration records

Naturalization records

History hub

My heritage.com

Paul is trying to warn the Gentile-Christians not to get so high and mighty about their new place in God's family.

They may think they've got one over on the non-believing Jews, but the truth is, God still digs them.

Paul writes:

If the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.

So, the Gentile-Christians need to remember not to brag about their good fortune.

They've also got to realize that the Jewish faith is like the roots of their tree.

Without it, they would be nothing.

Time to start showing some respect, guys.

There's always the MORMON CHURCH for more family tree records!

Don't Make Him Use These Shears

Paul also continues with a tiny threat (just a tiny one):

Do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you [...] And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into

a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Yowza. Yep, that's Paul.

Another strong message.

Sure, the Jews have been cut off God's family tree, but God can also bring them back any time he wants to.

God's a pretty good gardener, in case you're wondering.

As it turns out, the Gentiles don't even belong on this tree.

According to Paul, it's native to Israel, and it's not natural that they—the "wild" branches—should be growing on it.

God has been generous enough to graft them on where they didn't belong, but they better watch out. If they step out of line, they'll end up like the non-believers.

Lying in a heap of twigs on the ground.

Shout-Outs

The Bible is filled with references to God, the Great Pruner:

"The Lord cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed in one day." (Isaiah 9:14)

"Go up through her vine-rows and destroy, but do not make a full end; strip away her branches, for they are not the Lord's." (Jeremiah 5:10)

John's Gospel has a reference to God bringing out the pruning shears. "I am the vine, you are the branches [...] Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned." (John 15:5-6)

The Body of Christ

Anyone who's ever had a broken foot knows it's pretty tough to get around without the help of that appendage.

We take our bodies for granted when they're working well, but when something goes wrong, we see how much we need every single bit of ourselves to function.

The same is true for the Christian community.

At least according to Paul.

We Are One Body

Paul uses the **metaphor** of a person's physical body to describe the way that Christians must work together:

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the

giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Basically, Paul is saying that we're all like different body parts.

We each have our own job to do, but we need to work together to keep this thing going.

Some people are more like a heart, beating blood through the body.

Rock That Body

Don't be so quick to, walk away
 Dance with me
 I wanna rock your body
 Please stay
 Dance with me
 You don't have to admit you, wanna play
 Dance with me
 Just let me rock you
 'Til the break of day
 Dance with me

Guy time, but I don't mind
 Just wanna rock you girl
 I'll have whatever you have
 Come on, just give it a whirl
 See I've been watchin' you
 And I like the way you move
 So go ahead, girl, just do
 That ass shakin' thing you do

So you grab your girls
 And you grab a couple more
 And you all come meet me
 In the middle of the floor
 Said the air is thick, it's smellin' right
 So you pass to the left and you sail to the right

Don't be so quick to, walk away
 Dance with me
 I wanna rock your body
 Please stay
 Dance with me
 You don't have to admit you, wanna play
 Dance with me
 Just let me rock you

'Til the break of day
Dance with me

I don't mean no harm
Just wanna rock you girl
Make a move, but be calm
Let's go, let's give it a whirl
See, it appears to me
You like the way I move
I'll tell you what I'm gonna do
Pull you close and share my groove

So you grab your girls
And you grab a couple more
And you all come meet me
In the middle of the floor
Said the air is thick, it's smellin' right
So you pass to the left and you sail to the right

Don't be so quick to, walk away
Dance with me
I wanna rock your body
Please stay
Dance with me
You don't have to admit you, wanna play
Dance with me
Just let me rock you
'Til the break of day
Dance with me

Talk to me boy
No disrespect, I don't mean no harm
Talk to me boy
I can't wait to have you in my arms
Talk to me boy
Hurry up 'cause you're takin' too long
Talk to me boy
Bet I'll have you naked by the end of this song

So what did you come for?
I came to dance with you
And you know that you don't want to hit the floor
I came to romance with you
You're searchin' for love forever more
It's time to take a chance
If love is here on the floor, girl

Hey
Dance with me
Yeah
Come on baby

Don't be so quick to, walk away
Come on dance with me
I wanna rock your body (I wanna rock your body)
Please stay

Come on dance with me
 You don't have to admit you (you don't have to admit), wanna play
 Dance with me
 Just let me rock you
 'Til the break of day
 Come on dance with me Talk to me boy
 No disrespect, I don't mean no harm
 Talk to me boy
 But I can't wait to have you in my arms
 Talk to me boy
 Hurry up 'cause you're takin' too long
 Talk to me boy
 Bet I'll have you naked by the end of this song

Don't be so quick to walk away
 (Just think of me and you)
 Don't be so quick to walk away
 (We could do somethin')
 Don't be so quick to walk away
 (I like the way you look right now)
 Don't be so quick to walk away
 (Come over here baby)

Are you feelin' me?
 Let's do somethin'
 Let's make a bet
 'Cause I gotta have you naked by the end of this song

Just a little JT (Justin Timberlake) to make your day!

So that's pretty easy.

But Paul takes this a step further and calls individual Christians members of the body of Christ.

What does he mean by that?

Well, it's hard to say.

Some people think that it means we become a part of Jesus through our belief in him.

Others think it only refers to the church and that you have to be a member of a specific Christian church in order to be part of Christ's official body.

There are lots of different interpretations.

It just depends on which member of the clergy you ask.

What's clear is that Paul wants to say that we're all related to each other and all in this together.

Peace, love, and fully-functioning body parts for all.

Shout-Outs

Sex Drugs And Violence• In the Eucharistic meal, the bread is sometimes referred to as "the body of Christ." But be careful: this means something different from what Paul is saying.

The Catholic Church also refers to its members as "the mystical body of Christ." Does this mean unicorns are allowed to join?

Every Epistle Has a Rating I am going to call this one - PG

Romans is pretty vanilla.

It's light on violence (Paul seems to be a bit of a pacifist, in fact) and drugs don't show up at all.

There is one passage where Paul talks about men being "consumed with passion" for other men.

But that's about as scandalous as it gets up in Paul's house.

The Final Word

(Almost)

Paul promised the church members at Corinth that he would visit them again as soon as he had the opportunity, and it was not long after sending his last letter to them that the opportunity came, and he was able to spend several months with them. During this time, probably in the latter part of the year 57 A.D., he wrote a letter to the church in Rome, the most ambitious of all his letters and the only one in which he presented a “systematic account of “his” understanding of the gospel.”

Because he had not visited the church in Rome and was unfamiliar with their local problems, the letter was not written in the form that he used in his earlier correspondence with the other churches. Instead, it is a carefully prepared statement of what he regarded as the essential elements of the Christian religion. Paul wanted the gospel proclaimed throughout the then-known world, and it seemed most appropriate that he should not only visit the church in Rome but gain its full support for the missionary program that he envisioned.

We do not know how the church at Rome was started, but it existed during Paul's life, and there were good reasons for believing that it would soon become one of the leading Christian churches of the world. Paul wanted the Roman church to have firsthand knowledge of the gospel that he preached, but unable personally to visit its members in the immediate future, he set forth his convictions in a letter addressed to the Romans.

Parts of the sixteen chapters in the Epistle to the Romans are so detailed that a full explanation of Paul's meaning would require a large volume of Analysis.

The main substance of the letter can be summarized briefly by stating the answers given to a number of pertinent questions: What is the gospel? Who needs it? Why is it needed? What is the nature of salvation? How is it achieved? What difference does salvation make in an individual's life? What difference does it make with reference to society as a whole? Many other points are discussed in Romans, but these questions are sufficient to indicate the letter's general character.

The gospel, we are told, is “the power of God unto salvation,” for in it the “righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith.”

Man is a sinful creature who follows his own heart's desires and is powerless to change these desires by himself alone. Only through the power of God, working in cooperation with the human spirit, can these desires be changed and brought into harmony with the divine will.

Jesus' life illustrates the way in which the power of God can work in and through a human life, thus enabling a person to overcome evil temptations, which are always present in the world. The same power that enabled Jesus to overcome temptations is also available to all those who

have faith in him. "The faith" by which God's righteousness is revealed involves beliefs but also includes something that grips the entire personality and finds expression not only in what one thinks but in feelings, attitudes, and actions.

"The salvation" of which Paul writes is salvation from "the power of evil" that entices man to sin against himself and God.

"Salvation means a transformation of one's nature" so that what one wants to do will coincide with what ought to be done.

This salvation is needed by everyone, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Salvation is just as necessary for the Jew as it is for the Gentile, and necessary even for those people who feel that they do not need it, for they may be the ones who need it most.

How well people think of themselves is determined by the standard that they use in judging themselves. Anyone who measures himself by "the righteousness of God" will know that he falls short and needs improvement.

"The salvation" of which Paul speaks is not something that will automatically make a person's character equal to "the righteousness of God," but it will move the person in that direction and keep bringing him ever nearer to that goal. But, again, it is important to know that "this salvation is available only to those who recognize their need for it and who are receptive to the divine power that is constantly being offered to them."

In his discussion of the way in which salvation is to be achieved, Paul presents the same arguments that he used in his Epistle to the Galatians.

He emphasizes that salvation is not brought about by efforts on the part of the individual to observe the requirements of the Law. It makes no difference so far as this point is concerned whether the laws are human or divine in their origin. Laws of any kind are powerless to make people good, evidence of which can be seen in the state of society as it existed in Rome during Paul's life.

The Romans boasted of "the superior quality of their system of laws." Although their laws were among the best that the nations of the world had known up to that time, Roman society had become notoriously corrupt. The state of this corruption is indicated in the closing verses of the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

"Concerning corruption," Paul argues that Jews are not better off than the Romans.

The Romans have had their human laws, and Jews have had divine laws, but in neither case have the laws changed the desires of humans or transformed their natures from that which is evil into that which is good.

"Only by faith" can a transformation of this kind occur. In this connection, Paul writes about "justification by faith."

Having pointed out that "no one will be justified in [God's] sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin," he goes on to say that everyone is "justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ."

And again, he says, "For we maintain that "a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."

"People are in need of justification because they are estranged from God." They are not living in harmony with their own best interests, which is equivalent to saying that they are not in harmony with the divine will.

"Justification" is that which overcomes the estrangement and puts people on the right track, a process that happens when the Spirit of God takes possession of one's heart and life.

A person's desires are changed, and a "new creature" emerges, which is what Paul means by "salvation."

Having developed his argument concerning the means of salvation, Paul supports his position by referring to Abraham, as he did in his letter to the Galatians.

Abraham's faith was "credited to him as righteousness"; by faith, those who are his spiritual descendants can be saved. Jesus is the supreme example of faith in that he was a human being in whom the Spirit of God was manifested more completely than in any other person.

In this respect, Paul thinks of Jesus as "the ideal man" in the same way that "Adam" was regarded as the symbol of the human race. Just as in Adam we all died, so in Christ are we all made alive. Adam's disobedience illustrates what happens in the lives of all human beings, and Jesus' triumph over the forces of evil illustrates what can happen when the Spirit takes possession of a person's entire nature. This point, Paul insists, is the true meaning of Christian baptism and symbolizes the death and burial of one's sinful nature and resurrection into a new quality of living.

Paul's own experience with the Law when he was studying to become a rabbi is described at some length to demonstrate again the impotence of the Law in contrast with the power of faith to transform one's nature.

Trying to achieve salvation through obedience to the Law was indeed a miserable type of existence, comparable to having a dead person strapped to one's own body. In this state of affairs, a person is a slave to sin, as Paul notes: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." And again, "Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."

Under these conditions, Paul cries out in the name of humanity, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" The answer is that deliverance

comes through faith in Jesus Christ: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."

"The effects of salvation" will be manifest first in the changed life of the individual and then, as this salvation takes place in increasing numbers, in society. The life of the Spirit that frees one from bondage to the Law does not give one the license to sin, nor can laws legitimately be violated just because they conflict with one's immediate desires.

The Christian will be a law-abiding citizen whose freedom consists in the fact that he no longer wants to act contrary to laws. He will do what is right because he desires to act that way, not because he does it from a pure sense of duty or as a means of gaining a reward.

With reference to the future of the Jewish people, Paul expresses the hope that they, too, will be included with those who are saved through the gospel.

Since the gospel is of divine origin and the great heroes of Israel achieved righteousness through faith, that the Jews would reject the gospel seems strange. When they refused to accept it, the opportunity was extended to the Gentiles. However, Paul does not envision a complete break between Judaism and Christianity. He believes that the Jews eventually will come to accept the gospel since God is not willing that any person should perish but that all might be saved.

The closing part of Paul's Epistle to the Romans contains instructions on the manner of living.

Paul tells the Christians in Rome to have respect for the civil government: "The authorities that exist have been established by God." He does not mean that Christians should obey the civil laws when these laws conflict with the laws of God but rather that Christians should not attempt to hide their conduct from the rulers nor escape the punishment that the state inflicts. Earthly governments are not perfect, and some laws are bound to be unjust. Nevertheless, laws preserve order in society, and Christians should abide by them. As in the other letters to different churches, Paul asks the Christians in Rome to contribute to the fund that he is gathering for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem.

In no portion of the Early Christian Writings is the dynamic and universal character of Christianity set forth more clearly than in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, evidence of which can be seen in the fact that so many of the revival and reform movements in the course of Christian history have been started and promulgated by a restudy of this portion of the Early Christian Writings.

For example, in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther's commentary on Romans was an important factor in the promotion of the Protestant Reformation, and in the twentieth

century, when Karl Barth published his analysis of Romans, a new era was introduced in the contemporary interpretations of Christianity.

Paul's letter to the church in Rome is without question one of the great documents in Christian literature. It has furnished the inspiration and guidance for many of the important developments that have taken place in the life of the church during the past and in all likelihood will continue to do so in the future.

The dynamic character of the gospel as Paul understands it is illustrated in the introductory portions of his letter, where Paul refers to the gospel as something that is powerful: "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

The gospel is more than the acceptance of a set of speculative ideas, even though these are not necessarily excluded; it is the righteousness of God, an active force operating in the lives of people who are ready and willing to receive it.

Available to all those who recognize their need for it regardless of their religious backgrounds, the gospel does for those persons who are willing to accept something that they are wholly unable to do for themselves: produce within them a changed nature so that the desires of their hearts will coincide with what they ought to do.

"The universality of the gospel" is exemplified in the way in which it completely transcends all distinctions between Jew and Gentile. Among the early Christians, as well as in other communities, certain people believed that salvation was only for the Jews.

Paul's letter to the Romans addresses a church whose membership is composed of people from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, and he wants to set forth the meaning of the gospel in terms that will be intelligible to all of them.

Because he is familiar with both Judaism and Hellenistic culture, he uses concepts drawn from each of these sources to communicate his version of Christianity.

Thus, we find him using the terminology of "Jewish eschatology and apocalypticism," as well as the language of the "mystery cults" and other forms of Gentile religion, to explain his conception of the real significance of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

His use of terms drawn from such different sources was not without its dangers: His readers might very well interpret these terms in a manner that was other than he intended. He did not want to convey the idea that the use of these terms in connection with the Christian religion was exactly like what either the Jews or the Gentiles had been taught. Rather, he used them to distinguish similarities that would aid in their proper understanding.

“Salvation,” as this term was used by the Jews of Paul's day, primarily refers to “a future event when the kingdoms of this earth will be brought to an end and the new age identified as the kingdom of God will be established.”

“The saved” will be those who are not destroyed at that time but who will be permitted to live under the new order of things.

Although Paul does not reject this view entirely, he couples with it the idea that salvation is something to be achieved here and now, as well as in the future.

Being saved from yielding to evil temptations is achieved not by “conformity or obedience to laws” but “by faith in the righteousness of God,” manifested in the life of Jesus the Christ.

In support of this conviction, Paul quotes the Hebrew Bible prophet Habakkuk, who said that “the righteous will live by his faith.”

Paul's use of the word “faith” is somewhat different from that of the ancient prophet, for Habakkuk was speaking about his belief concerning the future that was in store for those who lived in obedience to the Law, or commands, of God; Paul is discussing salvation that is apart from the Law.

Thus, we see how Paul uses a familiar Hebrew term to communicate to his readers a concept that was in some respects new to them.

In his discussion of the need for salvation, Paul implies what has often been called “the doctrine of original sin.”

The Adam of the Genesis story is generally interpreted as a reference to all humanity.

The same tendency toward evil present in Adam is also present in every human being.

Yielding to these temptations brings about an estrangement between an individual and God.

To explain the way in which this estrangement can be overcome, Paul draws analogies from customary court procedures and from concepts used in the mystery cults. He shows how all humans are guilty before God, and in this connection, he speaks of “justification and redemption.”

When the sinner acknowledges his guilt, he is accepted by God, and past sins are no longer held against him.

Justified in the sense that the estrangement has been overcome, the former sinner is now in accord with the divine will, which does not mean that he will never sin again, but

he will continually be aware of his need for improvement and will seek divine aid for its accomplishment.

To explain the change that takes place in life when a person experiences justification and possesses the same spirit present in Jesus, Paul uses “the language of the mystery cults.”

Just as “the heroic redeemer of these cults” experienced a death, burial, and resurrection, so Christian baptism means a death of one's old nature, a burial, and a resurrection in which one walks in a newness of life.

Got all that?

If your head is swimming...it is because of Paul... his logic, his understanding, his theology...and the way he attempts to win bonus points for Christianity...if your head hurts, you are in good company...sometimes his arguments actually are circular.

He is well worth the read.

You may agree with his logic, or you may not, but Paul was indeed a man to be reckoned with. Something tells me he would never back down from a good discussion or argument.

