

# Going Deeper with Romans



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## Going Deeper with Romans 2020

- Session 1    *Introducing the questions; Paul and the Church in Rome*  
The Apostle and his Audience (Rom 1.1-17; 15.14-16.24)
- Session 2    *The Human Predicament; Righteousness, Peace and Reconciliation*  
Paul's Gospel Part 1 (Rom. 1.18-5.11):
- Session 3    *The Story of Salvation*  
Paul's Gospel Part 2 (Rom. 5.12-8.39):
- Session 4    *God's Choice of Israel*  
Interlude or the heart of the letter? (Rom. 9.1-11.36)
- Session 5    *Advice for Living*  
Putting the method to work (Rom. 12.1-15.13)

### *Learning Objectives:*

By the end of the module you will have:

- Engaged in detail with the text of Romans
- Have an understanding of Paul's core message in Romans
- Developed skills in using a method to interpret a text
- Be more confident in reading and interpreting a whole New Testament letter

### *In advance of the module, please read:*

- The text of the letter itself (don't worry if you don't understand it – the aim is to get at least a little sense of the flow of the letter as a whole)
- The introductory material on Romans from Cooke *New Testament* (printed below)
- The Five Narrative Critical Questions of a Text, and apply the questions to Philemon (also printed below)



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## Some Recommended Books

These recommendations are offered so that you know where you might go to if you want to dig a little deeper – choose which one or two look interesting, don't try to read them all! The books are listed in alphabetical order of author, and different ones will appeal to different people. Many are available as ebooks for a reasonable price.

On Paul in general, try:

- Richard Cooke *New Testament: SCM Core Text* (SCM Press 2009) Ch. 6, which gives an outline of Paul's life, together with short introductions to most of the letters.
- Morna D. Hooker *Paul: a beginners guide* (Oneworld Publications, revised ed. 2012) – an excellent short introduction. (Note: this was previously published as *Paul: a short introduction* in 2003.)
- David G. Horrell *An Introduction to the Study of Paul* (T&T Clark, 3rd ed. 2016) – more academic, it introduces scholarly approaches to issues in Paul.
- Anthony C. Thiselton *The Living Paul* (SPCK 2009) – short chapters reflecting on various aspects of Paul's thought and their implications for today.
- Rowan Williams *Meeting God in Paul* (SPCK 2015) is a brilliant, short and accessible introduction based on a series of three talks that opens up the background to Paul's thought.
- Tom Wright *Paul: A Biography* (SPCK 2018) – is larger than the other books listed here, with more of a focus on Paul's life than his theology. This is probably the easiest way into Wright's approach to interpreting Paul (on which Wright has written extensively and voluminously). Always stimulating and engagingly written, this is a good introduction, though Wright tends to assume that his own views are the only ones that could be correct! A condensed version can be found in N.T. Wright & Michael F. Bird *The New Testament in its World* (SPCK 2019) Ch. 15.

On the Letter to the Romans specifically:

- A. Katherine Grieb *The Story of Romans* (WJKP 2002) – a brilliant interpretation of Romans as a 'narrative defense of God's righteousness', seeking to see the letter as part of Paul's context and engagement with a church community.
- Beverley Roberts Gaventa *When in Romans: An Invitation to Linger Longer with the Gospel according to Paul* (Baker Academic 2016) – a short book which helpfully introduces the 'big ideas' of Romans.
- Paula Gooder *Phoebe: a story* (Hodder & Stoughton 2018) is a bit different, offering an imagined approach to Paul's theology from the perspective of Phoebe, who delivered the letter to Rome on his behalf. The second part of the book provides a commentary on the story in the first part.
- Scot McKnight *Reading Romans Backwards: a Gospel in Search of Peace in the Midst of Empire* (SCM Press 2019) does what it sets out to do, and reads Romans in reverse order – beginning with the final section (chapters 12-16), enabling the reader to see the letter more clearly in its pastoral setting.

- Stephen Westerholm *Understanding Paul: the early Christian Worldview of the Letter to the Romans* (Baker Academic 2004) – this is a ‘traditional’ reading of Romans, seeing it as primarily a summary of Paul’s doctrine (10 out of 12 chapters cover Romans 1-8). Well written and applied.
- Jackson Wu *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul’s Message and Mission* (IVP 2019) offers an intriguingly different approach to Romans from a different cultural perspective, a useful counter to the strongly Western interpretive tradition of Romans.

There are probably more commentaries on Romans than any other book in the New Testament (Ben Witherington says ‘This list could go on for miles’ – and he’s right!). But if you want to go through the letter in detail, these are the most accessible companions I’ve come across to help you as you read, though don’t let them stop you reading Paul’s text for yourself...

- James D.G.Dunn *Romans: The People’s Bible Commentary* (BRF 2001) is based on the ‘Daily Notes’ format – a brief section of a few verses and two pages of commentary on them.
- Robert Jewett *Romans: A Short Commentary* (Fortress Press 2013) is a much abbreviated version of Jewett’s 1000-word *Romans* which was 50 years in the making. For an in-depth study of Romans, there is nothing better.
- Craig S.Keener *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cascade Books 2009) covers the ground well, and keeps more technical discussions to separate sections which can be ignored if you wish.
- Anthony C.Thiselton *Discovering Romans: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (SPCK 2016) is an immensely learned summary of many views, and a quite technical guide to how Romans has been interpreted in the past, but a good ‘next step’ if you want to look further into the letter.
- Ben Witherington with Darlene Hyatt *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A socio-rhetorical commentary* (Eerdmans 2004) focuses particularly on the way in which Paul constructs and develops his argument about God’s righteousness.
- Wright & Bird *The New Testament in its World* (see above) offers a very short commentary in Ch.20.

## Introduction

**Before session 1, please read the extract below, and also look at the ‘Five Narrative Critical Questions of a text’, applying them to Paul’s (very short!) letter to Philemon.**

(From Richard Cooke *New Testament: SCM Core Text*, SCM Press 2009, chapter 6)

Paul’s three months in Corinth in early 56 seems to have been the time when he wrote his letter to the Romans. This letter, the longest Paul ever wrote, has proved an incredibly fresh source of theological inspiration through the history of the church. But why was it originally written? It is unique in being sent to a church which Paul had neither founded, visited, nor claimed any oversight for. The church in Rome, as we saw in chapter 4, had probably existed from the late 30s, and initially had a strongly Jewish character. Paul expresses his desire to come to Rome in order to use it as a base for the next missionary campaign he has in mind – to Spain (Rom. 15.28). The letter seems to function as a preliminary to that campaign which would be new territory in a more than literal sense. Paul was getting older, and Spain might have been his final and greatest challenge. The Jewish population of the province was smaller than he was used to from the eastern Mediterranean, being mostly confined to the south-western coast of the Iberian peninsula which had once been part of the Carthaginian empire. Therefore the usual strategy of beginning with the God-worshippers would be less effective. The main language of Spain was Latin rather than Greek, supplemented by local languages similar to the Celtic dialects of Galatia. According to Roman writers, the people of the interior were so barbaric that they brushed their teeth with urine. So Paul’s plan would be a hard task, and the need for a sympathetic and supportive community behind him was obvious. Would the Roman church oblige?

With this strategy in mind, Paul seems to aim to summarise his message, perhaps so that they can judge for themselves whether what they might have heard about him as an enemy of the law is true. But there is also more to Romans. In the absence of Jewish believers after their expulsion by Claudius (probably in 49), the church would have taken on a clearly Gentile identity. Some of those who had been expelled (notably Aquila and Priscilla) had returned to Rome, and it seems reasonable to assume that this may have caused tensions in the church there, as the same dynamic had done in Palestine. Paul wants to remove these tensions by giving sustained attention to the relationship of Jew and Gentile in the church, and this too is a major theme. Romans largely explodes the letter-form which is its basis. Although it retains a few of the conventions (see above), it goes far beyond them.

Nevertheless, it does seem that there are at least five main sections: the prologue (Rom. 1.1-17), the outline of Paul’s gospel (Rom. 1.18-8.39), a sustained reflection on God’s choice of Israel (Rom. 9.1-11.36), advice for living (Rom. 12.1-15.13) and the appeal to join in Paul’s vision for future mission (Rom. 15.14-16.24). But this is not really a systematic presentation of Paul’s theology, though it is the closest he ever came to doing so. It is an apologetic exposition of his beliefs in the form of a theological *story* rather than a theological *system* full of drama and tension. What, then, is the story which Paul tells in Romans?

*Prologue – introducing the messenger and the message (Romans 1.1-17)*

The curtain rises on Paul himself, alone in the spotlight in the centre of a bare stage (all Paul's other letters to churches are sent from him and at least one other, except for Ephesians which may be a special case as we shall see below). He stands before them as the slave of Jesus Christ, his apostle or messenger. In other words he is not here on his own authority but because the Lord has called him, in the long line of prophets. He is here to declare the good news of Jesus, known to be son of God by virtue of his resurrection. Paul is his messenger to the nations, which includes the Romans themselves (Rom. 1.1-6).

These are ambassadorial credentials being presented. In particular they present Paul as *the* intermediary of God and Jesus Christ to the nations. He seeks to rise above any factions that there may be, especially divisions between Jew and Gentile: he has the message, and it comes

with the authority of God himself, a breathtaking claim.

After this magisterial opening Paul rather spoils the effect by breathlessly assuring them that he has longed to come and visit them, perhaps betraying an underlying awkwardness, as if the mantle he has assumed does not quite fit (Rom. 1.8-15). In a way this is appealing and is perhaps meant to seem so to the Romans. For, while Paul comes as the messenger of God, he comes too as a human being with all the frailty which that may imply. But he quickly recovers his balance: his theme is not himself but the good news of God's salvation for all who have faith, both Jew and Gentile. He concludes the section with what looks very like a title: 'the righteous will live by faith' (Rom. 1.17). The rest of the letter will unpack this headline statement. Now the story begins.

*Outlining the Gospel (Romans 1.18-8.39)*

The first word of the next part of the letter is *apokalyptetai*, the verb form of *apokalypsis* or apocalypse, meaning revelation or unveiling (see chapter 8 below). Paul is announcing something that has been revealed; again like a performer on a stage it is as if he swishes back the curtain to show a scene of teeming life on which the 'wrath of God from heaven' (Rom. 1.18) is coming down. This wrath is not 'a state of chronic ill-temper with humanity, but is something like [God's] constant pressure against evil of every kind.'<sup>1</sup> For this is a world created by God, whose structure bears witness to the goodness of its creator. But humanity has deliberately turned its back on that goodness and over the centuries the world has spun out of control like a runaway animal (Rom. 1.18-32). As Paul and his audience look down on the scene, with the perspective of God, they see that judgement has been revealed and must fall.

But suddenly Paul turns on his audience as they gaze, perhaps in grim fascination, at the orgy of evil laid out beneath them. He switches from 'they' to 'you': 'do *you* think...that you will escape the judgement of God?' (Rom. 2.3); Gentiles by their participation in society are implicated in this runaway world (Rom. 2.1-16), and while Jews in the audience might think they would escape judgement because they have obedience to the Law to protect them, Paul swiftly makes sure they

know that they too are included in it (Rom. 2.17-3.20). Both Jews and Gentiles fall under the judgement of God, then, included in the general indictment of humanity.

And now Paul reveals with a flourish the solution to the problem which he has stated so briefly but effectively. Like a royal proclamation from the messenger who stands before them he announces, 'Now, separate from the Law, God's righteousness has been shown forth' (Rom. 3.21). This is righteousness through Jesus Christ, available for all, since 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3.23, this universal righteousness is the pay-off of the universal condemnation announced earlier). How this righteousness is achieved Paul does not detail at this point, other than to say it comes by grace, a free-gift, in the form of an atonement sacrifice in which all believers participate by faith, for God is God of Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 3.24-27).

The question with which Paul is wrestling here is about the faithfulness of God (Rom. 3.1-8). It would be easy for him to reject the Law, as his opponents said he did, an accusation that had dogged him for years and was to lead to his downfall in the Jerusalem Temple, as we shall see presently. But in doing so he would also jettison the story of God's dealings with Israel, in which

<sup>1</sup> J. Ziesler (1989) *Paul's Letter to the Romans* London, SCM Press, p.74.

case the gospel of Jesus would have no context and lose its power. Even worse, it would suggest that God had taken a wrong turn somewhere and in Jesus had decided to make a new start (effectively the approach which Marcion would take a hundred years later, claiming to be Paul's faithful follower). Paul himself could only understand the Gospel as the culmination of the story of Israel down the ages, as the prologue to the letter made clear (Rom. 1.2-3). It was the righteousness of God himself that was at stake in Paul's argument, in the sense that it was his justice, fairness and consistency that would be faulted if the Jews and their Law were rejected.

The key was grace. Grace, as we saw in chapter 2, was what lay at the heart of Jewish faith, the sense that keeping the Law was a grateful response to God's already-made choice of Israel to be his own people. God's righteousness, then, could be shared by him with human beings, received by them by grace and not earned, just as the original covenant had been. This would put both Jew and Gentile on an equal footing. But wasn't the Law redundant then? Paul turns to face this accusation, just as if one of the audience has spoken it out loud: 'Not at all! Faith confirms it' (Rom. 3.31).

Now Paul turns from general argument to the introduction, one by one, of three characters who are crucial to his story: Abraham, Jesus and Adam.

First to be introduced is Abraham. His significance lies in being the ancestor of Israel, but predating the law: he was chosen by God (or 'accounted righteous') before he was circumcised, thus showing that it is possible to be part of God's people without circumcision. Abraham simply had to accept this righteousness with nothing outward to show for it; he accepted it by trust, or faith. Circumcision then was the sign following God's choice, not the qualification for it, making Abraham 'our ancestor' - of Gentiles as well as Jews (Rom. 4.1-12).

God's promise to Abraham was always that, through him, the whole world should be blessed. The Law, though it plays a vital part in the story, was therefore a means to an end, that is, to bring to light the grounds for God's judgement (Rom. 4.15). Abraham's faith in this large view of God's mission to save the world, even when it seemed impossible, was the most important thing about him and the aspect of Abraham that Paul

wishes his audience to imitate. But they have much more to put their trust in than Abraham had: God's resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 4.13-25).

The focus switches to Jesus, who has been mentioned before but is now brought centre-stage. God's righteousness has been the theme Paul has been expounding and it is not lost here: English translations tend to switch at this point from 'righteousness' language to 'justification', but it is important to realize that the Greek words which Paul actually used are from the same family, *dikaioisynē*. The problem, as virtually all commentators point out, is that there is no English word such as 'to righteous', which would make better sense of Paul's next statement: 'Having been righteoused therefore by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 5.1). Morna Hooker makes the helpful suggestion that an alternative approach would be to use the word "to right", a verb which normally means "to restore to the proper position" (as with a boat) but can also mean to vindicate or avenge (as in righting wrongs), to rehabilitate or put right.<sup>2</sup> Jesus has appeared briefly before in Paul's dramatic presentation as the 'atoning sacrifice' (Rom. 3.25), but again something has been lost in the translation, for Paul there actually refers to Jesus as the 'mercy-seat', within the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple where sacrifices took place annually on the day of atonement. Does Paul see Jesus as a bit of furniture? Hardly! The symbolism is strange to us, but perhaps not so different from John's transfiguration of Jesus into a lamb in Revelation. Paul's point is that Jesus' body is the place where God and humans are reconciled, the function of the temple's mercy-seat. He is the place to which humans come to be 'righted' and he is God's means of sharing his righteousness with them.

Jesus is the bridge between heaven and earth. At the 'mercy-seat' peace is established between God and humanity and a way to God provided. The picture Paul drew at the beginning of the letter of the unbridgeable gulf between the runaway world and its gracious creator is now miraculously set aside as he shows that Jesus is able to bring both sides together. For, 'while we were still sick, when the time was right' Jesus died 'on behalf of the ungodly' (Rom. 5.6); 'while we were still sinners Christ died on our behalf' (Rom. 5.8); 'being enemies we were reconciled to God' (Rom. 5.10).

<sup>2</sup> M. Hooker (2003) *Paul: A Short Introduction* Oxford, OneWorld, pp.74-5.

Paul has stated the importance of Christ, indeed has hammered the message home; but he has not demonstrated to his audience how it is possible for Jesus to be the one who establishes peace. This is what he now seeks to do, moving forward the third character in his story: Adam.

Adam is, for Paul, a representative human, following the meaning of his name in Hebrew. The entry of death into the world came through Adam, the inevitable accompaniment to humanity's turning away from God which Paul had outlined at the beginning of the letter. All are under condemnation, but the original act of disobedience, according to the Hebrew scriptures, was Adam's and it brought with it the penalty of death (Gen. 3). However, Paul is at once struck by how inexact the comparison between Adam and Jesus is – he doesn't want the Romans to feel that he is putting the two on the same level. For the 'gift of grace [which must mean righteousness] is not like the sin' (Rom. 5.15): its effect is far greater and more wonderful. In other words, God's righteousness always triumphs over evil. It's an unequal contest: sin cannot win.

Instead through the one man Jesus, grace has broken out. 'Through one man's sin came judgement for all, so through one man's right action came righteousness for all.' (Rom. 5.18). There is an echo here of Paul's understanding of the two ages, which we looked at earlier in the discussion of 1 Thessalonians. Adam is the archetypal human of the 'present age', Jesus of the 'age to come'. They are parallel figures and yet the glory of the age to come is so much greater than that of the present as to unbalance the comparison. But, and here Paul might scandalize his Jewish listeners, the Law came in to expose the rampant nature of sin (Rom. 5.20); that is, it functions as a diagnostic tool but is not itself part of the cure. In other words, the role of the Law is limited. By exposing the virulence of sin, the Law provokes God's response leading to 'life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Rom. 5.21).

Now Paul is caught on a dilemma. For the logic of his position that by exposing the enormity of sin the Law has done a good thing suggests that the greater the sin of humanity, the greater the grace-filled response of God will be. Paul does not hesitate to throw out the logic. 'Of course not!' (Rom. 6.1). Again, without spelling them out, the categories of the present age and the age to come are assumed by Paul, creating their own logic. People of the age to come have no business with sin, the characteristic of the old order of creation; instead they identify with Christ, an identification

acted out in their baptism where they died to the old order and were raised as Jesus was into a new kind of life. Here Paul employs a favourite and compelling phrase, 'in Christ' which means in some way that the believer participates in Christ, implying an intimate and profound relationship beyond anything merely human (Rom. 6.3-13).

The Law too belongs to the old order, and they are to live in the new by grace (Rom. 6.14). But if they are no longer subject to the Law which defined sin, then comes back the objection, surely sin is a meaningless concept? Paul echoes the title he had proudly employed for himself in the opening greeting of the letter: 'Paul, slave of Christ Jesus' (Rom. 1.1) by responding that where they had been slaves to sin, now they are slaves to righteousness. He has briefly used the concept of redemption – being bought back – earlier (Rom. 3.24); here he uses the same idea to suggest that their experience is like being bought by a good master from a bad one. All they would earn from the old, bad master was death (slaves could usually expect to be paid at least a little pocket-money by a reasonable master); from the new, good master the free gift of eternal life would be showered on them (Rom. 6.15-23).

The issue of the Law still bothers Paul, though. So he embarks on a new analogy. The relationship of believers to the Law is just like a marriage, he says. Once one party dies the marriage is over. In the same way their participation in the death of Christ means that they are not bound any longer by the obligations of the Law (Rom. 7.1-6). But does this mean that the old order of sin and the Law are to be identified with each other? No, once again Paul emphasises the Law's role as a diagnosis, pointing up what's wrong. Diagnosis is neither sickness nor cure, but a necessary (and good) tool between the two. The diagnosis provokes a new awareness of sin, however, and can even make it seem attractive. Caught in the spider's web of temptation and wrong-doing the flesh is weak, though the mind yearns for what is good; but now we are back with the sinful desires of the first part of the letter, and the answer is the same: 'who will rescue me?' Only God through Jesus Christ can do this, according to Paul (Rom. 7.7-25).

The truth Paul proclaims is that there is 'no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8.1). Slaves of a new master, born through death into a new life, they have a new freedom from the old order of sin and death and by their participation 'in Christ' escape the

righteous wrath which God has pronounced upon the runaway world. How do they know this? Paul produces with a flourish the ace in his pack: they are in Christ and so, 'Christ is in you' (Rom. 8.10). They experience the presence of the Spirit, the 'Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from amongst the dead' (Rom. 8.11), whose life-giving power now extends to them and can bring a halt to the slavish tendencies to sin which Paul has just spoken about. They can break the patterns and habits of the old order and know that they are part of the new (Rom.8.12-17).

Paul knows it's not quite that simple. This is a time of suffering (as he already knew personally and was to find out even more fully in the months that lay ahead of him). But the suffering which believers encounter is part of the 'birth-pangs' of the new creation, the age to come (Rom. 8.22). Though Paul is talking primarily here

of the struggle of the whole of creation as it hangs between the two ages the argument also applies to the individual caught between the tendency to sin and freedom in Christ: the believer's struggle makes their body a battle ground between the present age and the age to come (Rom. 8.26-27). As we saw when looking at Paul's view of the coming of Christ earlier, nothing lies in the balance here. He is unshakably convinced that in the cross and resurrection of Jesus the future is not just assured but has already been made present. So he can conclude that those whom God 'righted [already], these also he glorified' (Rom. 8.30), firmly using past tenses.

How shall Paul sum up this bravura performance? He rehearses highlights of his presentation of the Gospel and concludes that nothing at all can ever keep the Romans apart from the love of God (Rom. 8.31-39).

### *Did God cast off his people? The role of Israel (Romans 9.1-11.36)*

The knottiest and most tortuous section of the whole New Testament is probably Romans 9-11, where Paul wrestles in anguish with the apparent rejection of his gospel by the Jews. There is no doubt of his deep feeling on the matter: 'the grief to me is great, the pain in my heart unending, and I would pray myself accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my family of the flesh who are the people of Israel. (Rom. 9.2-4). Where do the people of Israel, who first received the grace of God and showed the way to salvation, now fit into the plan of God which Paul has outlined in the first eight chapters of the letter to the Romans?

Paul begins by repeating that it is not by sharing blood but by sharing the promise of God that one truly becomes a descendant of Abraham. God's grace is given by him as he wishes (Rom. 9.6-18). Paul's change of language is significant here. Up to this point in Romans he has spoken of Jews and Gentiles; but now he begins to speak of Israel rather than the Jews. James D.G.Dunn points out that while Gentiles and Jews are mutually exclusive terms, since they are primarily ethnic, yet 'it might be possible to include "Gentiles" within "Israel"'<sup>3</sup> if Israel is defined, as Paul has done earlier, as the heirs of God's promise. The tragedy which Paul feels so keenly is therefore that, by God's grace, the covenant relationship has been opened to 'the nations', thanks in no small part to Paul's own efforts. And yet at just this

point, when the glory of God can be seen in salvation being proclaimed to the whole world, the Jews (including Paul himself) who were the original bearers of that salvation seem to be turning their backs on what God has done. But it is not that God has rejected them – whatever they choose to do in reaction – in favour of the Gentiles. Paul is convinced that there is still a place for the Jews, for how could God have rejected his people? The idea is unthinkable (Rom. 11.1).

Instead Paul, reflecting on the historical events which he has lived through, sees that it is actually through the 'stumbling' of Israel that salvation has become possible for the Gentiles (Rom 11.11-12). He uses the language of 'hardening of the heart' several times (Rom. 9.18; 11.7, 25), evoking the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt, where God hardened Pharaoh's heart in order to bring about deliverance (see Exodus 4.21; 7.3; 14.4, 17). In the same way Paul reflects that if the synagogues had not refused to listen to him, his mission to the nations would not have developed as it did. So he reaches for metaphor again: the Jews are the original 'olive tree' and the Gentiles are being 'grafted in' to the original stock (Rom. 11.17-24). And thus Paul finds a solution to his anguish. For the present turning away of Jews is part of the 'mystery' of God's plan (Rom. 11.25), in order to achieve the ultimate aim: the salvation of 'all Israel' which includes both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 11.26). The whole section concludes with a

<sup>3</sup> Dunn *Theology of Paul the Apostle* p.506.

sustained hymn of praise to God, whose wisdom is beyond grasp (Rom. 11.33-36) – except of course that Paul has now grasped it!

Paul's strong affirmation in this section of his letter to the Romans is that both Jew and Gentile have a place within the church. If there were tensions between the two groups in the Roman church, as may well have been the case, this was an important affirmation to make. Paul's understanding of 'inaugurated eschatology' with an overlapping period between the present age and the age to come which participates in both (see above) forms a crucial background to his thought about the current division between Jews and Gentiles; both groups will together be the eschatological Israel in the future. But for now they remained largely apart.

### *Advice for Living (Romans 12.1-15.13)*

The next section of the letter to the Romans could have followed directly from the end of chapter 8. For now Paul encourages the Romans to put into practice the implications of what he has been teaching them. There are instructions on how to live as a transformed person, whose whole life bears witness to their faith (Romans 12.1-13). It's noticeable that the highly compressed list of sayings which Paul repeats seems to be a summary of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Rom. 12.14-20, see Matt. 5.38-48; Luke 6.20-36).

Then Paul introduces the difficult question of how to deal with the authorities. Given his brushes with the law (as outlined in 2 Cor. 11.24-25) he wouldn't be the most obvious guide! His practice and theology had clearly put him on a collision course with the 'imperial theology' that was gaining ground across the Mediterranean during the first century. We saw above how allegiance to Jesus as Lord and saviour both echoed and strongly questioned the same words being used of Caesar. But in Romans we find a more positive assessment of Roman power, as Paul says 'let everyone be subject to the governing powers, for there is no power except God's and the powers that be have been ordered by God' (Rom 13.1). He goes on to say that therefore those who resist the authorities resist the order God has set up.

This is a passage which has been used (especially in the Lutheran tradition) to justify appalling abuses on the grounds that rulers have the sanction of God. It is important to read it in

As we shall see in chapter 9, however, Paul's championing of Israel as one inclusive nation of Jews and Gentiles within the plan of God was ultimately unsuccessful: 'Paul carried the day on his first major point: that the grace of God is extended to Gentiles. But on his second major point – that God has not broken covenant with Israel – Paul lost'.<sup>4</sup> It's likely that already within the Roman church the tensions which would pull Jews and Christians in different directions had begun. It is perhaps the first sign that Paul was being left behind by the movement he had helped to create. His practical work in gathering the collection for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem was a means of trying to hold together Gentile and Jewish churches and reflect the vision of Romans 9-11.

context and alongside Paul's implicit challenge to imperial theology. He is writing to the Christians in Rome where disturbances 'at the incitement of *Chrestus*'<sup>5</sup> had, only a few years before, led to the expulsion of the Jewish community. Paul's intention, again as we saw earlier, seems not to have been to provoke unnecessary conflict with the authorities. His clashes with them never seem to have been direct, but the result of others' accusations. And, as they are portrayed in Acts, Roman officials seem to have been reluctant to act against him.

Paul shows a degree of trust in the fairness of the legal system here. In the course of his letter he has told the Romans to live peaceably and not to seek vengeance, in words that echo Jesus' in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). Understanding the authorities and the legal system they operated as, at root, ordered by God, made it possible to leave vengeance to be worked out legally (Rom. 13. 3-4). It is important to remember that Paul was writing in the early 50s, before Nero's rule of terror threw legal processes out of the window.

The culmination of Paul's argument is that Christians should pay taxes without question (Rom. 13. 6-7). This was a more contentious question in the provinces than in Rome itself, where direct taxation was minimal. Indirect taxes were high in the city, however, and in any economy they hit the poor hardest. Occasionally there were riots over the price of bread, for example, which was inflated by customs fees and sales taxes. It is easy to see how Paul's anti-

<sup>4</sup> R.Hays (1996) *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* London, T.&T.Clark, p.417.

<sup>5</sup> Suetonius *Life of Claudius* 25.4.

imperial theology could have been co-opted to refuse payment.

On this point, of course, though Paul does not say so, there was a well-remembered saying of Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar which probably lies underneath his argument. It is interesting that rather than simply quoting the words of Jesus, he argues his case. The gist of the message seems to be, 'don't pick unnecessary fights.'

Allied to this is the recognition that the present authorities, though ordered by God, are only temporary (Rom. 13. 11-12). Paul clearly expected that one day, soon, God would sweep away the present order and bring in the kingdom. Even the great Caesar was only temporary.

### *Paul's Appeal (Romans 15.14-16.24)*

Although Paul was able to greet twenty-six people by name at the end of the letter (Rom. 16.3-16), Paul had not visited the church in Rome when he wrote it. The primary function of the letter had been to introduce himself fully and to establish for the Roman believers what 'his gospel' was. Now, finally, he tells them of his plan to use Rome as a base for a further westward expansion of the church. He has no desire to work in Rome itself, for he wishes to be a pioneer, not someone who builds on 'another's [Peter's?] foundation' (Rom. 15.20). Instead Paul hopes to be 'sent onwards by

Paul wrote on the verge of heading to Jerusalem. There he would find, ironically, that it was only the Roman imperial authorities that could guarantee his safety and, in the teeth of murderous threats he would be rescued by a troop of Roman soldiers. He would soon have cause to thank God for the powers that be.

Further instructions for peaceful co-existence in a mixed church where Jews may already have been a minority follow, particularly commending patience and understanding for those who still wish to observe the Sabbath and Jewish dietary regulations (Rom. 14.1-15.5), before Paul returns to the theme of the central section of the letter, the future unity of Jews and Gentiles in one people. It is literally by the harmony of their praise that God will be glorified (Rom. 15.6-13).

you' (Rom. 15.24) to Spain. But first he tells them that he must return to Jerusalem, to ensure that he has the backing of the community there in the next stage of his strategy (Rom. 15.25-29).

After a string of personal greetings and a final thanksgiving to God (Rom. 16.1-27) the letter was complete. As it went west with Phoebe the deacon from Cenchrea, Paul prepared to go east to Jerusalem. He wanted to be there for Pentecost (Acts 20.16).

### Five Narrative Critical Questions of a text

These questions were developed for use with the passages from the Gospels, but can also helpfully be used with a text like Romans. Read them through, and then apply them to the (very short!) Letter to Philemon.

1. *Author/audience – who’s speaking, who’s listening?*
  - Who is the implied/stated author(s)? What seems to be his/her/their cultural background and social status? What can be inferred from the language they write in, the voice that is used?
  - Who is the implied audience? What seems to be their background? What response is required from them?
2. *Characters – who’s acting?*
  - Who are the key characters in the text? What does the text say about them? Is the audience invited to judge or identify with them? Are they in the background or the foreground? Is their identity simple and unchanging, or complex and dynamic?
3. *Settings – where and when?*
  - What is the geographical setting? Is it symbolic or real? What is the time frame? Does time pass uniformly or from scene to scene?
4. *Plot – what happens and why?*
  - What happens? Is this part of a larger story? What are the twists and turns in the plot, the surprises or the expected outcomes?
5. *Rhetoric – how?*
  - How is the text constructed? What literary format does it use or subvert? Are there echoes of other texts? How does it seek to persuade the audience? What is its message?

(See Elizabeth Struthers Malbon ‘Narrative Criticism: How Does Story Mean?’ in J.C.Anderson & S.D.Moore (eds) *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed. 2008, pp.32-42)

**Paul's Letter to Philemon****Narrative Critical Questions**

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,  
To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, <sup>2</sup>to Apphia our sister,  
to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house:  
<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus  
Christ.

<sup>4</sup> When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God  
<sup>5</sup>because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith  
towards the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>I pray that the sharing of your faith may  
become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do  
for Christ. <sup>7</sup>I have indeed received much joy and encouragement  
from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been  
refreshed through you, my brother.

<sup>8</sup> For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command  
you to do your duty, <sup>9</sup>yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis  
of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a  
prisoner of Christ Jesus. <sup>10</sup>I am appealing to you for my child,  
Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment.

<sup>11</sup>Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both  
to you and to me. <sup>12</sup>I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back  
to you. <sup>13</sup>I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of  
service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the  
gospel; <sup>14</sup>but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in  
order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something  
forced. <sup>15</sup>Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for  
a while, so that you might have him back for ever, <sup>16</sup>no longer as a  
slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to  
me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would  
welcome me. <sup>18</sup>If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you  
anything, charge that to my account. <sup>19</sup>I, Paul, am writing this with  
my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me  
even your own self. <sup>20</sup>Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from  
you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>21</sup>Confident of your  
obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even  
more than I say.

<sup>22</sup> One thing more—prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping  
through your prayers to be restored to you.

<sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to  
you, <sup>24</sup>and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow-  
workers.

<sup>25</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

1. Author/audience - who's speaking, who's listening?
2. Characters – who's acting?
3. Settings – where and when?
4. Plot – what's happening and why?
5. Rhetoric – how?



## 1. Introducing the Questions; Paul and the Church in Rome

### a) The Shape of Romans

Romans falls in to five main sections: a very short introduction which introduces the theme: a statement of Paul's Gospel, where he outlines the good news of Jesus as he understands it; an interlude where he considers what the implications and consequences for the Jewish people might be; a practical section which encourages his hearers to change the way they behave in the light of the good news; and a final section where Paul shares his future plans with the Romans.

#### **1.1-17 – Introduction: Greeting and Headline Summary**

#### **1.18-8.39 – Paul's Gospel**

#### ***9.1-11.36 – Interlude: God's Choice of Israel***

#### **12.1-15.13 – Advice for living**

#### **15.14-16.24 – Reasons for Writing and Closing Remarks**

## b) 16.1-33 - Greetings and Paul's Intended visit to Rome

16 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon<sup>\*</sup> of the church at Cenchreae,<sup>2</sup> so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus,<sup>4</sup> and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.<sup>5</sup> Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert<sup>\*</sup> in Asia for Christ.<sup>6</sup> Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you.<sup>7</sup> Greet Andronicus and Junia,<sup>\*</sup> my relatives<sup>\*</sup> who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.<sup>8</sup> Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.<sup>9</sup> Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.<sup>10</sup> Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus.<sup>11</sup> Greet my relative<sup>\*</sup> Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus.<sup>12</sup> Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.<sup>13</sup> Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother—a mother to me also.<sup>14</sup> Greet

Asyncretus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters<sup>\*</sup> who are with them.<sup>15</sup> Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.<sup>16</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

17 I urge you, brothers and sisters,<sup>\*</sup> to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offences, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them.<sup>18</sup> For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites,<sup>\*</sup> and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.<sup>19</sup> For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I want you to be wise in what is good, and guileless in what is evil.<sup>20</sup> The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.<sup>\*</sup>

21 Timothy, my co-worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my relatives.<sup>\*</sup>

22 I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.<sup>\*</sup>

23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.<sup>\*</sup>

In Romans 16.3-15 we meet the Church in Rome as it was known to Paul. The names seem to fall into several distinct groups:

- Prisca and Aquila, my kinspeople (ie Jews) who were in prison with me, they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. A church meets in their house.
- Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ
- Mary, who has worked very hard among you
  
- Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.
- Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord
- Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ
- my beloved Stachys
- Apelles, who is approved in Christ
  
- those who belong to the family of Aristobulus
- my relative Herodion
  
- those who belong to the family of Narcissus
- those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa
- the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.
- Rufus, chosen in the Lord
- Rufus' mother—a mother to me also
  
- Asyncritus
- Phlegon
- Hermes
- Patrobas
- Hermas
- and the brothers and sisters who are with them
  
- Philologus
- Julia
- Nereus and his sister
- Olympas
- and all the saints who are with them
  
- Who are these people, and why do you think they might be grouped like this?
  
- Note Paul's parting words (Rom. 16.17-20) and his companions (Rom. 16.21-23, especially Tertius!)

## c) 15.14-25 – Paul's Purpose

14 I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters,\* that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God<sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God.<sup>18</sup> For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished\* through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed,<sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God,\* so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news\* of Christ.<sup>20</sup> Thus I make

it my ambition to proclaim the good news,\* not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation,<sup>21</sup> but as it is written,

‘Those who have never been told of him shall see,  
and those who have never heard of him shall understand.’

22 This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you.<sup>23</sup> But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you<sup>24</sup> when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. <sup>25</sup>At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints.

- What are Paul's purpose and circumstances here?

1. *Author/audience - who's speaking, who's listening?*
2. *Characters – who's acting?*
3. *Settings – where and when?*
4. *Plot – what's happening and why?*
5. *Rhetoric – how?*

- Rom. 15.19 – 'from Jerusalem round to Illyricum I have fully proclaimed/fulfilled/accomplished (*peplerokenai*) the good news of Christ'
- Rom. 15.23-4, 25 - 'there is no further place for me in these regions I desire to come to you...when I go to Spain...At present I am going to Jerusalem'.



The 'arc of the covenant'?

## d) 1.1-17 – Opening and Headline

1 Paul, a servant\* of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,<sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,<sup>3</sup> the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh<sup>4</sup> and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit\* of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,<sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name,<sup>6</sup> including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

7 To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.<sup>9</sup> For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel\* of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers,<sup>10</sup> asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you.<sup>11</sup> For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen

you—<sup>12</sup> or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.<sup>13</sup> I want you to know, brothers and sisters,\* that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles.<sup>14</sup> I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish<sup>15</sup>— hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.<sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'<sup>\*</sup>

1. *Author/audience - who's speaking, who's listening?*
2. *Characters – who's acting?*
3. *Settings – where and when?*
4. *Plot – what's happening and why?*
5. *Rhetoric – how?*

- [illegible]

## 2. Paul's Gospel Part 1 (Rom. 1.18-5.11)

### a) 1.18-3.20 – 'We're all in this together' - The Human Predicament

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.<sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.<sup>20</sup> Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse;<sup>21</sup> for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened.<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools;<sup>23</sup> and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves,<sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature

rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural,<sup>27</sup> and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done.<sup>29</sup> They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters,<sup>\*</sup> insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents,<sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.<sup>32</sup> They know God's decree, that those who practise such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practise them.

1. *Author/audience - who's speaking, who's listening?*
2. *Characters – who's acting?*
3. *Settings – where and when?*
4. *Plot – what's happening and why?*

(i) 1.18-23 God Revealed

- The wrath of God is *revealed* (1.18, cf. 'revealed' 1.17).
- The wrath and holiness of God.
- *Revelation* is the key category – God has made himself known, and humans have turned away.
- Idolatry (1.23)

"NOT TO CRITICIZE, BUT PAUL COULD HAVE MADE ROMANS SO MUCH MORE EFFECTIVE BY SHORTENING HIS SENTENCES, SIMPLIFYING HIS THOUGHTS, AND DROPPING IN A COUPLE OF FUNNY STORIES!"



(ii) 1.24-32 Runaway hearts and minds

- What is the force of *therefore* (1.24)?
- Hearts (1.24), and minds (1.28)
- Sexuality is in view (1.24, 26) – is it a focus or an example?
- Other vices are included (1.28-32)
- A Jewish list

2 Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.<sup>2</sup> You say, \* 'We know that God's judgement on those who do such things is in accordance with truth.'<sup>3</sup> Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgement of God?<sup>4</sup> Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?<sup>5</sup> But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgement will be revealed.<sup>6</sup> For he will repay according to each one's deeds:<sup>7</sup> to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life;<sup>8</sup> while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury.<sup>9</sup> There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek,<sup>10</sup> but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.<sup>11</sup> For God shows no partiality.

12 All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.<sup>13</sup> For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified.<sup>14</sup> When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves.<sup>15</sup> They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their

own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them<sup>16</sup> on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.

17 But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God<sup>18</sup> and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law,<sup>19</sup> and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,<sup>20</sup> a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth,<sup>21</sup> you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?<sup>22</sup> You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples?<sup>23</sup> You that boast in the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law?<sup>24</sup> For, as it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'

25 Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.<sup>26</sup> So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?<sup>27</sup> Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law.<sup>28</sup> For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical.<sup>29</sup> Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.

*(iii) 2.1-29 No excuses*

- Jews and Gentiles alike fall under the condemnation. All are condemned, but all can be saved. God has no favourites (2.11).
- The Law heard is different from the Law obeyed (2.13); therefore Gentiles may have obeyed the Law instinctively (2.14-16). But this cuts both ways. If their conscience testify to the Law, then it can also testify to their guilt. There's no way out.
- Jews as Lights to the Gentiles. Being Jewish as such confers no privilege. Obeying the Law is what matters, and that is the sign, not (e.g.) circumcision (2.17-29).

<sup>3</sup>Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?<sup>2</sup>Much, in every way. For in the first place the Jews\* were entrusted with the oracles of God.<sup>3</sup>What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?<sup>4</sup>By no means! Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true, as it is written,

‘So that you may be justified in your words,  
and prevail in your judging.’\*

<sup>5</sup>But if our injustice serves to confirm the justice of God, what should we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)<sup>6</sup>By no means! For then how could God judge the world?<sup>7</sup>But if through my falsehood God’s truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?<sup>8</sup>And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), ‘Let us do evil so that good may come’? Their condemnation is deserved!

<sup>9</sup> What then? Are we any better off?\* No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin,<sup>10</sup> as it is written:

‘There is no one who is righteous, not even one;

<sup>11</sup> there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God.

<sup>12</sup> All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.’

<sup>13</sup> ‘Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of vipers is under their lips.’

<sup>14</sup> ‘Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.’

<sup>15</sup> ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;

<sup>16</sup> ruin and misery are in their paths,

<sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they have not known.’

<sup>18</sup> ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.<sup>20</sup>For ‘no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

#### *(iv) 3.1-20 So what’s the point of being a Jew?*

- God remains faithful (3.3-4) – a key theme of Romans. Israel is the forerunner of righteousness, chosen not for their goodness but as an example of mercy. Here is how God deals with his runaway creation.
- Jews are not a different kind of human being. The function of the Law is to diagnose sin and the human condition (3.19-20).

## b) 3.21-5.11 Righteousness, Peace and Reconciliation

21 But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets,<sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ\* for all who believe. For there is no distinction,<sup>23</sup>since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;<sup>24</sup>they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup>whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement\* by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;<sup>26</sup>it was to prove at the present time

that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.\*

27 Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith.<sup>28</sup>For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.<sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,<sup>30</sup>since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.<sup>31</sup>Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

## (i) 3.21-31 Faith in Jesus is what matters

- God's righteousness revealed irrespective of the Law, but backed up by it (3.21-22); it is Jesus Christ who brings it for all who believe (3.22).
- Faith *in* or faith *of* (3.22)?
- Redemption and sacrifice (3.24-25).
- God does not give up – he remains faithful (3.25-26).
- Boasting has no place because it's all the work of God (3.27-31)

**Righteousness/righteous**

Paul talks a lot in Romans about righteousness and being made righteous, and it carries the meaning of being made acceptable to God. He uses several words for this which all come from the same root, but English has no verb that is equivalent to it, and so most translations opt for a word like 'justify' when Paul has written that we are 'righteoused'. Morna Hooker suggests using the English verb 'to right', 'which normally means "to restore to the proper position" (as with a boat) but can also mean to vindicate or avenge (as in righting wrongs), to rehabilitate or put right.' (Paul: A Short Introduction OneWorld 2003, pp.74-5.)

4 What then are we to say was gained by\* Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh?<sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.<sup>3</sup> For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'<sup>4</sup> Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due.<sup>5</sup> But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.<sup>6</sup> So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness irrespective of works:

<sup>7</sup> 'Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered;  
<sup>8</sup> blessed is the one against whom the  
Lord will not reckon sin.'

9 Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, 'Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.'<sup>10</sup> How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.<sup>11</sup> He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them,<sup>12</sup> and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants

through the law but through the righteousness of faith.<sup>14</sup> If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.<sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

16 For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us,<sup>17</sup> as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.<sup>18</sup> Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations', according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.'<sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already\* as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.<sup>20</sup> No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,<sup>21</sup> being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.<sup>22</sup> Therefore his faith\* 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.'<sup>23</sup> Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him', were written not for his sake alone,<sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,<sup>25</sup> who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

*(ii) 4.1-25 Introducing the first witness: Abraham*

- Abraham is reckoned righteous by God *before* circumcision (4.10). He is the ancestor of the circumcised and predates Moses. He was 'righteoused/righted' before the Law and Moses.
- The promise of God is all that is needed (4.16-25)

5 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we<sup>\*</sup> have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>2</sup> through whom we have obtained access<sup>\*</sup> to this grace in which we stand; and we<sup>\*</sup> boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.<sup>3</sup> And not only that, but we<sup>\*</sup> also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,<sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,<sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, rarely will

anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.<sup>8</sup> But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.<sup>9</sup> Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.<sup>\*</sup><sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.<sup>11</sup> But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

*(iii) 5.1-11 Peace with God*

- Headline recapitulated (5.1-2)
- Boasting again: but this is the proper stuff, boasting about God so that his grace gets the credit (5.2-5)
- Jesus came and got us (5.6-11)
- Reconciliation – more than personal salvation (5.10-11)?



### 3. Paul's Gospel Part 2 (Rom. 5.12-8.39)

#### a) The Story of Salvation 5.12-8.39

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—<sup>13</sup>sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law.<sup>14</sup>Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.<sup>16</sup>And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.<sup>17</sup>If, because of the

one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.<sup>19</sup>For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.<sup>20</sup>But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,<sup>21</sup>so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification\* leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### (i) 5.12-21 The second witness: Adam

- Death is the consequence of human disobedience, which is Adam's (5.12-14)
- But Jesus and Adam are not equivalents – Jesus, as the manifestation of the grace of God, brings more benefits than Adam brought disbenefits (5.15-21)
- The Law again seen as a diagnostic tool (5.20-21)

6 What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?<sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?<sup>4</sup> Therefore 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.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.<sup>6</sup> We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.<sup>7</sup> For whoever has died is freed from sin.<sup>8</sup> But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.<sup>9</sup> We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.<sup>10</sup> The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.<sup>11</sup> So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.<sup>13</sup> No longer present your members to sin as instruments\* of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your

members to God as instruments\* of righteousness.<sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

15 What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?<sup>17</sup> But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted,<sup>18</sup> and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.<sup>19</sup> I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations.\* For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.<sup>21</sup> So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death.<sup>22</sup> But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life.<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(ii) 6.1-23 Sin's Power Broken

- Being in Jesus means turning from sin not continuing to live in it (6.1-4). Behavioural standards will be expected (cp. the argument about Israel as light to the Gentiles, earlier).
- Sin has no more *de jure* power, though it may have *de facto* power, like phantom pain from an amputated limb. 'Consider yourselves dead to sin' (6.11).
- Sin has no actual power (6.12-14)
- But this doesn't lead to a 'Law-free' position (antinomian).
- Righteousness as the new master (6.15-23, cp. 1.1 – Paul the slave of Jesus)

7 Do you not know, brothers and sisters<sup>\*</sup>—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only during that person’s lifetime?<sup>2</sup> Thus a married woman is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress.

4 In the same way, my friends,<sup>\*</sup> you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.<sup>5</sup> While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.<sup>6</sup> But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

7 What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’<sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead.<sup>9</sup> I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived<sup>10</sup> and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.<sup>11</sup> For sin, seizing an

opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.<sup>12</sup> So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

13 Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin.<sup>\*</sup><sup>15</sup> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.<sup>16</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good.<sup>17</sup> But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.<sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.<sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.<sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self,<sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.<sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?<sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

*(iii) 7.1-25 The Role of the Law*

- The death of Jesus sets humans free from the demands of the law, as death sets a spouse free from marriage obligations to the dead partner (7.1-3) It's rarely noticed here that Paul chooses an analogy which implies bereavement, which is how many Jews must have felt at the end of the Law. On the other hand he's also equating marriage with slavery!
- Law can tend to legalism, though Paul doesn't say this directly. Law can only diagnose sin, it cannot cure it (7.4-25).
- There is no human way out – but when all looks hopeless, Jesus rescues us (7.24-25).

8 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.<sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit\* of life in Christ Jesus has set you\* free from the law of sin and of death.<sup>3</sup>For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin,\* he condemned sin in the flesh,<sup>4</sup>so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.\*<sup>5</sup>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit\* set their minds on the things of the Spirit.\*<sup>6</sup>To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit\* is life and peace.<sup>7</sup>For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot,<sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,\* since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.<sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit\* is life because of righteousness.<sup>11</sup>If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ\* from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through\* his Spirit that dwells in you.

12 So then, brothers and sisters,\* we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—<sup>13</sup>for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.<sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.<sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we

cry, 'Abba! \* Father!'<sup>16</sup>it is that very Spirit bearing witness\* with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.<sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;<sup>20</sup>for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope<sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.<sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now;<sup>23</sup>and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.<sup>24</sup>For in\* hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes\* for what is seen?<sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes\* with sighs too deep for words.<sup>27</sup>And God,\* who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit\* intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.\*

28 We know that all things work together for good\* for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.<sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.\*<sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he

called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

<sup>31</sup> What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?<sup>32</sup> He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?<sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.<sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.<sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or

persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?<sup>36</sup> As it is written,

'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### *(iv) 8.1-39 No More Condemnation – God's Triumph*

- Paul expands the thought in 7.24-25. The Holy Spirit living within the believers enables them to live lives free of the effects of slavery to sin (= 'flesh', 8.1-11).
- Adopted as children of God and heirs (8.12-17)...
- ...but heirs share the inheritance, and that includes suffering (8.17-25), including participation in the birth-pangs of God's new world.
- The role of hope (8.24-25).
- We are not alone – the Spirit intercedes with groans (8.26-27, cp. 8.22).
- God draws all things together and his love triumphs over sin and death (8.31-39, cp. Revelation: no single image is enough to capture the whole truth).

But the issue of the Law and the place of Israel in the purpose of God remains. This is what Paul now goes on to explore in Romans 9-11.

## b) Lament and Hope - Some Thoughts on Romans 8.20-28

Romans 8 is one of the great highlights of Paul's letters, in fact of the whole New Testament. Here, after Paul has worked his way through how he understands the good news of Jesus Christ, which is that God in Jesus has brought the lost creation back to himself, he returns to what this cosmic truth might mean for Christians. Where do they fit in the great drama Paul has outlined? Here's what Paul says (my translation):

*(20) For the creation was enslaved to futility, not willingly, but because the one who gave it over did so in the hope (21) that the creation would be set free from its slavery to destruction into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

*(22) For we know that the whole creation laments together and labours in pain till now. (23) And not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, we also lament within, while we wait urgently to be adopted as children, when our bodies are set free. (24) This is the hope in which we were saved; but a hope you can see isn't hope, because you don't hope for what you can already see. (25) Instead we hope for what we don't yet see, waiting urgently but patiently.*

*(26) At the same time also the Spirit draws alongside us to help our frailty, for we don't know what we need to pray for. So the Spirit prays for us with laments beyond words; (27) and the one who can see into hearts knows the mind of the Spirit who pleads with God on behalf of the holy ones.*

*(28) And we know that God draws all things together towards what is good for those who love him and are called into his plan.*

One of the words which ties this passage together is 'lament', 'groan', or sigh' (Greek: *stenazo/stenagmos*). It's an evocative word, used of the cry of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old

Testament with which Paul was familiar. The people groan under subjection to Pharaoh, and as Walter Brueggemann says, 'it is the cry of Israel (Exod. 2.23-25) that mobilizes Yahweh to the action that begins the history of Israel. The cry initiates history.' ('The Costly Loss of Lament' in *The Psalms and Life of Faith* Fortress Press 1995, p.106.) In Exodus it is as if God is asleep, and the lament of Israel wakes him and rouses him. Divine action seems, in the grace of God, to be spurred on by the human plight. In Romans 8 creation laments, Christians share that lament, and amazingly, the Spirit also shares that lament, which means that God does too. So this passage situates our own sadness, our own sense of lament, and reinterprets that lament as a form of hope.

Creation laments because, Paul says, it is enslaved (this is where we hear the echoes of Exodus). Here he's referring back to his diagnosis of the condition of creation that has run away from God in Romans 1, where he says that God has 'given them up' (1.24, 26, 28). But having 'given them up' to futility is not the same as 'giving up on them', which has been the gist of Paul's argument in the succeeding chapters. God's giving up is in order for the creation to see the folly, the futility, of its own devices; in order to seek to come back to its creator. This is the hope that Paul speaks of in v.21; that the creation would be set free from its slavery to destruction in order to enter into the freedom which is already seen in the children of God.

The creation laments because it's in pain, but this pain Paul identifies, in a brilliant move, as not destructive but creative pain: like childbirth. It's a brilliant move because the pain of childbirth is perhaps the only pain that is like this; necessary for greater good to come about, for new life to be created.

This creative pain is what Christians share, a recognition which issues in lament, that the world is not as it should be, that it is full of destruction, injustice, of decay and entropy. Christians have a hope of creation set right, they know the first-fruits of the Kingdom of God in the Spirit within

them, but they still lament. In fact they may feel the contrast between what is and what is to be as a sharp agony of waiting for the time when bodies will be redeemed, that is to say, set free from their slavery to decay (the image of redemption picks up the slavery allusions earlier on in the passage). Lament for the decay of illness, for example, is lament for the finitude of the human condition, in which Christians share. But alongside lament is hope that this pain and decay is not the last word. Though Paul doesn't say so explicitly here, it's clear from his other letters that the ground of this hope is the resurrection of Jesus in bodily form. There is urgency in this hope, but patience too. It will be fulfilled in God's time, not ours.

And then, the greatest wonder, is that the lament of creation and of Christians is also remarkably the lament of God too. In pain, in our lament, we do not know what to pray and the Spirit comes alongside and prays for us in lament too, our deepest yearning and longing swept up into God, beyond the words which we stumble to find, our incoherent groans of lament. For God knows, he sees and searches hearts; he does not need words. In an extraordinary mystery we see here that our pain, our lament, and even that of the whole creation, is a drop in the ocean of the pain and lament of God himself over his broken world. He knows it because he shares it.

If we can glimpse this it perhaps relativises our own pain, our own sighs and laments. That's not to

say the pain and lament is unimportant: quite the reverse. As we share the pain of the runaway creation, we see that what we experience is a fraction of what God himself feels too.

In the final verse of the passage Paul puts all this in its place. Within the great mission of God to bring healing to his runaway creation, those who love him and offer themselves to be part of his plan are part of his drawing together of all things for the good. But only by sharing the lament of the creation and the Spirit are we part of the plan of God. It's a hard path, but it is a path of hope.

One of the extraordinary reversals of Christian faith, which after twenty centuries we sometimes fail to grasp, is the utter disruption of saying that God is revealed in suffering, in the death of Jesus on the cross. For the ancient world this was utterly absurd. Those who suffered, who lamented, were clearly on the losing side and could not be close to God. The suffering of Jesus dignifies pain; his cry of dereliction is in the words of a psalm of lament: 'Why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15.34). Lament has its place, but it does not have the last word. Lament is met with hope. Which is why Paul goes on from here to close the first part of Romans with his ringing conviction that, whatever affliction comes, nothing in the end can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 8.39).



## 4. God's Choice of Israel (Rom. 9.1-11.36)

### a) Romans 9-11 as a coherent section

- Does this section belong to the argument of Romans or not? (The flow from 8.39-12.1 doesn't necessarily require it).
- It depends what you think the letter is for. If it is a meant to be a doctrinal treatise, then Romans 9-11 is superfluous. But if it is an attempt to argue for Paul's own mediating position in a mixed Jew-Gentile church, then it becomes a central part of the letter.
- Reading what Paul wrote – rather than what we would like him to have written!

Richard B. Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (T.&T. Clark 1996) writes (p.412):

The entire letter to the Romans circles around two basic issues:

- *Is the grace of God extended to Gentiles who do not observe the Torah?* Paul answers emphatically yes: the righteousness of God is now revealed in Jesus Christ, apart from the Law. The gospel of "the power of God for salvation" is for "the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1.16).
- *If God receives Gentiles by grace without requiring circumcision and adherence to the Law, does that mean that he has broken the covenant with Israel?* This question, which is the focus of Romans 9-11, Paul answers even more emphatically than the first: ...by no means!...A major purpose of Romans is to offer an impassioned defense of the faithfulness of God to Israel, despite that people's manifest unfaithfulness (3.3).

#### **Dealing with a tricky passage: how do you go about it?**

- Read the whole passage in one go. Try to sense the flow, the gaps and the structure.
- Isolate the units. Spilt it up into blocks of thought.
- Try to sum up the theme of each block in a single sentence.
- Now expand your explanation. What is in each block?

### The Spectrum between 'law-free' and 'subject to law':

Law-free-----Subject to Law

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Christians who see no role for the Law or Hebrew Scriptures</b></li> <li>• 'Anything goes – Christ has set us free!'</li> <li>• Predominantly Gentile</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Paul's mediating position</b></li> <li>• the Law as a diagnostic tool which identifies sin</li> <li>• Jesus has dealt with sin, but standards of ethical behaviour are required as a means of witness, reflecting the character of God</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Christians who see Jesus as fulfilling but not setting the Law aside in any way</b></li> <li>• circumcision and food regulations are still required to serve God</li> <li>• Predominantly Jewish (Pharisees?)</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

Richard Hays in another book suggests that Romans 9-11 is 'broadly analogous to the structure of a lament psalm' (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (Yale University Press 1989) p.64.) This is a helpful observation – a good example of a lament Psalm is Psalm 44 (quoted in Romans 8.36).

Can you see a parallel between it and Romans 9-11, as outlined below?

#### Psalm 44

<sup>1</sup> We have heard with our ears, O God,  
our ancestors have told us,  
what deeds you performed in their days,  
in the days of old:  
<sup>2</sup> you with your own hand drove out the  
nations,  
but them you planted;  
you afflicted the peoples,  
but them you set free;  
<sup>3</sup> for not by their own sword did they win the  
land,  
nor did their own arm give them victory;  
but your right hand, and your arm,  
and the light of your countenance,  
for you delighted in them.  
<sup>4</sup> You are my King and my God;  
you command victories for Jacob.  
<sup>5</sup> Through you we push down our foes;  
through your name we tread down our  
assailants.  
<sup>6</sup> For not in my bow do I trust,  
nor can my sword save me.  
<sup>7</sup> But you have saved us from our foes,  
and have put to confusion those who hate  
us.  
<sup>8</sup> In God we have boasted continually,  
and we will give thanks to your name for  
ever.  
<sup>9</sup> Yet you have rejected us and abased us,  
and have not gone out with our armies.  
<sup>10</sup> You made us turn back from the foe,  
and our enemies have taken spoil for  
themselves.  
<sup>11</sup> You have made us like sheep for slaughter,  
and have scattered us among the nations.  
<sup>12</sup> You have sold your people for a trifle,  
demanding no high price for them.  
<sup>13</sup> You have made us the taunt of our

neighbours,  
the derision and scorn of those around us.  
<sup>14</sup> You have made us a byword among the  
nations,  
a laughing-stock among the peoples.  
<sup>15</sup> All day long my disgrace is before me,  
and shame has covered my face  
<sup>16</sup> at the words of the taunters and revilers,  
at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.  
<sup>17</sup> All this has come upon us,  
yet we have not forgotten you,  
or been false to your covenant.  
<sup>18</sup> Our heart has not turned back,  
nor have our steps departed from your way,  
<sup>19</sup> yet you have broken us in the haunt of  
jackals,  
and covered us with deep darkness.  
<sup>20</sup> If we had forgotten the name of our God,  
or spread out our hands to a strange god,  
<sup>21</sup> would not God discover this?  
For he knows the secrets of the heart.  
<sup>22</sup> Because of you we are being killed all day  
long,  
and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.  
<sup>23</sup> Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?  
Awake, do not cast us off for ever!  
<sup>24</sup> Why do you hide your face?  
Why do you forget our affliction and  
oppression?  
<sup>25</sup> For we sink down to the dust;  
our bodies cling to the ground.  
<sup>26</sup> Rise up, come to our help.  
Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast  
love.

For more on lament psalms see  
<http://www.bibleodyyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/psalms-of-lament.aspx>.)

a) 9.1-31 – has the word of God failed?

- (i) 9. 1-5 - *Paul's sorrow (prologue)*
- (ii) 9.6-18 - *has the word of God failed?*
- (iii) 9.19-29 – *the inscrutable ways of God*
- (iv) 9.30-33 – *striving for righteousness (bridge)*

b) 10.1– 10.21 – God, Israel and Gentiles

- (i) 10.1-13 – *the same Lord is Lord of all*
- (ii) 10.14-21 - *how is God heard?*

c) 11.1-36 – has Israel been abandoned?

- (i) 11.13- 16 - *how Gentiles should respond*
- (ii) 11.17-32 – *the mystery and paradox of God's actions*
- (iii) 11.33-36- *doxology (conclusion)*

What's the advantage of seeing this passage as a lament psalm?

## b) 9.1-31 – has the word of God failed?

9 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup>I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.<sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, \* my kindred according to the flesh.<sup>4</sup>They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises;<sup>5</sup>to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, \* who is over all, God blessed for ever. \* Amen.

6 It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel,<sup>7</sup>and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but 'It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you.'<sup>8</sup>This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants.<sup>9</sup>For this is what the promise said, 'About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son.'<sup>10</sup>Nor is that all; something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac.<sup>11</sup>Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue,<sup>12</sup>not by works but by his call) she was told, 'The elder shall serve the younger.'<sup>13</sup>As it is written, 'I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.'

14 What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!<sup>15</sup>For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'

<sup>16</sup>So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.<sup>17</sup>For the scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.'<sup>18</sup>So then he has mercy on whomsoever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomsoever he chooses.

19 You will say to me then, 'Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?'<sup>20</sup>But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is moulded say to the one who moulds it, 'Why have you made me like this?'<sup>21</sup>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?<sup>22</sup>What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction;<sup>23</sup>and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—<sup>24</sup>including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?<sup>25</sup>As indeed he says in Hosea,

'Those who were not my people I will call "my people", and her who was not beloved I will call "beloved".'<sup>26</sup> 'And in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people", there they shall be called children of the living God.'

27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, 'Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved,<sup>28</sup>for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively.'<sup>29</sup>And as Isaiah

predicted,

'If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors\* to us,  
we would have fared like Sodom  
and been made like Gomorrah.'

30 What then are we to say? Gentiles, who did not  
strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is,  
righteousness through faith;<sup>31</sup> but Israel, who did  
strive for the righteousness that is based on the  
law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law.<sup>32</sup> Why

not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis  
of faith, but as if it were based on works. They  
have stumbled over the stumbling-stone,<sup>33</sup> as it is  
written,

'See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make  
people stumble, a rock that will make them fall,  
and whoever believes in him\* will not be put to  
shame.'

(i) 9. 1-5 - Paul's sorrow (prologue)

- Paul caught between strong factions. His unmistakable anguish - lament.
- Romans 1.16-17: the headline. The righteousness of *God* is at stake – before Paul has looked at the righteousness of humans.
- The messiah who is 'over all'. The Lordship of Jesus.
- Pressure to compartmentalise God. 'If Jesus is not Lord of all, then he is not Lord at all.' Christ and Caesar

(ii) 9.6-18 - has the word of God failed?

- Romans 3.1-6: unfinished business?
- Looping back to Abraham (chs. 3/4) – righteousness by faith (trust), not what you do or who you are – children of the promise
- Is God unjust? A serious question.

(iii) 9.19-29 – the inscrutable ways of God

- Whose rules here? All is grace to be received. (Not a great argument for post-Enlightenment thought!)
- God chooses who to use.

(iv) 9.30-33 – striving for righteousness (bridge)

- Summary statement: faith, not works (doing) matters
- You can't strive for righteousness, it comes as a free gift

## c) 10.1– 10.21 – God, Israel and Gentiles

10 Brothers and sisters,\* my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.<sup>2</sup>I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened.<sup>3</sup>For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness.<sup>4</sup>For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

5 Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that 'the person who does these things will live by them.'<sup>6</sup>But the righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?"' (that is, to bring Christ down)<sup>7</sup>or "Who will descend into the abyss?"' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).<sup>8</sup>But what does it say? 'The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);<sup>9</sup>because\* 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.<sup>10</sup>For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.<sup>11</sup>The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.'<sup>12</sup>For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on

him.<sup>13</sup>For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?<sup>15</sup>And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'<sup>16</sup>But not all have obeyed the good news;\* for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?'<sup>17</sup>So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.\*

18 But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for

'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'

<sup>19</sup>Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,

'I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.'

<sup>20</sup>Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.'

<sup>21</sup>But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'

(i) 10.1-13 – *the same Lord is Lord of all*

- vv. 1-4 – a summary statement which sums up much of Romans in a short space.
- vv. 11-13 – Lord of all – the logic is that God *cannot* just be the God of Israel (note change to Israel) – he must be ‘Lord of all’, a universal claim – cf. Gal. 6.16 – *true* Israel is all who believe.

(ii) 10.14-21 *how is God heard?*

- vv. 14-21 - Is Israel’s the only revelation? v.18 – the natural creation? (Ps 19.4) Or the gospel has already been preached? What is the word? Does it need speech?

## d) 11.1-36 – has Israel been abandoned?

11 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.<sup>2</sup> God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?<sup>3</sup> 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.'<sup>4</sup> But what is the divine reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'<sup>5</sup> So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.<sup>6</sup> But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.\*

7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,<sup>8</sup> as it is written,

'God gave them a sluggish spirit,  
eyes that would not see  
and ears that would not hear,  
down to this very day.'

<sup>9</sup> And David says,

'Let their table become a snare and a trap,  
a stumbling-block and a retribution for them;

<sup>10</sup> let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,  
and keep their backs for ever bent.'

11 So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling\* salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel\* jealous.<sup>12</sup> Now if their stumbling\* means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for

Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

13 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry<sup>14</sup> in order to make my own people\* jealous, and thus save some of them.<sup>15</sup> For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!<sup>16</sup> If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy.

17 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,<sup>18</sup> do not vaunt yourselves over the branches. If you do vaunt yourselves, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.<sup>19</sup> You will say, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.'<sup>20</sup> That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.<sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you.\*<sup>22</sup> Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness towards you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.

25 So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters,\* I want you to

understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.<sup>26</sup> And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

‘Out of Zion will come the Deliverer;  
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.’

<sup>27</sup> ‘And this is my covenant with them,  
when I take away their sins.’

<sup>28</sup> As regards the gospel they are enemies of God\* for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors;<sup>29</sup> for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.<sup>30</sup> Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience,<sup>31</sup> so

they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now\* receive mercy.<sup>32</sup> For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

<sup>33</sup> O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!

<sup>34</sup> ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counsellor?’

<sup>35</sup> ‘Or who has given a gift to him,  
to receive a gift in return?’

<sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.

(i) 11.1-6 – has God rejected his people?

- No!
- Paul’s own feelings.
- The remnant, elected by grace (vv.5-6).

(ii) 11.7-12 – the stumbling of Israel means salvation for the rest of the world

- Part of Israel has obtained what was sought. The rest were ‘hardened’.
- vv.11-12 – is God’s purpose in Israel’s stumbling the inclusion of the Gentiles?

(iii) 11.13- 16 - how Gentiles should respond

- v.15 is key: their rejection is the reconciliation of the world

(iv) 11.17-32 – the mystery and paradox of God’s actions

- Don’t boast!
- the olive tree analogy
- vv.20-22 – the kindness and severity of God. You stand where you stand because of grace. (Does ‘faith’ help?)

- the mystery of the hardening (v.25)  
“All Israel” is the community of those elected by God in and with Jesus Christ both from Jews and also from Gentiles, the whole Church together with the holy root of Israel will consist in the totality of all the branches finally united with and drawing sustenance from it, in the totality constituted by the remnant continuing in and with the original stem Jesus Christ, by the wild shoots added later from the Gentiles, and by the branches which were cut off and are finally grafted in again. (Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics* II/2, (T.&T.Clark 1957)p.300.)

(v) 11.33-36- *doxology (conclusion)*

- the deepest mystery is the unsearchability of the wisdom of God. Compare with 8.38-39.
- Isaiah 55.6-11.

So – what’s Paul’s answer in a nutshell? Has he faced the question?

**Next week: Romans 12.1-15.13 DIY!**

- We’ll use the analytical process introduced above to look at these three and half chapters.

## 5. Advice for Living (Rom. 12.1-15.13)

### a) Putting the method to work

Step 1: split the passage up into sections. Where do you break it up, and why? Can you give each section a subtitle?

Step 2: Choose one section to look at within your group and be ready to feed back at the end of the session. Please DON'T read the notes that follow!

Remember the two critical tools we've used – dealing with a difficult passage and the 5 Critical Questions to ask of a text.

***Dealing with a tricky passage: how do you go about it?***

- *Read the whole passage in one go. Try to sense the flow, the gaps and the structure.*
- *Isolate the units. Split it up into blocks of thought.*
- *Try to sum up the theme of each block in a single sentence.*
- *Now expand your explanation. What is in each block?*

***Five Critical Questions***

1. *Author/audience - who's speaking, who's listening?*
2. *Characters – who's acting?*
3. *Settings – where and when?*
4. *Plot – what's happening and why?*
5. *Rhetoric – how?*

**12** I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**3** For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,<sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.<sup>6</sup> We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith;<sup>7</sup> ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;<sup>8</sup> the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

**9** Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;<sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour.<sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.<sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

**14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.<sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.<sup>18</sup> If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.<sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'<sup>20</sup> No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their

heads.<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

13 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.<sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.<sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval;<sup>4</sup> for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.<sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience.<sup>6</sup> For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing.<sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.

8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.<sup>9</sup> The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'<sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

11 Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;<sup>12</sup> the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light;<sup>13</sup> let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy.<sup>14</sup> Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

14 Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions.<sup>2</sup> Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables.<sup>3</sup> Those who

eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them.<sup>4</sup> Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

<sup>5</sup> Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds.<sup>6</sup> Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

<sup>7</sup> We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.<sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.<sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God.<sup>11</sup> For it is written,

'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.'

<sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

<sup>13</sup> Let us therefore no longer pass judgement on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling-block or hindrance in the way of another.<sup>14</sup> I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.<sup>15</sup> If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.<sup>16</sup> So do not let your good be spoken of as evil.<sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval.<sup>19</sup> Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual edification.<sup>20</sup> Do not, for the sake of

food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat;<sup>21</sup> it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble.<sup>22</sup> The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve.<sup>23</sup> But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

<sup>15</sup> We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.<sup>2</sup> Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour.<sup>3</sup> For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.'<sup>4</sup> For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.<sup>5</sup> May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus,<sup>6</sup> so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup> Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.<sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,<sup>9</sup> and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

'Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name';

<sup>10</sup> and again he says,

'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people';

<sup>11</sup> and again,

'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him';

<sup>12</sup> and again Isaiah says,

'The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.'

<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in

believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**b) 12.1-13.10 – Be transformed****(i) 12.1-2 Living Sacrifices**

- Sacrificial language – but the living sacrifice tends to wriggle off the altar! A different way of living.
- J.B.Phillips: 'Don't let the world squeeze you into its mould.' Transformation happens through the renewing of minds (*knowing*).

**(ii) 12.3-8 – One body**

- Parallel with 1 Cor. 12.4-31. The importance of interdependence.

**(iii) 12.9-13.10 - Genuine love**

- A general list which becomes specific (note also parallel with 1 Cor 13, following same sequence after teaching on one body).
- Similarities with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.
- 'burning coals' – probably shame and embarrassment rather than deliberately making them squirm!
- From personal conduct to citizenship (13.1-7); then to 'golden rules' of the well-lived life (not universally agreed, but in line with many philosophers' teaching). This is the interior witness to the ethical aspect of the Law which Paul has referred to in the early chapters of the letter.
- Little private space in the ancient world (see Edward Adams *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places* (Bloomsbury 2015)) – so conduct was not hidden at all. Actions are key to the spread of the Gospel.

**c) 13.11-14 Now is the Moment**

- A bridge passage between 12.3-13.10 and 14.1-15.13
- Salvation is coming. Live in the light.

## d) 14.1-15.13 – Welcome, don't judge

## (i) 14.1-23 Food and days

- Possible Jew/Gentile conflict here – food is a key issue in the early church (cp. Gal. 2.11-12). Jews are free to live by the Law, but must not dictate to Gentiles. Gentiles are free not to live by the Law but must respect those who do.
- God's judgment is implied in 13.11-14: therefore do not judge. Check for what really matters – the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformers used the word *adiaphora* to describe 'things indifferent' which are not central to the Gospel – they included robes and bishops – what might our contemporary equivalents be?

## (ii) 15.-1-6 Space for disagreement.

- Return to the character and example of Jesus, as Paul often does (cp. Phil 2.5-11).
- Living in harmony and singing with one voice (15.5-6).

## (iii) 15.7-13 Conclusion

- Climax of this 'welcome' section is an appeal to the example of Christ again.
- Final note that this is a Jewish faith for the Gentiles- the overall theme of the letter.
- A final prayer: hope x2!

## e) 16.26-33 The Ending of the Letter

<sup>26</sup>for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup>They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things.<sup>28</sup>So, when I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, <sup>\*</sup>I will set out by way of you to Spain;<sup>29</sup>and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing <sup>\*</sup>of Christ.

30 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, <sup>\*</sup>by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf,<sup>31</sup>that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry <sup>\*</sup>to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,<sup>32</sup>so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.<sup>33</sup>The God of peace be with all of you. <sup>\*</sup>Amen.

- Finally Paul greets those he knows (or has heard of) in Rome - from which in session 1 we got the idea of who he is talking to.
- In his last remarks, note how Paul does not ignore the practical aspects of his mission. 'Here's the thing' he says: 'I need your support and your money'! He outlines his intended actions – to take the collection for the Judean church to Jerusalem, and then to go to Spain via Rome. According to Acts, it didn't quite work out that way, and when he arrived in Rome it was in chains. He probably never got to Spain.

## Text to Sermon - Assignment

These are the Sundays on which passages from Romans is read as part of the Church of England's Principal Service lectionary. One list shows the liturgical order, the other follows the order of the letter.

Choose *one* of these passages and write a sermon on it which you will deliver to a small group.

It should contain:

- A brief introduction to where your chosen passage fits in the overall shape of Romans;
- An explanation of what Paul is saying in the passage;
- A reflection on how the passage relates to life today.

Your sermon should take 15 minutes to deliver.

Please submit a written version of your sermon as an assignment, together with a 1000-word reflection on how you approached the task and what methods you used to look at the passage in your preparation.

### Year A – Matthew's Gospel (2019-20, 2022-23, 2025-26)

Advent 1	Rom 13.11-14	Proper 8	Rom 6.12-23
Advent 2	Rom 15.4-13	Proper 9	Rom 7.15-25a
Advent 4	Rom 1.1-7	Proper 10	Rom 8.1-11
Epiphany 9	Rom 1.16-17; 3.22b-28 (29-31)	Proper 11	Rom 8.12-25
Lent 1	Rom 5.12-19	Proper 12	Rom 8.26-39
Lent 2	Rom 4.1-5, 13-17	Proper 13	Rom 9.1-5
Lent 5	Rom 8.6-11	Proper 14	Rom 10.1-5
Proper 4	Rom 1.16-17; 3.22b-28 (29-31)	Proper 15	Rom 11.1-2a, 29-32
Proper 5	Rom 4.13-25	Proper 16	Rom 12.1-8
Proper 6	Rom 5.1-8	Proper 17	Rom 12.9-21
Proper 7	Rom 6.1b-11	Proper 18	Rom 13.8-14
		Proper 19	Rom 14.1-12

### Year B – Mark's Gospel (2017-18, 2020-21, 2023-24, 2026-27)

Advent 4	Rom 16.25-27
Lent 2	Rom 4.13-25

### Year C – Luke's Gospel (2018-19, 2021-22, 2024-25, 2027-28)

Lent 1	Rom 10.8b-13
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Year	Sunday	Reading
A	Epiphany 9	Rom 1.16-17; 3.22b-28 (29-31)
A	Proper 4	Rom 1.16-17; 3.22b-28 (29-31)
A	Advent 4	Rom 1.1-7
A	Lent 2	Rom 4.1-5, 13-17
A	Proper 5	Rom 4.13-25
B	Lent 2	Rom 4.13-25
A	Proper 6	Rom 5.1-8
A	Lent 1	Rom 5.12-19
A	Proper 7	Rom 6.1b-11
A	Proper 8	Rom 6.12-23
A	Proper 9	Rom 7.15-25a
A	Proper 10	Rom 8.1-11
A	Lent 5	Rom 8.6-11
A	Proper 11	Rom 8.12-25
A	Proper 12	Rom 8.26-39
A	Proper 13	Rom 9.1-5
A	Proper 14	Rom 10.5-15
C	Lent 1	Rom 10.8b-13
A	Proper 15	Rom 11.1-2a, 29-32
A	Proper 16	Rom 12.1-8
A	Proper 17	Rom 12.9-21
A	Advent 1	Rom 13.11-14
A	Proper 18	Rom 13.8-14
A	Proper 19	Rom 14.1-12
A	Advent 2	Rom 15.4-13
B	Advent 4	Rom 16.25-27