

Notes on

# Romans

God's Faithfulness

One Family

New World

Kent Hodge

These notes have been divided into two sections.

Section one covers Romans chapters 1-7.

Section two covers Romans chapters 8-16.

# Romans

Chapters 1-7

From Accusing  
To Family Care

Kent Hodge

Romans isn't primarily a letter about our personal justification. Rather, Romans is a letter about God moving mankind from a life of accusation to a life of love and care for others. Accusation has filled our heart since the fall, in which we accuse ourselves and also our neighbour, bringing division, with personal and social destruction. The law has brought us into a downward slide into this captivity of separation from God and conflict.

God has embarked on a salvation plan, in which in his love he takes our sin and forgives it. He then calls us to do the same for our neighbour. God establishes a new community, where people freely receive and love each other, despite our backgrounds and traditional differences. This community is released into the world, bringing forgiveness, love and healing, where there was formerly offence, bitterness and destruction.

In doing this, God has fulfilled his promises to Israel. By sending Christ, God has been faithful to his original creation plan, in commissioning Adam and Eve to reflect his serving and self-giving image in the world. God has demonstrated his righteousness and faithfulness, in restoring humanity in Christ to our call of a rule of love over his creation.

## Context

To start with we need to get the context of the letter.

The first matter here is to ask what was Paul writing about? We predominately read Romans by our own worldview. In Western theology this is largely to do with judicial thinking. That is, man has fallen short of God's requirement in some legal sense. There is a bar representing a standard of righteousness, and man has fallen short of this bar.

Western theology interprets the word of God from Genesis to Revelation mainly in this light. It's like God's main aim in the gospel is to justify man in line with this legal requirement. If this justification can happen, then man is fit for relationship with God again, and even to enter heaven when he dies. Those who are justified legally by God enter heaven for eternity, and those who are not enter the lake of fire for eternity. This is often the Western view of the word of God.

This is the major view of the letter to the Romans in the Reformation. At least, this is how Western churches largely viewed the Reformation in its aftermath. The Reformation is seen as a battle between Luther and the Catholic Church, about how this legal justification occurs, or how man is justified before God. It is said that the Catholics argued that this justification occurs through our works, while Luther argued it is by faith.

This is an oversimplification of the debate between Protestants and Catholics. It oversimplifies the role of works in our lives as Christians. We don't want to get into that discussion at this point. The point here and now is that the Reformation, and the post Reformation period, up until today, largely employs Romans, and Paul, to argue in this debate about our personal justification.

It is said that this was Paul's debate in Romans. It is said that Romans is to do primarily with how we are justified and then glorified. It is said that glorification is about going to heaven when we die. A main issue in Romans, according to our Reformed or Evangelical theology today, is about how we are made right with God, in order to fellowship with him forever in heaven and miss eternal judgement.

But what if we said that this wasn't what Paul was mainly writing about? What if Paul did discuss our justification, but he was doing so mainly with a purpose in mind that we don't focus on. That is, we have read Romans from the point of view of our own questions as Western believers. But what if this point of view wasn't what was mainly on Paul's mind?

We have read Romans from what we perceive was Luther's main question about personal justification. But what was Paul's question? What question was Paul answering as he sat down to pen this letter? Luther didn't write the letter. Paul did. So why did he Paul write Romans?

## The Faithfulness of God

Paul's question was about God's faithfulness to his promises. Since creation, God has had a plan. What is that plan? He made the heavens and the earth and he made man, male and female, to rule over the earth through their connection and relationship with heaven. Heaven and earth were to be joined this way, as we see at the end of the book of Revelation.

God had promised to Israel that he was taking this project forward through them. God's promises to Israel weren't just spiritual, about legal justification and a place in heaven. God's promises to Israel were about a kingdom on earth. His promises were holistic, or about what they called shalom, peace and well-being to the whole person, the whole creation, including the renewal of the earth we live in here.

But it looked like all these promises went astray. Beginning with Babylon, and then Assyria, Greece and Rome which followed, Israel had gone into captivity. They were still in captivity when Jesus came; still under the yoke of Rome. The promises of a flourishing Israel that brought blessing to the whole gentile world, looked far off. They still looked impossible at Jesus' time.

When Jesus came the Jews hoped he was the Messiah. The Messiah would be the one who would fulfil the promises of God. He would re-establish Israel's rule, and also use Israel to bless and restore the whole world. These promises weren't about us leaving this world for heaven, but about heaven joining and healing the world through Israel.

The Jews mostly believed the Messiah would achieve this violently. Jesus was a big disappointment in every way. He didn't try at all to overthrow Rome. He didn't try at all to establish Jewish sovereignty and rule. Instead, he loved and served the enemies of Israel. Instead, he was killed as an outcast, like a gentile slave which is crucified. His entire mission was an embarrassment and a huge disappointment to Israel as a whole.

Here is the big letdown in regard to the promises of God. God had apparently failed in his earthly kingdom promises. He had failed in his holistic promises. It appeared now that his promises were just about spiritual things, about relationship with God only, to be ultimately fulfilled in heaven. It looked like God had cancelled out his promises concerning the mission of Israel to heal the nations.

It looked like that in the gospel, God had changed his mind and had adopted a new form of the gospel. Not the former Hebrew form. Not the commission of Adam to the nations. But now the gospel looks Greek. It resembles the ideas of the Greek philosophers, like Plato. It looks like God is throwing off his natural creation, and that his promises were now only spiritual.

This is what Paul was writing about in Romans. Has God been faithful to his promises to Israel and to the world through Israel? In what way did the Messiah fulfil these promises to Israel? Is there some strange way in which Jesus is the Messiah that Israel expected and the one through whom God does fulfil all his promises to Israel, not just the spiritual promises?

That is, has God been righteous to Israel and to the world in carrying out what he promised to do? This is what Paul means by “the righteousness of God.” Jesus Christ is the righteousness of God. That is, through Jesus, God has not abandoned his promises to restore our nations and world, but he has fulfilled them. Through Jesus, God has enacted his “covenant faithfulness.” Jesus Christ is the way in which God has done what he said he would do. Therefore, Jesus is the expression of God’s righteousness, of his faithfulness.

Through Christ, God has restored the kingdom of Israel. Through Christ, God has kept his promises to heal the world, just as he first purposed in creation in Adam and Eve. Through Christ, God did not circumvent his promises and divert us to heaven, but he fulfilled his promises about a holistic salvation and ultimate justice for all of his creation. This is the topic of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

Paul’s question was not primarily about us and our personal salvation, but about God and his righteousness to the whole world through Jesus Christ. This brings a particular view about the gospel into focus. The gospel is about God’s whole creation. It is about God building a new community of people to heal his world. It is very much a community gospel.

Instead of the gospel focusing centrally on legal justification for the individual, it is revealing a new community, which is God’s covenant faithfulness in healing that nations. The legal aspects of Romans are the enemy’s challenges to God’s actions, which God overcomes through the love and faithfulness of Christ. God has restored mankind to his image to fulfil Adam and Eve’s original mandate to the world; ruling through service.

### The Roman Church

Another aspect in the context of Paul’s letter is what was going on in Rome itself. Paul wrote Romans about one year after Emperor Claudius died. Claudius had passed a law saying that all Jews must leave Rome. This included Jewish believers in Christ. This is when Priscilla and Aquila left Rome and met Paul at Corinth. They became part of Paul’s team in church planting.

After Claudius died, the law was no longer operational and Jews were allowed to return to Rome. It is likely that Priscilla and Aquila then returned to Rome and headed up the house church group in that city. We suppose other Jewish believers were returning to Rome and joining the churches there.

These various house churches, mentioned in Romans 16, were likely a bit separate, especially as Jews were often culturally despised in Rome, and Paul was looking to unite them in love. This forms a major motivation of Paul in writing to Rome. He was concerned for the unity of believers in Rome, from gentile and Jewish backgrounds.

Nobody is certain about the origins of the Roman church. Some say Peter was the founder, but there is no evidence, apart from tradition, that Peter was ever in Rome. Paul said he would not build on another man’s foundation. The letter to Romans shows an ongoing

relationship between the church and Paul. Paul was apologising for not visiting Rome up until now. But he said he would endeavour to visit soon, on his way through to Spain.

It seems Paul wanted to shift his centre point for mission from Antioch in the east, to Rome in the west. This way he could journey further west for the gospel. He planned that the church in Rome could help him in this mission. It seems that Priscilla and Aquila had returned to Rome to oversee the churches, and that Paul was the apostle of those churches, as the head of a team which included Priscilla and Aquila.

### The Roman Rule

After Claudius died, the Roman senate passed a law saying that Claudius had ascended into heaven and had sat down at God's right hand and had been given rule over all the nations of the world. This rule, Rome claimed, was carried out through the Roman senate and the new Emperor Nero.

This claim of the senate was based on Daniel 7. There it says that one from among men ascended to heaven and ruled over all the world. This text was well known in all the empire, due to the synagogues and the Old Testament being translated into Greek. Rome claimed that their Emperor was the one the Jewish texts prophesied of. This would give him more credibility, especially in the eyes of the Jews, who were at times a lot of trouble to an idolatrous empire.

The first major world Emperor of Rome was Augustus. This was before Jesus came. Augustus conquered much of the known world and he claimed to be the world's saviour. He said he had brought peace and justice to the world, by conquering smaller powers and uniting nations for trade. His military outposts maintained order and allowed travel. He claimed he defeated anarchy through the Romans legal system.

Augustus called this the gospel, the good news of his reign for world renewal, called himself the Son of God and called all nations to faith and obedience. He claimed to fulfil the prophesies of Isaiah about a kingdom blessing the nations. Like all the pagan empires before him, he claimed he would turn the world into the Garden of God. It is this claim that Paul is writing about. For Paul, it was Christ that was fulfilling this very purpose in the world. Paul's gospel was about this world, which is being renewed by heaven.

## Romans 1 & 2

### A New Lord

It is startling when we realise that Paul was writing to Rome in this context. Paul was knowingly and deliberately debunking the Roman claims to divine rule. In the first verse he uses the word gospel, the same Greek word as Rome claimed for itself. Paul was saying that he is presenting the true good news, of the true Lord for the true world renewal.

Paul goes on to say that Jesus is the Son of God. This statement was treason in Paul's day. The Son of God wasn't just a religious title that we speak about on Sundays at church. It referred to the one who ruled the nations, to whom we all owed allegiance.

Paul said Christ was the Son of God with power. This was a reference to Daniel 7. It was Jesus, not Caesar, Paul said, who was raised from the dead, to rule at God's right hand in heaven. It was Jesus who ascended into heaven, to be granted ruler over all the nations. This is what heaven meant in the Hebrew mind. It isn't a place separated from the earth, far away. It is the place of power, to rule over the nations, from where the earth is renewed.

Paul said that Jesus was the governor of all the world, not Rome. Paul continued by saying that it is to Jesus that all nations must give obedience. This means a conflict between Caesar and Paul. In the mind of Caesar this is treason, but not in the mind of Paul. To Paul, God isn't after Caesar's throne. He just wants Caesar transformed. But Caesar believes that if he loved his enemies he may be overthrown. So Caesar would choose violence instead of God's kingdom.

Throughout Romans, Paul calls all people, from all nations of the world, to faith in Christ and claims that it is through Christ that God bring justice to the world. This justice, in contrast to Rome, isn't brought through brutality, but through the self-giving love and faithfulness of Christ.

The contrast is huge. On one hand we have Caesar who kills, who makes slaves, who holds races and classes in his empire in different levels of privilege, and on the other hand we have a King who gives his own life, and calls all groups of people to follow him in love and care for each other. God brings justice through our love, not through Roman, or through any other law.

No doubt, as Paul's letter was read in the churches of Rome, there were others listening, ready to carry reports to the rulers about the church's "treason." Informers would have received rewards, maybe even positions of advantage within the government.

Nevertheless, it was worth it for the church. Paul wasn't inciting the church against Rome, only against Roman values. The churches needed to be warned not to assimilate the self-centred values of the beast, but to follow the Lamb in serving others.

## One Church

Immediately, Paul brings up the matter of Jews and gentiles and this would be a main focus throughout the letter. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

With Jews returning to Rome and filtering into the churches, Paul is eager that they and the gentile believers forge strong relationships. Paul didn't want a fragmented church with churches separating according to the racial background of the believers.

Paul didn't want what happened in Antioch and in Galatia to happen in Rome. The problem in Antioch and Galatia had bedeviled Paul's mission work, and Paul was going to strike early to cut this problem off in Rome. In Antioch and Galatia, Judaizers had withdrawn from gentile believers and wouldn't eat with them.

This separation along nationalistic lines mirrors Caesar's type of justice/rule and it is the "other gospel" that Paul spoke of in Galatians. It mirrors the world powers in division. World powers rule mankind through division and injustice. God rules mankind through reconciliation, unity and care. This is a major theme in Romans. With Jews returning to the Roman church, after the edict of Claudius elapsed, Paul is eager that the gentiles and Jews don't look down on each other.

This theme picks up momentum throughout the letter. There is so much to say here, which will come out more in further notes. There is a kind of replacement theology already working in the hearts of gentile believers. They consider themselves better than the Jews, who they consider to be forsaken by God. On the other hand, the Jews also claim to be better, and hold a kind of Zionist approach to the gospel, as though they still have some special position with God.

But they don't hold a special position. They have fallen. Instead they have mercy, just like the gentiles, on the same level. This is explained throughout the letter. Both replacement theology and Zionism (gentile or Jewish nationalism) are wrong. Paul is eager to cut them both off, from the start of his letter.

As we read on in Romans we see that it isn't the law of the Jews that Paul is against. He isn't against their tradition of circumcision, or their other traditions. He is simply against making these traditions a necessity for fellowship between believers. It is fellowship Paul is speaking of, not the traditions themselves.

If the Reformation claimed that Paul condemned the Jewish works or traditions, and for that matter, the Catholic traditions as well, then it wasn't correct. If the Greek church fathers had read Paul more accurately, we may have averted two thousand years of persecuting the Jews. Paul was against Judaizers, not Jewish traditions. He was against enforcing these traditions on gentile worshippers. He was against Jewish nationalism. And if we had read Paul better, we may have averted 500 years of nationalist stances against Catholics since the Reformation.

## Salvation

“The gospel is the power of God to salvation.” What is salvation? In the Hebrew mind it is holistic, along the lines we spoke of above. It is about God calling people into a kingdom of love and care, through which the world is renewed. It is how the promises to the Jewish nation are fulfilled. The power of it is a new heart that we receive as the gift of God.

The former condemnation is gone, and forgiveness and love is spread and this breaks down divisions in the worldly empires and brings healing through helping those trodden down. This breaks down bitterness and brings peace. This is the kind of kingdom that Jesus brings into our world through our new hearts spilling over to our neighbours.

This is the gospel that Paul describes through the rest of the letter. It is a gospel where Jew and gentile come into one family through the cross and resurrection of Christ. Rather than their former hostility, they now see themselves as one. This family bringing loving justice to the world through the newness of our hearts, in contrast to the Roman injustice, is the salvation Paul is thinking of, not the individualistic salvation that we have become used to.

## Apocalypse

Paul begins by claiming that the righteousness of God is revealed through the gospel. First, we see Paul’s use of the word “revealed.” This is referring to the apocalypse, which means to unveil. Paul means, that which was revealed by the gospel, that is, by the death and resurrection of Christ, which was not known before.

The gospel was a massive surprise to the Jews and to the world in many ways. No one thought that God would overcome his enemies by peace. No one thought that God, who has all power, would overcome his enemies by giving his own life for them. No emperor would ever think of such a thing. No Jew would have considered such love to the heathen.

No one ever thought that God would fulfil his world renewing promises to Israel through the cross and resurrection. It was a total shock to us all. Through the gospel, the real nature of God and of his kingdom rule is revealed.

This apocalypse may be the main theme in Paul’s ministry, showing how that through this unexpected Messiah, God actually fulfils his word. Since Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus, this new vision and way of understanding the scripture dawned upon him. In all his letters, Paul is unfolding this new meaning to the world of his day.

## The Righteousness of God

Paul claimed in Rom 1:17-18 that two things are revealed by the gospel, which were not previously known. One is the righteousness of God. It has been held that this refers to God’s gift of righteousness to the believer. We have said that God gives his righteousness to us by faith.

We have viewed it this way because of our individualistic view of the gospel. We think the gospel is about us primarily, but it isn't. It is about God and his righteousness. Romans is primarily about God's righteousness, not first of all about our righteousness.

We have confused the righteousness of God with our justification and righteousness. Our righteousness is granted by the judge who declares us in right standing with the law. The judge of a court doesn't grant the defendant his own righteousness, but simply declares the status of the defendant in relation to the law. This is what God does for us in justification. God declares us forgiven members of his covenant family, not by the ceremonial works of the law, but by faith.

The righteousness of God however is a different matter. This is referring to God's own righteousness. Paul is setting out in Romans to show that God has been righteous, meaning that he has acted rightly in regards to his promises to Israel. The Greek is *dikaiosynē theou*, the faithfulness or justice of God in keeping covenant with Israel.

The main point of the letter of Romans is how God has shown himself to be faithful, or righteous, through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of God's promises, rather than the setting aside of his promises, and replacing them with another Greek spiritual gospel. Jesus Christ is the righteousness of God displayed to the world. In Christ, God has acted rightly.

Rom 1:17 says, "God's gospel unveils God's righteousness." This was the question first century Jews were asking. How will God be faithful to his covenant? In biblical and post-biblical Jewish texts, this is always what the phrase "righteousness of God" means.

This has a big impact on our reading of the letter. It shifts the letter's focus away from ourselves and towards the whole church community. It means that the whole culture of our faith shifts. It means that we now hold a faith that is looking at renewing our land, like Israel's Promised Land in the Old Testament, through our behaviour towards others, including our wider communities and even our enemies. This brings all Jesus' kingdom teachings to bear strongly upon Paul's teachings. This shows that Jesus and Paul are in the same ballpark after all, preaching the same gospel.

Paul's point is that the gospel is an apocalypse, an eye opener. When the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, we see that the gospel, not the law, is God's answer to God's promises. It isn't through the law that we see achieve the promises of God, but by grace, through God's Spirit working in our community life by faith.

#### From Faith to Faith

"The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." We have taken this phrase to mean that we receive righteousness by faith. It's true we are declared in right standing with God's covenant by faith, but this phrase is not speaking of that. It is speaking of God's own righteousness being revealed in our world through the church. This is speaking about the way in which God's promises of renewal in our lives and in our nations come to pass.

The just plan of God is unfolded in our hearts and communities “from faith to faith.” When we consider the shades of meaning of the Greek word *pistis* (faith, belief, trust, confidence, fidelity, faithfulness), this phrase means “from the faithfulness of God, to our trust in him.”

God’s righteousness has been revealed through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Jesus was faithful in that he loved us. He fulfilled the essence of the law, which is love for God and love for neighbour. When he forgave our sins against him on the cross, he was faithful to the love of God and to the law.

When we see this love, this draws us into trust. It moves us to give up our self-plan for salvation and trust instead in God’s free forgiveness and love. This is “the just shall live by faith”, which in Habakkuk meant his simple trust in the righteousness and faithfulness of God.

Trust moves us into faithfulness. It removes condemnation from our heart and enables us to share God’s love with our neighbour. That is, we are passing on the fulfilment of the law, which is love, to our neighbour in faithfulness. So this is the meaning of “from faith to faith;” or “from Christ’s faithfulness, to our trust;” or “from Christ’s faithfulness to our faithfulness.”

We can see here what Paul is saying about the righteousness and faithfulness of God in transforming the world through transforming our lives, and thereby fulfilling his promises to Israel. The Jews worked through law, which brought condemnation and destruction towards themselves and to those around them. The gospel is God’s plan in bringing Israel to see this, so they would give up their self-sufficiency plan and instead trust in the free love and grace of God.

This faith or trust in the love of Christ clears our hearts of a judgmental nature and opens us to God’s Spirit, who begins to fulfil community love in our lives, building God’s kingdom in the world, in line with what he promised. This is how Christ’s kingdom will reign from sea to sea, to the ends of the earth. This is how God fulfils his promises of changing us and our communities; by leading us, through his faithfulness to us, to pass on this same love to others.

The whole letter of Romans is calling us to a trust in God’s faithfulness and love, rather than a trust in our own works. This replaces the accusing work of the law in our lives which destroys community. Paul is calling the Jews and gentiles in Rome into this new kind of loving community. God’s faithfulness in transforming us and our communities as he promised, is revealed and fulfilled as we trust in his love and pass it on to our neighbour.

## The Fall of Israel

If the gospel is opening our eyes to God’s righteousness, then it is also opening our eyes to our fallenness. This is the second part of the apocalypse Paul is describing.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...” (Romans 1:18)

Throughout Paul's letter is speaks of "to the Jew first and also to the gentile." This includes both the gospel promises and also the judgment of God. The verse above is another one of these statements. This is what Paul means by "against all unrighteousness of men." By this Paul means both Jews and gentiles.

Pauls uses the word for apocalypse. It means the gospel reveals something here not known before. The cross and resurrection of Christ reveals the wrath of God in a way not known up till now.

This appears strange, because the wrath of God was already something well known. Israel knew God's wrath in the exile to Babylon. But since the return from Babylon, Israel took up the law of God and followed its letter more seriously.

Israel knew about God's wrath on the gentiles. They believed, as Paul said in chapter two, that Israel was a light to the gentiles, a guide to the blind and foolish nations. All the gentiles lay in idolatry and under the wrath of God. The Jews largely despised them. The sin of the gentiles and God's wrath against them was well known.

But Paul said God's wrath is now revealed against all men. This was the surprise, what the cross revealed, which wasn't known. Israel thought they had repented after Babylon. They cleansed themselves from outward idolatry, though they still had it in the form of covetousness, or love of mammon, which Jesus spoke about frequently. They thought that they had now perfected righteousness by the law and were waiting for God's commendation towards their nation, in sending a messiah to destroy their heathen sinful enemies.

This was Paul's testimony as a Pharisee, "concerning the law, perfect." (Philippians 3:6) But the cross revealed that all wasn't well in the camp of Israel. Things weren't as they seemed. And the resurrection backed that up even more. The cross and resurrection together revealed that Israel brutality killed an innocent man, even the Son of God. This brought them face to face with their real state before God in a way that was previously hidden and unknown to them.

The gospel revealed the Jew's own anger, violence and lawlessness, in persecuting and crucifying an innocent man. It is the same for us. When we persecute and scapegoat the innocent, of different nations or faiths, then this reveals our state before God. The cross of Christ reveals our heart against all those we shun and close off from Gods blessings.

This sinful state of Israel is highlighted by Paul in Romans 7 in more detail. There he describes the condition of Israel under the law. In chapters 9-11, Paul shows the surprise, or the apocalypse; meaning the fall of Israel, God's wrath upon Israel, his handing them over to their own hardness, which led to the salvation of the world. It is here, in Romans 1 and 2 that Paul begins to unfold and describe what Israel refused to hear, their own sinful condition before God.

The gospel is God's open revelation of both the sin of Israel and God's righteous plan in saving all who believe, the Jew first and also the gentile. The cross reveals the sin of humanity. The resurrection reveals his salvation and the launching of his new creation plan.

## Creation Restored

In Romans 1 and 2, Paul speaks of the fall of man and human idolatry. The fall is presented in terms of man's relationship to the creation. Man was placed over the creation in the Garden of Eden. He was made in the image of God to rule over this world and all that is in it. But instead of ruling over creatures, man is now bowing down to images of birds and animals. The fall is presented in regard to the Hebrew view of the gospel, of Adam's fall from dominion to servitude, and of Israel's call to reverse this.

The fall of man isn't presented by Paul as a legal fall. Romans does deal with the legal issues with regard to our salvation, but this is in regard to God's battle with the accuser, satan. As far as God himself is concerned, it is our captivity to death and the fruit of that in our lives that is the issue in the gospel. God rescues us from ourselves, not from his own legal demands. The "wrath of God" is our punishment under the law that the enemy demands.

When addressing the fall of man, Paul isn't speaking of a legal failure. It is man failing to reflect the image of God through his rule of shalom in the world. He has failed in God's commission. He has failed as a renewing priesthood, in a benevolent care of creation. Instead of creation flourishing, it is groaning, as Paul mentions in Romans 8. In Romans, Paul traces this fall of Adam and Eve, and thus of the whole creation and then the redemption of creation through the gospel.

Paul summarizes the fall of man with "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We have read this in legal terms, as though man has fallen short of some legal bar. This then means the gospel is simply Christ taking us over that bar and justifying us. This makes the gospel largely individualistic and largely spiritual. This takes the gospel out of its wider shalom, community and holistic purpose.

What Paul has in mind here is man's renewing service call to God's whole creation. This was the Hebrew vision Paul was writing from. The word "glory" in the verse above refers to man's rule over creation. It is used in Psalm 8, where the author speaks of man's dominion over this world, being restored through Christ. He says, he is crowned with glory, to rule over the works of God's hands. Paul is writing Romans about the restoration of mankind to this position and purpose.

It's a matter of moving away from our view of a legalistic God, to Paul's view in his Hebrew culture. The issue in Genesis 1 and 2, which is filling Paul's mind as he writes, is the temple. The "glory" refers to the image of God in Adam and Eve, and their commission as a heavenly conduit to the world, much like the vision of the renewed temple in Ezekiel 47, which is the church, also seen in Revelation 21-22. God gave man the role of filling the world with this temple, meaning God's love.

The essence of the gospel is of a renewing humanity within creation, to renew creation. We see this in Isaiah where the new Israel (those in Christ) are called to, "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes." This means our summons to renew the

four corners of the globe by our transformation in to the image of Christ. This is the New Testament vision of Christ's body filling all things in God's creation. (Ephesians 1:23)

The theme of the fall and restoration of Adam's rule runs through Romans. In Romans 4, the gospel is Abraham inheriting the whole world. In Romans 5 Israel takes on Adam's identity and sin, and through that the world is redeemed. In Rom 5:5, the love of God is restored to the human heart, replacing idolatry.

The purpose of this love, in the Hebrew *shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) is the Torah bringing forth new creation through new Israel. *Shema* in the Hebrew means "hear and do" love... The real hearing and doing can't come about through outward circumcision under the ceremonial law, but only through heart circumcision through faith/trust. (Deut 30:6) This is all through Paul's teaching, e.g. the light of God's word (Torah) shining through the gospel into our hearts, to bring forth new creation in the world. (2 Corinthians 4:6, 5:17, lit., "if any man be in Christ, new creation," reflecting the holistic purpose we are reborn into.)

In Rom 5:21, the obedience of Christ restores man to loving rule over the principalities of self (rulers of darkness). We aren't called to rule over other people, but over those things within ourselves, all the lifestyles outlined in Romans 1-2, that destroy community and creation. In Romans 8, the renewed rule of humanity delivers the whole creation from its corruption. Israel's call to renew Adam and thus creation is fulfilled in the gospel. This is Paul's overall narrative.

We aren't speaking here of a post-millennial prediction, where everything in our societies gradually gets better. We do know that God will change the whole of creation, but that doesn't mean there won't be great catastrophes along the way. I guess this depends in part on how man responds to God's kingdom, or doesn't, in the days ahead.

We see that Paul isn't preaching something different to Jesus in the Gospels. He hasn't departed from Jesus' teachings about love for neighbour, into a separate legal atonement, going-to-heaven individualism. Paul is addressing the same concerns Jesus was, about a humanity renewed in the Spirit, and taking up a new destiny of care within his community, reflecting God's image of life for healing.

## The Wrath of God

In Romans 1, Paul moves on to describe the wrath of God. We could say this is doctrine. He isn't writing in symbolic terms, as other scripture employs. So we could say that if we are looking for straight forward doctrine on the wrath of God, here it is. But Paul is speaking once again from his Hebrew mind on this subject matter.

First of all, wrath in the Hebrew scriptures is always historical. It's always God's acts within human history. It is never about a wrath that continues in conscious torment in an afterlife. God's wrath is about which kingdoms or nations will continue in this world in our human history and which ones won't. Those who aren't permitted to continue are destroyed, and

they are self-destroyed. In relation to the eternal kingdom, God's wrath is the same; who will enter his eternal kingdom of the renewed heaven and earth, and who won't.

In Romans 1 the wrath of God is described this way: "Therefore God gave them up," "for this God gave them up," "God gave them over." In each case God's wrath is God giving man over to himself, to reap the consequences of his own determined decisions and actions. That is, his wrath is his love, where he refuses to dictate to man's ultimate decisions. God doesn't execute the wrath personally. The wrath is in his allowing man to go the way he is determined to go. God finally allows him.

In Romans 2, wrath works the same way. God "renders to every man according to their deeds." That is, the deeds themselves bring about the judgement, one to destruction, the other to life. That people should reap what they sow, is the judgment of God. Those who sin without the law, reap the destruction they sow. Those who sin under the law, reap the destruction the law warns us of. This is not a legal punishment inflicted by God's own actions, but the consequences of our actions that the law bears witness to. The judgement seat of Christ is simply the eternal confirmation of the outcome of the life we have lived.

This doesn't mean we always get justice in this life. Many who sow good reap evil. But this evil isn't self-inflicted. It isn't the judgment of God, but the persecution of sinful man against them. The final judgement of God shall raise such people to life. But those who are destroyed in the process of selfish living, even if death comes upon them in ill-gained luxury, shall be allowed to reap those consequences which they brought upon themselves; that is, their death, in self-determined isolation from God.

Paul is speaking about wrath from the Hebrew perspective. In the Old Testament, wrath is God removing his hedge and allowing the destroyer entrance. In the end, God must do this because he is just. He must allow man what he wants. But he also does it because of his love; to cleanse the earth from oppression, to set the people and creation free from the abuse, to renew the world.

The question is, what or who is the destroyer? In scripture he is portrayed as satan, which means accuser. He is said to be some spiritual power above. It's hard to pin this down in scripture, about his personal being, or his operation through governments in high places, or through our high or proud thoughts, which sit above our lives and rule our sin and destruction. There is no certain talk of satan being created or of his fall before God made the world, although some people take some passages to speak in this way.

Satan, the accuser, and the destruction that follows, is seen in scripture to be what is in the heart of man. God said he would judge Jerusalem and pour his wrath out upon it. How was this done? He gave the city over to its own lusts. He removed his grace, or his hedge, which means his call in our human conscience to repent and care for others. We stop hearing his voice. We are given over to our own foolishness.

This is how Jerusalem was destroyed. After constant warning from the Prophets, Jesus and the apostles, after years of persecuting the weak and the Christians, the people of Jerusalem were given over to their own self-centredness. This produced strife throughout their

community, which led to civil war and unimaginable human wickedness. Finally, Rome had to come to settle the situation down. They did this by totally destroying the city. They took the temple apart brick by brick, to get at the gold that the temple rulers had hid between the bricks.

So what destroyed Jerusalem? It was God who took down his hedge and let Satan in. Who was Satan and how did he come in? He was the choices that man made, and he came in through the covetousness of man; both the covetousness of the Jews, who destroyed each other for gain, and the covetousness of Rome, who destroyed everything to get all the gold. God had no part in any of this wrath or destruction. He simply allowed it.

This is how sin destroys. It isn't God who destroys. Sin has its own seeds of destruction within it, from which God tries to save us, by calling us to repentance. Eternal life comes through the works that we do. It is the result of "patient continuance in well-doing." This is the gospel: a new heart, for a new path, for a new outcome; life. The old heart brings about a form of living that leads by itself to death. (Rom 2:7-10)

Paul outlines this throughout Romans, beginning in chapters 1-2. Here he points out the kind of living that reaps eternal blessing in our communities. In Romans 6-8 he shows how the gospel instils this life into us. In short, Paul says, what the law could not do in us, God has done by his Spirit. His Spirit turns our heart to sow the right seeds, that brings about the right harvest. This harvest is the life Paul is speaking about, the consequence of new lives. Torah pointed to this new life, by the *shema* works it outlined, but Torah couldn't change our heart.

Paul isn't speaking of just faith. He is speaking of genuine faith that changes the heart, that changes the works. We are given faith freely, without the law, but its purpose is to fulfil the law within our lives. We distinguish here between the works of the ceremonial law, and the works that are at the centre of the Torah witness, which is love for our neighbour. These are the works God has come in the gospel to make flourish in our lives and community.

I think we misrepresent Paul when we cut off Romans 1-2 from the rest of Romans, and hold that the judgment there is just one that happens under the law for those outside the gospel. I think this judgment is for all of us, and it is the gospel that produces in us the works of life Paul mentions in Romans 2:6, "He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life..." These works of grace vindicate God and his people at the final judgment. They defeat the accuser, which in Romans, is the aim of the gospel message.

When Jesus said that in the gospel we will not come into condemnation, but have passed from death into life, he is anticipating the fruits of the Spirit working into our lives by grace. Salvation is the whole ongoing testimony of faith, in our heart when we believed, the present transformation and the future hope of vindication.

## From Pride to Love

We have compartmented Romans 2 to say it is only speaking of the fall of sinners. But it is speaking of more than that. It is showing that a call of the gospel to allow the Spirit of God into our lives by a free gift, moves us into a walk of the Spirit. This means care for others, reflecting Jesus' love on the cross, that renews our lives and communities. This is introduced here, but fully presented in Romans 8, where Paul speaks of the sons of God serving the creation.

So many issues are introduced in chapter 2 and early on in chapter 3. Israel has been given the law, by which they think are better than others, a guide to the blind, and are able to judge the heathen. But this law actually leads to their own downfall, which Paul begins to speak about in chapter 3, and then more fully in chapters 5, 7 and 9-11. Their calling and privilege of election isn't to lord it over the gentiles, but to serve them. And this is what Israel does, not voluntarily, but through their sin. Their sin and fall leads to the glory of God, to his salvation going out to the world.

So instead of using the law to judge others, we should see in the law its main factor, *shema* love for our neighbour. We look at this in Romans 5. This is fulfilled in service. So Paul, in Romans, is moving the Jews and gentiles away from satan's accusative life, introduced in the Garden, into a community of free justification, of love and service for each other. This is his main point in speaking about the law, to lay it aside and produce a united family in love in the Roman church.

Paul is leading the Jews and gentiles to understand the service life style of chosenness, or what it means to be elected by God. The call to God is a call to serve others. We see this in Christ and the apostles. They both served the world through suffering, voluntarily in love. Israel served the world instead through their fall.

In Romans 9-11, Paul calls both Jews and gentiles not to boast against the other; the Jews because of their call, the gentiles boasting because of Israel's fall. Instead, we all move into a new life style of serving.

Romans 2:24-29 goes on to tell us that God will save some from eternal destruction, even those who may not have heard the gospel in its fullest sense. These are those who by their deeds show the law written within their hearts. This grace was available to people in the Old Testament times, even outside of Israel, as there are numerous examples in the Old Testament, e.g., Melchizedek, Moses' father-in-law, and the repentance of the Ninevites when Jonah preached to them.

Others who may claim to know God, but whose works show that claim is false, will not be saved. Here again, we see a judgment of works, works brought about through our hearts which have been renewed by the grace of God. We expect that this group of people with renewed hearts should be made very extensive through the gospel of Christ.

Again, Paul says this to bring down Jewish pride, as they fellowship with gentiles in the churches. It's not the law that is their boast, but grace. This ought to have the same effect upon us as we spread the gospel in our communities. We are to respect even God's

common grace among others. We are not better than sinners, if God's love is not shown in and through us to them all.

Our identity in our churches and communities isn't judging sinners, but loving and caring for them. We ought to learn this from Paul's description of the wrath of God in Romans 1 and 2, which is to do with the hardening and softening of our consciences. Paul wasn't saying these things so the churches could judge and harden against the world, but so that we could have remorse or humility for our own sin, knowing that God accepts us through his grace and love, as we move on to serve, receive and love each other instead.

## Romans 3

### The Accuser

Romans 3 launches into the legal part of Paul's argument. He carries on the same Old Testament, Hebrew form of argumentation, in which the righteousness of God is on trial. This chapter isn't so much about the justification of man, but the justification of God.

Paul asks a series of questions, that are raised by people about whether God's dealings in the world are just. Paul brings these people into a play, or a drama, as the satan, the ones accusing God. And then Paul brings out the answers.

We see this form of arguing in the Old Testament. In Job the sons of God come before the throne. This could be an actual historical depiction of satan and his angels before God's throne, or the sons of God here could represent the high opinions of man, e.g. the ones accusing Job were actually Bildad, Zophar, Eliphaz and Elihu. We have books and books filled with these opinions about whether God is just, or even real, on the books shelves of our world's libraries. Some of these opinions are depicted in Job.

God is on trial for his "unjust" treatment of Job. Satan claims that Job doesn't genuinely love God, and so God is unjust to keep a hedge of protection around him. We know the rest of the story.

We see the same type of drama played out in Zechariah 3. Here, satan appears before God accusing Israel's High Priest, Joshua. This was when God was bringing the Jews back from their captivity in Babylon, and resettling them in Jerusalem. Satan was charging God with injustice. He said Joshua, representing Israel as a nation, had broken God's covenant. God had no right to be good to the nation. This is the kind of discussion Paul is launching into in Romans 3.

Just as in Romans 3, there is an interesting interaction between satan's accusations and the men of the world, those who think their opinions about God matter. In the days of Zechariah, all the nations would have been contesting the restoration of Jerusalem. We see this in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. These people were all accusing God's right to be restoring Israel.

I am not saying that this can be extended to the current day situation in Israel, where Zionism is leading the cause in retaking the land. In Romans, the land is the whole world, and it is taken, or inherited, by a serving and suffering church, made up of Jews and gentiles. Without this serving of our enemies, without this following of Jesus, we aren't heirs of God's inheritance. God is building a church that satan, or the nations, can't accuse.

This then is the scene Paul begins Romans 3 with. The world is challenging God over his alleged dealings with mankind. History is judging God's acts. Paul begins by answering the accusation that if God doesn't give special treatment to Israel, which God doesn't, then what was God's point in calling Israel? The point was to make them a witness to the world.

Then Paul raises the second accusation against God. If God called Israel, and some of them did not believe, is God's calling ineffectual, lacking in power? Has God failed? The answer is of course no. The fact that some in Israel tell and believe a lie, doesn't make God any less true.

The next accusation is that if Israel's lie, and their consequential judgement glorifies God, is God taking advantage of their sin by taking glory from it? That is, if our darkness makes God's light more visible, aren't we providing a service to God by our sin? If Israel's fall brought about benefits for the world as a whole, is God unjust for judging Israel? Paul here is introducing the way the fall of Israel, depicted in Romans 5, 7 and 9-11 makes way for the salvation of the world.

Paul's answer is that if God didn't judge Israel for their unfaithfulness, how would he judge the world? If God didn't judge his own people, what right would he have to judge the nations? And if God couldn't judge the nations, then satan, darkness, oppression and greed would rule constantly and there would never be any light or goodness in our world.

Here is one of Paul's major purposes in Romans. He is moving the Jewish and gentile believers away from the way of the accuser. The world is full of accusation, or charges of blame. God moves us into his free justification, and calls us to treat others the same way, moving us from accusing each other over meats, drink, tradition, and receiving each other in love. The verse in Romans 14 classically sums up this glaring distinction in how the world treats people and how God calls us to treat each other: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Then Paul goes into a discussion showing that all men, Jew and gentiles, are deserving of judgment. They have all broken covenant, either with God, or with their conscience. So then, if God takes that sin upon himself in his incarnation and sufferings, and forgives man for it, then he has a just basis to forgive the sin of the world.

This is where satan, or the people of this world, can't accuse God of being unjust for forgiving sin. We can't say that God should not have forgiven those who sinned against us. That is because people sinned against God himself in Christ, and he forgave that. So then, God is just in forgiving sin.

This is the case Paul is building in Romans 3. He launches into a legal defence of the gospel, not because God required this legal payment for our sins, but because God is on trial before the courts of the cosmos. Paul is showing that the gospel is just; that is, God is just in forgiving those who believe. And believe here means to have a new heart, to be a follower of Christ. Faith means trust and faithfulness.

"That God may be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus." Rom 3:26

Again then, what is Paul's point through this whole argument? It is that there is no distinction between the Jew and gentile in faith. There is no boasting on the part of either. God is the God of both. This is why Paul is speaking about justification by faith; to draw us all together in one community. The doctrine isn't about our personal salvation, but about our being one body in love.

Paul carries this theme of justification right through to Romans 8, where he concludes it by asking, “Who shall condemn us, it is God who justifies...” The accuser is the satan, not God. The law isn’t God’s issue in salvation. God’s issue is our transformation and renewing priesthood, his new creation. God is the justifier.

We can see in Romans 3 that Paul is keeping on the same discussion he raised at the beginning of the letter, i.e. the righteousness of God. Has God acted righteously towards Israel and the nations of the world? Has he acted righteously by forgiving both in the gospel? This chapter is about God’s righteousness in forming a new community of forgiven Jews and gentiles, into one body of love. God has acted justly and rightly in doing so.

## One People

The triumph of forgiveness over law, over our accusative and scapegoating societies.

In Romans 3:19-31, Paul continues to show that God has made both Jews and gentiles one in Christ. First, Paul explains that God’s promises are not fulfilled through the law. This means that it wasn’t through the law that God’s people would renew the world. Rather, the law was given to testify of sin and to point us to the love God.

Paul wasn’t saying that Jewish believers shouldn’t follow the law. Paul wasn’t condemning the traditions of the Jews. He is merely saying that these traditions aren’t the means of our renewal and of the fulfilment of God’s promises in the world. So for us today, Paul isn’t saying that we should be intolerant of the traditions of the Jews, or of the Catholics, or of anyone else.

Our traditions, like outward circumcision, are not the mark of our inclusion in the people of God. A circumcised heart is the mark; faith that works through love, i.e., faithfulness.

Paul says that the righteousness of God is revealed through the faith of Jesus Christ. Again, this righteousness of God means God’s faithfulness in fulfilling his covenant promises, to renew the world. God doesn’t do this through the law, but through the faith of Jesus Christ. The faith of Christ means the faithfulness of Jesus. Christ has fulfilled the law and he shares that status with all who believe; with all who are renewed in their walk by the Spirit.

Paul brings in the idea of redemption. This indicates again that Paul is speaking about the Hebrew gospel of community. He is alluding here to their redemption from Egypt. Israel came out of Egypt to be God’s people to renew the nations. This was God’s covenant with them, in making them the new Adam and Eves of a new creation. This is the covenant that is now fulfilled in Christ.

As in Egypt, the meaning of gospel redemption is to set God’s people free from satan. It was satan who held people in bondage, because of their sin. This is referring to our debt to the law, meaning our debt to other people we have sinned against, and also our debt to our own conscience. This is what God redeemed us from. He delivered us from the prison we made for ourselves. It wasn’t God who kept us in our legal prison. Humanity has done this to themselves.

God asks us to forgive ourselves and to forgive one another freely. When he comes in Christ and suffers and forgives us, his request for us to forgive one another has force. Following this model sets us free. We set our conscience free and we also set free those who have sinned against us. God's request that we forgive others is now righteous, because he suffered and forgave us. He didn't turn the law aside in unrighteousness, but he came and suffered lawlessness with the rest of humanity.

So Christ becomes a propitiation for our sins, not because God is accusing us under the law, but because of our accusations against each other. God wipes these away through his love, and calls us to do the same, i.e. to love one another, rather than accuse each other. This is how God builds one new community, by taking away our sins. It is this oneness, this receiving of each other, that is the point of Romans 3.

The point of Romans 3 isn't that God was angry and so he punished Jesus. It is that we were angry at ourselves and at others and God forgave us, and on the strength of that he calls us to forgive each other.

So God grants to us by faith. Faith is accepting God's forgiveness by trust, and faithfully passing on forgiveness to others. Faith is receiving others as justified and righteous members of the covenant, the way God has received us.

This means that we don't owe any debt to the law. This is different to Paul's term, the "righteousness of God." Our righteousness is a simple declaration by God that we stand in a right relationship to the law. It just means we are forgiven for our sins against each other. God can make this declaration righteously because he has suffered and forgiven.

Thus Satan has no accusation against God for receiving us as his new people, renewing us and fulfilling his promises of world renewal through us. This chapter is speaking about God's plan to renew the world, in such a way that he can't be accused by humanity of unfairness, in forgiving the hurt we have all done to each other, i.e. "sins that are past." God can justly show forbearance to these sins.

Paul is making two points in Romans 3:19-31. First, that the people of God are one. Since we are justified through the love and forbearance of Christ on the cross, and not through our traditions under the law, we can freely receive those whose traditions are different to our own. Our traditions, though valuable to ourselves in some way, aren't the basis for our fellowship with others. We fellowship by faith, which means by following God in our forgiveness of each other.

Second, Paul is defending God's righteousness in taking to himself a new people, consisting of Jews and gentiles, despite our sins against each other. God has given himself in Christ to redeem us from these sins. This redemption isn't on the behalf of God's own legal requirements, but on the part of those who would accuse his kindness towards their sinful neighbour as being unjust.

Here we see the same issues as with the Prodigal Son's brother, who claimed the father was unjust for freely forgiving the son, without legal or other compensation. The older brother felt his interests were not justly recognized. Christ's death was to show the older brother

how we can forgive each other, how we can be like the father in this story, and just forgive others freely.

So Romans 3 draws to a close by showing that God has been just in judging both Jews and gentiles, but also forgiving those who trust in him, who extend forgiveness to each other. God has been just in building a new family of faith, to carry his promises into the nations as one family.

Paul completed Romans 3 by claiming that our salvation doesn't set aside the law, but rather fulfils the law. This means that the Spirit renews our lives by faith, and this renewal means that we walk out the spirit of the law. We fulfil the law's intent in our love for God and for our neighbour. Faith, which is forgiving and loving one another, is the fulfilment of the law.

## Romans 4

### Faith that Works through Love

Romans 4 follows on from the discussion in chapter 3, showing that God is building one family of both Jews and gentiles. This was the context in which justification was being discussed in the earlier chapter.

So many themes are rushing together in Paul's narrative. God is building a family which will fulfil his promises in the world, which will overcome the fall of Adam, and fulfil our priesthood calling to God's creation. This is the flow of argument from chapter 1 through to chapter 4. God is restoring mankind's commission to the world through a new united family in Christ.

To achieve this promise, God builds a new family of service, of people who freely care for each other. To build this family, first the accuser, the scapegoater, the demonizer of others, the serpent in the Garden, needs to be defeated in our own soul. It is in bringing us all out of the accuser's camp, to receive and love one another in the free justification of God, that's God new family can be God's image bearers in the nations.

This is the narrative of Paul in Romans. This is why these themes of mankind's commission and fall, Christ's justification, the world's accusations, *shema* love, and one family of Jews and gentiles, all build on each other through Romans.

What we have in opposition to this, throughout Paul's mission endeavours, is a threat to unity in the church, through splits between the Jews and gentiles, or church factions because of greed (see the table of the Lord discussion in Corinthians for example). Wherever these threats of disunity come up - people not fulfilling their call to serve others in Christlikeness - Paul is onto them like a ton of bricks.

The threat Paul is dealing with in Romans is Jewish nationalism (as he did in Galatians) and also gentile pride, boasting because of the Jewish fall. These threats still exist in the church today, or in our relations between Christianity and Judaism or Zionism. It is this Jewish nationalism that Paul is dealing with in Romans 4.

### Abraham

First, Paul reminds the Jews that they were justified by grace, not through works. This was how Abraham was called. This wasn't new to the Jews. They knew they were elected by grace. They all accepted this. This narrative of Abraham's grace call is well documented in scripture and in most of the other Jewish writings in Paul's day. Paul is only reiterating what was in the Jewish texts of that time. The Jews were not strangers to God's grace. Their theology or intelligence wasn't that poor, to have missed grace in the Old Testament.

The justification the Jews were thinking of wasn't about who will go the heaven. It was about who were the people that God was using to carry out the restoration of Adam's call. Who were the new Adam? Who were the people that constituted Abraham's family, that would re-establish God's rule in the nations? What marked out these people of God as distinct from the world?

They were looking for some outward sign of this faith. It's all very well for Abraham to be justified by faith, which no one was arguing about, but what was the outward sign of these people? What confirmed that these people were members of God's covenant people, meaning the people God had made covenant with to restore Adam's calling to the world?

The Jews argued that the outward sign of faith must be the seal that Abraham received after he believed, that is, his circumcision; the outward mark of the people of God must be the ceremonial law of Israel. This is what they meant by the works of the law. Holding to these works proved outwardly that we were justified and members of God's world renewing community.

This obviously supported Jewish nationalism. They held that for any people to become part of the community of God, faith alone wasn't sufficient, but also for those people to come under the law and the temple that the Jews were tribally ruling over.

But this is where Paul argued that this position of the Jews actually made the law void. If the inheritance is of the law, then faith that works through love is made of no effect: that is, we are excluding God's other people from our care, just as the Pharisees did all the time. This makes faith of no effect.

Paul said that the central aspect of the law is love for neighbour, and if we deny love and inclusion to our neighbour because of his lack of circumcision, then we aren't helping that neighbour in his need. We are excluding them from our support. This can't be love. This can't be the law of God truly operating in our hearts.

Paul agrees with the Jew on many counts. He agrees that Abraham is called by faith. He agrees that this justification is about identifying those who are in the family of God, called to bring about Adam's commission in the world. Paul agrees that there must be an outward sign of this faith, that faith alone is not enough. Up to this point everything Paul is saying is in common with the Jews, at least with the Jewish believers in the church.

It is the nature of this outward sign that Paul is disputing. Paul agrees that this outward sign is to do with the law. He agrees that a faith which nullifies the law is no faith at all. Still, Paul is agreeing with the Jews. He is even agreeing with James here; faith without works is dead. Paul is not saying the law has nothing to do with faith.

He is disputing what the sign of the law in our lives is. To the Jews, the sign of the law was the ceremonial works of the law. But not to Paul. Paul held that these ceremonial works were actually a sign themselves. They were only a sign of the law. They weren't the law itself, or not the real intent of the law. So those who had zeal for the law, were missing the true mark of the law, by having zeal for the ceremonial law.

It isn't just the Jews who try this kind of nationalism supported by traditions. We all do it. It is common today with our Western culture. Those who hold to faith must also hold to our world view on many accounts, even our political views about the Jews or the Arabs, or our economic views about capitalism and socialism. Our positions on all these are "justified" by scripture.

It's like saying that someone isn't a real Christian if they have a culture that looks to be somehow uncouth, or unacceptable to our views. Today we are in exactly the same position the Jews and gentiles in the Roman church were in. We hardly accept each other. That is why most of our churches today are divided along denominational lines, which really reflect the racial, economic and political positions of their adherents. None of this is of Christ.

We say we believe in justification by faith, just as the Jews did, but we practice something quite different. We say things like, "How can these people be real believers when they act in this way, or don't adhere to the traditions and beliefs we hold to? They claim faith by Christ's blood, but can we really think they are one with us?"

We say we believe in grace, but unless they are "circumcised," hold to our cultural or political traditions, we don't accept them. The church cannot fulfil Adam's commission like this. We can't take reconciliation and healing to the world, if we don't practice it ourselves in the church. This is what Paul was saying to Rome.

To Paul, the outward sign of our faith, the seal that we are in the covenant (made righteous means to be included in God's covenant people of world renewal) is not circumcision, as it was with Abraham, but love. Love is the outward sign that faith is operational in our lives. Love is the outward sign that faith is fulfilling the law in our lives. The only point of departure between Paul and the Jews in the Roman church is this: love is the sign and fulfilment of the law, not circumcision.

We speak about this more when we look at chapter 5, where the *shema* of the law, in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, is the actual centre of Jewish law and identity. Paul carries the law from Judaism over into the church through the *shema*. This is Paul's link in the law, between Judaism and Christianity. The true Jew is one who lives *shema*; loves God and loves neighbour. As Jesus said, this is the whole law.

The person who does *shema* isn't nullifying the law, but fulfilling it. Circumcision and the other ceremonial aspects of the law were pointing to *shema*, which is lived out through a circumcised heart. (Deut 30:6) The gospel has come to fulfil this law, to bring us into *shema*. Israel only had the sign of outward circumcision until their hearts were renewed. Now they have the reality of the law, which is love. This now is the outward sign the law pointed to. In love we fulfil circumcision and all the ceremonies.

Paul isn't arguing that the Jewish believers aren't permitted to live any longer in the ceremonial aspects of the law. There is nothing wrong with them. In as much as they point to Christ they are good. It is the same with ceremonies we have in our churches today. Often they have rich meaning to the worshipers, while others call them idolatry. Paul is not raising up a fight about these things.

To think Paul is raising such a fight, is to turn his point upside-down. It is to divide believers on the basis of our different traditions. Paul is doing the opposite. He is uniting believers who practice very different traditions, and who have very different ways of life, on the basis of a common justification by faith. He isn't using faith to throw out the law, but to throw out division. He isn't using faith to explain how we are saved, but to show how we are one in the same body. He is calling us to accept each other and not to judge each other, whether we live by the ceremonial law or we don't.

This is how Paul speaks of Abraham's faith in regard to the birth of Isaac. His body and Sarah's womb were as dead, and yet Isaac was born by faith. It isn't the flesh, the traditions, that marks out Abraham's family, but faith that works through love. Therefore, receive one another in care. Don't exclude from each other. Don't form divided churches in the world. If we refuse, whether we refuse those who do the rituals, or those who don't, either way, we are working against the common faith and not for it.

Rather than seeing Romans 4 as Paul's defence of the Protestants against the Catholics, we should see it as his call for us to find common ground in true faith that works through love. This is where our bridge building starts.

It's hard to combine a peacemaking view of Jesus with the way we have interpreted Paul in our past. Our theology in Paul needs reappraisal if our stance towards others is going to change. Some Catholic traditions are wrong; others we simply don't understand or don't grant grace over. This means God won't grant us grace over our errors, no matter our doctrine of "faith."

Chapter 4 fits into Paul's one body theme that runs through Romans. It comes to its highlight in Romans 14, where Paul speaks of the Jews and gentiles receiving one another at one table, accepting each other's faith expressions in their different life styles, rather than judging. Chapter 14 is possibly the highlight or central point of the whole letter. This is what makes the church a loving and renewing witness in the world.

Paul notes that Abraham was the heir of the whole world, not just of the narrow borders of the land in Jewish nationalism. It isn't through the law, accusing one another about our different traditions, that Abraham is appointed heir of the world, but through the faith that works through love. (Rom 4:13) Its faith that works through love that possesses the world, or as Jesus said, "The meek shall inherit the land."

Protestantism may hold that the faith of Abraham means faith held in individualism. But Paul isn't saying that. He is speaking of the faith that works through love. In law we divide, claiming we are better than others, and the world continues in division and injustice, rather than mutual care. In love, we care for those different to ourselves, and the world is healed.

"Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness;" meaning that Abraham was included in God's covenant program in restoring humanity. He was included in Christ by faith, which means trust and entrance into a faithfulness worked out in our lives by the Spirit. This faithfulness is fashioned after the faithfulness of Christ, who loved us and

gave himself for us. This faithful love towards others is the fulfilment of the law, or righteousness under the covenant.

So Abraham being justified by faith means a lot more than just the faith of an individual. It is entrance into a covenant of community. And it is this community by which God is carrying out his covenant of restoration to the world. This is the whole scope of what Paul is seeing in Romans 4.

Paul joins together his themes in the first 4 chapters of Romans. The gospel making us all one family, to become the people of God, who carry out mankind's commission to renew the world. Through this new family, God is righteous in fulfilling his promises to Abraham and to Israel. His promises are fulfilled as God turns us from accusing our brother to upholding and caring for our brother, living as one family, showing the image of God to a world in transformation.

## Romans 5

### Defeating the Accuser

In Romans 5, Paul moves on to give us assurance in the face of the accuser. In the opening verses Paul is fortifying us against the accuser, while at the same revealing to us our new identity in God's *shema* plan.

The opening verses sound a bit like the story of the Prodigal Son. After the father receives the son home, later the older brother speaks to him privately, saying that father can't really love him because of his sins. At such times we must stand in our faith, which means our trust in the Father's love.

Even as we undergo suffering, we are to rejoice. We aren't to listen to "the older brother," saying that the sufferings show that we aren't really in a proper relationship with God, that he doesn't really love us. This isn't the case, says Paul. Rather, the sufferings give us experience, and produce the proper character of God in us. Through sufferings we are able to forgive others, just as God has forgiven us. This produces hope, because we see that God is continuing to transform our lives.

Rather than showing that God isn't pleased with us, sufferings have a centre role in Paul's theology. In Colossians 1:24 Paul speaks of his sufferings continuing on in the ministry of Christ. We are Christ's followers and so our sufferings, as we absorb evil and answer with good, release healing rather than bitterness into our communities. This is the ministry of the saints, as Christ outlines in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. It is this suffering in newness of spirit that brings new creation. That is, the Sermon on the Mount is a new creation mandate.

In Romans 5, Paul continues giving us assurance, saying that if God didn't love us, he wouldn't have come to us in the incarnation. "God shows his love for us, in that while we were sinners, he came and died for us." God loved us before he came and died. He didn't have to die for us before he loved us.

The atonement wasn't to reconcile us with an angry God. Like the Prodigal's father, God was never angry with his family, not in the human sense of anger, of rejection. We separated ourselves from God; he didn't separate himself from us. The atonement of the cross was for our assurance, so we would stop our separation from him, so we would come home.

This assurance is the theme of Romans 5. The atonement shows us his love for us, strengthening our assurance that God welcomes us home unconditionally. It is to reconcile our fallen conscience back to a loving God. God couldn't do anything greater to show us his love and full, free acceptance, than the cross.

"God commends his love towards us." This is what the cross was about. He loved us even before the cross, not because of the cross. The cross is the proof of his love, not the means of his love. He doesn't demand Christ suffers so he can love. He shows his love by his

sufferings in Christ. The cross tears down every barrier in our conscience, in which the Prodigal's brother tries to prove to us that God is our enemy. The cross shows that the accuser is a liar. The enmity was only with us.

God says, "No, I am not angry against you. If I was, I wouldn't have come in the flesh. I wouldn't have visited your homes. I wouldn't have healed you. I wouldn't have said to the woman in adultery, 'Go and sin no more.' I wouldn't have accepted your violence against me. I wouldn't have forgiven you on the cross." He did all this to show that he didn't reject us in the Garden. He did all this to show that his love still goes out to us and his house is still open for us to return. Returning means receiving and trusting in this love.

Paul is saying all this to shore up the believers' trust in the love and acceptance of God. If God loved us enough to die for us, while claims of sin still rested against us, how much more can we be sure now of his love when he is raised from the dead. Christ rose without holding any claims of sin against us. When he forgave us on the cross he left all our sin against him right there. He rose with a new beginning for us all, without a single claim of sin against us.

### *Shema*

If God has freely forgiven us, let's pass it on. If God isn't accusing us, but loving us, let's love one another.

Thrown into the middle of this discussion is one verse that reveals the mission of God for his people. "The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." Through the cross the Holy Spirit has revealed God's immense love for us. This love has filled our hearts. But the love doesn't stop there. This frees our conscience to love God in return, and this love for God is expressed through our love for our neighbour.

For Paul, a Hebrew rabbi, this brings him right back to the *shema*, in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This passage formed a prayer that Paul would have prayed up to 10 or 20 times per day. It was the Jews' number one prayer. It was their identity, the central call to Israel in the Torah. It is this Hebrew identity that Paul in Rom 5:5 says is fulfilled in the gospel message. Jesus, Paul says, is the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel.

"Hear O Israel. The Lord your God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength." And Jesus added to this, "And you shall love your neighbour as yourself." Loving our neighbour is the love of God, as Paul said, "The whole law is summed up in this one word, you shall love your neighbour as yourself."

Paul is showing that in the cross, God has fulfilled his purposes. He has kept his promises. He has fulfilled the law. By filling our heart with his love, God builds a new community that is sharing this love with friend and enemy. This is God's answer to the world.

This is the love that renews our nations, that fulfils Adam and Eve's commission, in reflecting the image of God in our world. It is through this that, "The whole earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea." This glory – shekinah – speaks of the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit, Paul says, who fills the community with his love.

Here we see two things. The accuser is taken away, and love for others is put in its place. The law is taken out of our hearts through God proving his love towards us. This brings us out of our hiding from God, and stops us stretching out our finger to accuse others.

Satan is defeated on the cross. He is disarmed. That is, the law that works death in our conscience and that works death in our societies by our “legal” anger towards others, has been taken away. It has been nailed to the cross. And now that we are mature, now that we are ready to leave the law behind, now that God in Christ has shown us that the law is taken away, we are ready to be filled with his Spirit and love.

It is in the Holy Spirit that we are now to live, in accepting ourselves, accepting our neighbour, the foreigner and the enemy. We have swapped anger and isolation for forgiveness and reconciliation. This is the new creation working out through God’s new community into the whole world, wherever the church finds itself.

Nationalism has been replaced with care for those in need. Where we have problems with others, we now seek to heal, just as God sought to heal us when we were acting wrongly.

This is how, Paul says, God has been faithful to his promises in the gospel. The gospel is God keeping his promises to renew the world, by changing our hearts within the world.

#### Delivered from Corruption

In the second half of Romans 5, Paul continues the same themes, showing our deliverance from self-condemnation and our calling as a community church to renew the world. In the second half of Romans 5, Paul moves us from the general discussion of our deliverance through the love of God, into showing this deliverance through the history of Israel.

Paul begins this second part of Romans 5 by referring to Adam’s transgression. This introduces a very common gospel theme present in Judaism in Paul’s day. That is, the Jewish people’s awareness that they were called to be the new Adam. A reference to Adam is a reference to Israel and the global commission and promises they had received from God. Israel was the second Adam.

Paul describes the sin of Adam and how that brought him into bondage. He calls it death, which means the introduction into the world of the rule of the principalities and powers. These powers take mankind into bondage due to guilt, which produces violence and retribution within our cultures in general. There is a rule of law within our conscience, which leads to self-condemnation and to our condemnation of others.

These principalities and powers are now ruling the world, instead of Adam and Eve in their original calling to rule. God called Israel to reverse this problem. In the intertestamental literature of Paul’s time, Israel clearly saw themselves with this Adamic commission and promise. Here, Paul is explaining how God has been faithful to Israel in this call, through their representative, Jesus Christ.

Paul describes how sin rules, through this condemnation within our hearts. It started in Adam and Eve. Satan tricked them into accusing God on the basis of some twisted sense of justice, and so Satan brought them into a law based existence, rather than their former trust. But the law kills. That is, once the law had in this way been seated in Adam and Eve's conscience, it brought a sense of shame and condemnation to them that they were previously alien to.

This put mankind on a downward slide into death, where they would be accusing themselves and each other through what they felt was a sense of justice. And being self-condemned, they would lock themselves away from God, not recognizing his on-going and unfailing love for them.

This is the captivity that Paul was describing. And as he speaks, Israel recognize their part in this. They see that they are the new Adam and that the law has done the same work in them. They also chose the law rather than trust when God brought them out of Egypt. That is, they also accused God, rather than believed. They also have been brought into this bondage, and although they have the call to deliver humanity and the world from Adam's fall, they have joined that fall and failed.

This section in Romans 5 hearkens back to chapter 1, the gospel, in which the sin of Israel is revealed, in an apocalyptic way, that is, something the Jews had not recognized about themselves before. This theme is taken up again in Romans 7, and in Romans 9-11, in which the captivity of Israel is further highlighted, and how through this captivity God was faithful and fulfilled his promises to Israel.

It was through this captivity that God actually fulfilled his promises. He used Israel's sin to set us all free. That is, by the cross. When Israel turned against God and slew Christ, God used that as the salvation of us all, both Jew and gentile. This is a main part of Paul's discourse through to chapter 11.

Back in Romans 5, it is the law that also slew Israel. "Moreover the law entered that the offense may abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." This is what Romans 7 explains. The law brought Israel into bondage to sin, by taking captive their conscience, or filling their conscience with Satan, in accusing themselves and others. It brought death rather than love to their neighbours.

But this is where grace abounded, not only to Israel, but also to the world. It was through their sin that Christ was handed over to die. And this is where God stepped in and broke the curse of condemnation in our lives.

So the transgression of Adam brought sin to all. But the grace of God is much stronger. Because, even after so many transgressions of Israel, God has brought forgiveness to them all through just one act of obedience of Christ. His act of obedience, in which he fulfilled the whole law, was to love us and not his own life. And when Christ forgave us of our sin against him on the cross, this broke our condemnation, and commended God's love to us forever.

But this isn't where Paul stops. He isn't speaking of just us being free from sin on a personal level. He is speaking about God's promises to Israel being fulfilled through the gospel. God has been righteous in the gospel, in doing what he said he would do.

God has given to Israel the Adamic commission, to rule the world. This would include their enemies being subjected to them, and their land being blessed. They had received Adam's commission to rule the world.

This commission had been interrupted by their sin, as they found themselves also to be part of Adam's problem, and needed deliverance themselves, so they could fulfil their calling. This deliverer came in Christ. And so through Christ, God has fulfilled his promises to Israel, and also to all who believe and are grafted into Israel's call and journey.

He makes us to "reign in life through Christ Jesus." That is, we are now God's second or new Adam, through whom God's kingdom renews the world, as leaven fills a lump of dough. Here, Paul keeps the theme going from the earlier chapters in describing Adam's fall as a failure to rule the world. Paul showed in chapter 4 that this call has been renewed in Abraham. He dropped it in here in chapter 5, and brings it out more fully in describing the inheritance of the sons of God in chapter 8. It is God's promise of global renewal through his church community.

And this reign, this way in which our enemies are subjected to us, is by the same means that Christ reigns and reconciled and thus subjected his enemies, through his cross. It is a reign of service through suffering, in which our light of forgiveness and love to our enemies sets us free from the downward slide of death that fills the world through hatred and vengeance. In this way Torah is fulfilled in us, the *shema*, completing our identity as the Israel of God, the image bearers of God, making manifest a new community and thus a new creation.

Paul is showing the Roman church that we are no longer under the law. Thus, we can move from accusation against ourselves and against others, into one new body of free justification by grace, receiving and caring for each other. This is Paul's main underlying point; moving us from satanic accusative religion, which is today filling the world in fundamentalism, into sharing Christ through self-giving community.

## Romans 6

### From Exile to Glory

Paul proceeds into Romans 6 asking the question, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” This question stems from the previous chapter, in which Paul showed that it was through the sin of Israel that God’s grace abounded to the world. Paul said the same in chapter 3, where the sin of Israel glorified God, and in chapters 9-11, where their fall led to the salvation of the world. So the question is obvious, shall we therefore continue in sin that even more blessing shall come?

Romans 5 was a brief summary of what Paul now launches into in Romans 6-8. He is telling the story of Israel, how their call led to their fall through the law, and then to the salvation of the world through their Messiah representative. This was briefly stated in Romans 5, but in these next three chapters this story of Israel’s history is explained in some detail.

One of the great oversights in our interpretation of Romans is not recognizing this story of Israel as the template through which Paul sees and describes the gospel message. It is the way Paul shows God’s righteousness, or faithfulness to his promises. It’s the way Paul shows that the gospel message we have today is actually a Hebrew one, that fulfils Old Testament promises. The gospel is to be understood by these Old Testament views and expectations, not by our Greek mindset of spiritualising the promises, nor by our Western mindset of individualising the promises.

Reading the history of Israel into the background of Paul’s writing is the honest way of reading his texts, when we read Paul from his own time. As we said in earlier sections, Paul was not writing in our Reformation period. When we look through the Jewish writings of Paul’s day, all Paul’s contemporary authors were asking the same questions. Notably, “When will Israel’s captivity end? When will God fulfil his promises to Israel? When will his glory return to his temple?”

When Babylon destroyed the temple, Ezekiel saw the glory depart. God promised his glory would return to his temple and Israel were eagerly awaiting that day. When the temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel, and later improved by Herod, still the glory of God never returned as it came earlier in Solomon’s day. The Jews believed that when his shekinah glory, God’s Spirit, returned to the temple, then Israel would become restored and throw off the pagan Roman rule. This was the expectation in Paul’s time. This is what Paul was writing about.

This is the topic, the part of Israel’s story, that Paul launches into in Romans 6. Paul is speaking here about the Jewish exile. They have been exiled, to be placed under the power of the pagan rule. They have lost the shekinah. They are waiting for their restoration, their return from exile, and for the glory to be returned. They have been unable to help themselves because of their fall into sin, which has been exacerbated by the law working in their fallen conscience.

So God gives them a representative, one who is able to help. He is the Messiah. He takes on the calling of Israel and fulfils it. He fulfils the law; he meets the conditions for Israel's return from exile. These conditions were put upon Israel by Satan. He claimed they had broken the covenant and could not return to the land. They could not receive God's blessing and Spirit again.

This Satan is the nations of the world. They claim it would be unjust for God to restore Israel after the unrighteousness they had committed. The experts claim that God should forget his world restoration project through Israel and recognize the failure of his promises. As we saw in chapter 3, they say God should leave the nations to the pagan rulers.

God must step into this situation righteously, both in keeping his promises to Israel and in doing that in such a way that the world sees God is just. So God judges Israel's nationalism, i.e., their nationalism in which they feel they are better than others and try to keep God to themselves. God judges Israel's nationalism, destroying their temple and he raises up a new creation Israel to fulfil his promises. This is the new Israel Paul is describing in Romans 6.

#### Christ in Exile

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life."

This passage alludes to Israel's Exodus, so again we see Paul using Israel's history to explain the gospel message. This is the template upon which Romans 6-8 is written.

In chapter 6, Israel passes through the Red Sea in water baptism. Paul calls the Red Sea Israel's baptism in 1 Corinthians 10 as well. In Romans 7, Israel comes to Mount Sinai and receives the law. This takes them into bondage, as Paul explains. Then in Romans 8, the new Israel comes into the Promised Land as the sons of God, with the glory, shekinah, restored to them, and they inherit and renew the whole world. Paul is retelling Israel's history through the Messiah, the one who enters Israel's calling and fulfils it in righteousness.

Romans 6 doesn't only allude to the Exodus, but also to Israel's judgement under the pagans, from Babylon to Rome. Israel is in exile from God. They are cursed under the Old Covenant. This exile from God, from the Garden of Eden, like Adam, and from their land and temple, is called death. They are dead and buried, cast out of God's presence and favour.

So when Christ dies on the cross, he dies as Israel. He takes on Israel's curse. He takes their separation from God, by being driven out of the camp, crucified as a cast away from the temple and from the people. He bears the curse in exile from the land, driven out of the city. He is Israel, persecuted and cut off by the pagans, crucified by Rome. God comes in the flesh and bears the judgement of Israel. He takes the punishment which the pagan nations demanded of Israel upon himself.

This way God is righteous in keeping his promises. He is able to forgive and restore Israel, and also keep his promises through them in renewing the world. At the same time, he still judges Israel as a nation. But he doesn't destroy them utterly. Those who believe can follow

him into their restoration as a new people, sent to heal the world. This turns their former nationalism into global love and service, as seen modelled in their Messiah's love for the world.

### Return from Exile

The resurrection of Christ from the dead represents Israel's return from exile. They have been judged, cast out and buried with Christ, and the resurrection now means that God's favour and restoration has come to the nation through grace.

In our text above from Romans 6, Christ's death is Israel cast into exile and Christ's resurrection is Israel's return to the land; Adam's return to the Garden to rule the world; the church's commission to inherit the nations through service.

Paul says Christ was raised "by the glory of the Father," which is his shekinah presence. Christ has been raised by the Spirit. The Spirit has returned to Israel through Christ. They now have the presence of God with them, through the grace given to them in the gospel.

They have their temple back; which Jesus spoke of in John 14-17. Believers and followers of Christ are now the new temple of God. This is the renewed temple with the shekinah, which God promised Israel. The temple means God's presence, heaven on earth, through which heaven and earth are joined for new creation.

Now the temple is in all the nations, renewing the whole world, through an international body of Christ. This is what Romans is about; uniting this body to move in love as one renewing image of God in the nations. God promised that when his glory returned to Israel, they will inherit the nations. This is the gospel through new Israel.

The resurrection of Christ marks the return of the Spirit, the return of God's favour to new Israel, now redeemed from the Old Covenant. The return of shekinah means the return of the glory. In Hebrew texts, the glory means the Adamic call to rule the world. This is what the Spirit is for in the Hebrew gospel. The Spirit has returned, so that Israel may go on and fulfil its commission to transform the world and fill it with God's presence and goodness.

And this is what Paul is doing in his letters; he is drawing a straight line between Adam, Israel, Christ and the church, and God's original creation project being fulfilled.

Through Christ, the law has been taken away. The demands of the law have been met in Christ. God has forgiven us entirely concerning the demands of the law. This means that Israel's bondage, which their conscience was under, concerning the law, is gone. They are therefore free to accept God's love for themselves and to forgive and pass this love on to their neighbour. Sin shall no longer have dominion over them, but instead they have the Spirit, who gives us love, who enables us to fulfil and live out the *shema* of Israel's Torah.

This is new Israel, energised by the Spirit through grace, with the law behind them. And if we believe, we are also grafted in to become part of this new Israel, God's new creation Israel, in a world he is changing, by conforming us to his image through the gospel.

So God has judged Israel, as the nations demanded, but he has also fulfilled his promises to Israel through the gospel, by suffering in their place. God has proven righteous on both counts. The death of Christ is the destruction of the Old Covenant law, and the setting of sinners free from its demands. The resurrection of Christ is our return from exile, and the restoration of God's temple in all the world, to renew the nations.

### Sin Shall Not Reign

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions... For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”

This is the Adamic dominion theme that is right through Romans. Adam and Eve fall from their place of dominion, to have the law bring them under its power of condemnation. They are ruled by the principalities of guilt and punishment, which they inflict upon themselves and upon their neighbour, judging each other by the law. Being self-separated from God by guilt, our lives are ruled by self-pleasing, which brings about acts of retribution throughout a society of people offended by each other.

Romans 6 announces the restoration of dominion to mankind. Being free from the law by the death of Christ, we are set free from sin. What does this mean, or how does this work? It works through love. Being free from the law means God has reconciled us through love. Our realisation of this love begins to work in our heart in our affections towards others. When the Roman soldier saw the love of Christ on the cross, he said, “Surely this is the Son of God.” The vision of that love likely began to work out in his life, turning him from former brutality towards others.

This is what happened to all Christ's disciples in the scriptures, like Zacchaeus. A vision of God's love for us, gives us a love for him, which gives us a love for others. “We love because he first loved us... Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

It was God loving us on the cross that released us to love him. Before the cross, we were bound in our self-guilt. We thought God was angry with us. The cross proves he isn't angry, but loves us. This release of our conscience frees us to love him. Like Jesus said about the forgiven prostitute, “She that is forgiven much, loves much.” And when we love him, we love others. This is how the cross is at the centre of defeating evil.

Love restored in us Adam's dominion, to reign over the powers of self that formerly ruled us. The death of Christ, the love of Christ, sets us from sin, and restores us to image-of-God rule in the world, breaking the power of vengeance ruling our society, and bringing healing instead to our nations.

Paul is constantly weaving in and out of the various gospel themes in Israel's history, from Adam, to the Exodus, to the law, and the exile under the heathen nations from Babylon to Rome. In each and every case, Paul is showing how Christ embodies these themes in his life, death and resurrection, and that Christ is the redemptive fulfillment that Israel needs, which we all enter into through faith. He redeems us from captivity under the principalities and

powers, by redeeming us from sin, to serve the nations, bringing us into life and peace under Christ's love reign in this world.

### Slave to Sin

Paul then returns to Israel's Exodus theme by speaking of their former slavery in Egypt. If they return to sin it leads to death, not to more grace. The slavery theme hearkens back to Pharaoh and his self-centred policies of oppression over others. The law, which brought them into the land, spoke of their love for their neighbour and for the foreigner. So Paul's point in raising this Exodus theme means we have two options, either to please ourselves, or to build a community of care in a new land.

Paul is speaking here of works, the sign of our faith/faithfulness. Not the works of religious tradition, of Jewish nationalism, but the works of love, our care for others. It is these works that lead to a new land and to life.

This also relates to life in Rome. It hearkens back to chapter 1, to Caesar, the then current Pharaoh, and the self-cults of the empire. People are to leave those and live for each other instead. Even slaves under Rome can have their new Exodus in being servants of righteousness in the gospel.

As with chapters 5, 7 and 9-11, chapter 6 also speaks of old Israel under the law, giving themselves over to become servants of sin, going back to Egypt, living out the fall of Adam. Chapter 6 speaks of the bondage the law brought Israel into. It is this slavery to sin that chapter 7 describes in detail.

Paul is continuing the themes of Israel journey. All these themes came together in Paul's teaching. Israel's identity with Adam and his fall and global commission, God's promises to them through Abraham, their redemption from Egypt, their desire to return to Egypt back into slavery, the bondage they came into under Moses, their exile and captivity among the heathen, the Spirit of Yahweh leaving the old temple, and their final and everlasting deliverance through Yahweh's and the Spirit's return in the gospel of Christ. This is the journey Paul is taking the Roman believers on through his letter.

So, to the question of whether we shall continue in sin, that grace may abound? Paul's answer is, no. Israel sinned, that blessing may come to the world. But they don't escape judgment for that. Rather, they are called to the gospel, where there is forgiveness and rescue from the power of sin. It is in this gospel, in this escape from their former self-centeredness, that the mission of Israel to the world is fulfilled.

"For the wages of sin are death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

If we continue in sin, we will die. Israel will not fulfil its call in sin. But if our lives are filled with *shema* through the gospel, we and our nations will live. Eternal life, in the Hebrew mind in Paul's day, meant their inclusion in the people of God who would fulfil the call to

renew the nations. It was rooted in Adam and Eve's commission to rule the world, and the tree of life, which pointed to the eternal nature of our renewed world.

We are not to understand eternal life in the Greek sense of going to heaven when we die, or in the individualistic sense of Western theology, of just our personal salvation. It is the life of our community, in which the gospel is fulfilled in our new creation world.

Sin brings death, for anyone who continues in it, whether for a believer or non-believer. The gift of God is a new heart, which brings about new works of service and love, which brings about a new community of life for us all. This is the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, to be his new Adam in the world.

## Romans 7

### Free Forgiveness

Romans 7 and Israel.

Romans 7 kicks off where Romans 6 ended. It is about the slavery of the law. Israel had come out of Egypt, but had returned to bondage through the condemnation of the law in their lives. They are unable to move on to be God's renewing people in the world. They are stuck in a ditch. God's promises are not moving forward. So the Messiah comes and steps into Israel. He fulfils the law on their behalf and rescues them from the condemnation. Now new Israel, raised up with the Messiah in faith, are able to continue, sharing their forgiveness and *shema* love with the world.

We can see in chapters 5-8 one topic running through, how we were enslaved under the law, with a sense of righteous vengeance in our hearts towards self, in self-condemnation, and also towards others. It led to religions of punishment and blood, and to cultures of violence and crime, all by people who feel they are owed something by others, all through a twisted sense of the law working in our fallen state.

And this caused us to hide away from God, like Adam and Eve hid in the Garden. We had cut ourselves off from God, from the grace that would forgive us and set us free from this inward captivity of guilt.

So God set out on a rescue mission, to reconcile us and to prove his love of forgiveness towards us, to start a new people who would pass on this forgiveness to all others, setting loose a new principle within our nations; of jubilee or liberty, instead of guilt and punishment.

God's first step in this rescue mission was to call Israel. He gave them his witness, his call to spread a liberating kindness to the world. But this had a major stumbling block. The problem with Israel was that they too were part of the problem. They also needed rescue. They too were a part of the Adamic fall and its consequences, which God had called them to reverse.

It was this law that needed to be dealt with. Adam and Eve embraced law in the Garden, and used it to accuse God in order to liberate themselves for a self-centred purpose. Subsequently to that, they found that same law was a two edged sword. It condemned them and drove them from God's presence. This two edged sword law is what keeps us from the tree of life. Condemnation, self-righteousness and crime then filled our societies. This was the death God had warned them of. But God, in his love, couldn't stop mankind from taking this path of self-discovery.

Israel also took this law into their new relationship with God after the Exodus. Like Adam and Eve, they also couldn't trust God, but wanted the law to appease their conscience. The law held out to them the possibility of self-righteousness, if they could try hard enough. This is preferable to fallen man than trust. And the law gave them blood offerings, which is what

they liked, to take away their sins. That made them feel better. So the law was warmly accepted.

All the while God is holding out his free forgiveness to man, but alas, we can't accept that. That diminishes us too much. That leaves us without one plea. No, we must achieve our own salvation. To admit our guilt would make us weak. So instead of accepting God's free grace, we give blood, other sacrifices, we try to keep the law, and we condemn those around us, all to settle our society's accounts of wrong doing. All during this time our eyes are still closed to the love of God that is ever stretched out to us like the Prodigal's father.

So Israel takes the law. But this amplifies their problem even more. They invite the accuser even more into their lives, instead of God's love. The law has truth in it, like the *shema* especially, love. It is good. But instead of giving Israel life, it brings death. Instead of enabling them to walk in righteousness, it brings even more accusation than they had before. It brings an even greater condemnation to their conscience and pronounces death.

This is what was at work within Israel as a nation. Especially after their captivity in Babylon, where they saw their sin of idolatry exposed before the whole world. Especially then, they came out and back to Jerusalem with an even greater determination to redeem themselves. They increased their observance of the law. It became an even greater focus for them. They became experts in "the righteousness that comes by the law."

This self-reliance worked oppositely for them. Instead of achieving the love that the law gave witness to, the increased sense of guilt and failure worked in their hearts a greater need for punishment and sacrifice. They began exacting that punishment upon sinners, hoping to bring renewal to their land. Adulterers, the sick, the blind, the poor, the Lazarus's, the foreigners, the wrong religious sects, were all ostracised and punished for their "sin." "Wasn't this the duty of the righteous?"

We know the final outcome of this in Jerusalem. It led to segregation and selfishness at a high level, as each one justified themselves, instead of serving and helping their neighbour in need. The punishment they exacted upon their society for righteousness sake, tore the society to pieces and brought its destruction. This is the consequence of the law working within the hearts of fallen man. As someone said, "When we go by the principle of eye for an eye, soon everyone will be blind."

This is what led to the gospel, and this is what Paul is explaining from chapters 5-8. As Israel's hatred was turned upon Christ it did a number of things. First, it exposed their sin. They had killed an innocent man. This was clear. There was no hiding this time. Their unjust hatred had been exposed.

Their folly in trying to live by the law, to save themselves by asking God to give them a chance through the commandments, had been fully revealed to them. They had an apocalypse, an eye opener, of the wrath of God, meaning that the law drew them to the place where they saw their sin, not partially, but fully unmasked. There was no hiding place. Their self-salvation plan had been fully laid bare as utterly bankrupt. When Jesus was stripped naked on the cross, he laid naked the principalities and powers in our hearts.

But another thing was revealed by the cross; God's love. On the cross this innocent man, who they condemned with the utmost contempt and violence, through their totally corrupted legal systems, had forgiven them. They saw that even when their sin was exposed at its worst, where there was absolutely no excuse, where they could not blame other sinners, where all their attempts through the centuries at self-righteousness had come down like a ton of bricks; that at this point of their utter bankruptcy, God had fully and freely loved them and forgiven them.

They found themselves back in the Garden, this time naked again, but without any fig leaf. They had nothing left they could do. They had exhausted any hope of righteousness through the law. There was nothing further they could grasp at to cover the shame. They had come to the end. At this point, God forgave them, loved and received them back. "Father forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

This is where the law fully broke down. It had been used as a covering, but now it was destroyed. When the whole law had been broken, God forgave the transgression of it all. This took the law out of the way. It was no longer relevant. It was no longer needed as a crutch for righteousness. Now, they had come back to where Adam and Eve in the Garden were before the fall, simple trust. They had been reduced to trust in God's love and kindness. This would be enough. This trust or faith would be all we have left, because Israel is us all, the ones chosen to represent all humanity under Adam.

In man's eyes, Adam and Eve needed a covering for their nakedness, for their shame. But not in God's eyes. God didn't require them to have a covering, an atonement. He saw them as his children, not as sinners. He loved them. But they wouldn't come home to him, until the cross showed them the love of God when they were at their weakest, and then they opened up to his free reconciliation and redemption. They fell at the cross and received his love, not through God punishing their sin, but through taking their hatred and loving them in return.

This is what Israel was called to; to have the full witness of the law testify against them. They were called to fall. And in this fall, they were called to release the forgiveness of God into Adam's fallen race, not just for themselves, but for us all. They were called to stumble, that we might be saved. And our salvation is to know God's goodness, to see his love, to know we have been reconciled, to come home to him and to have our sin and anger transformed.

So in the death of Christ the law is taken away. It is forgiven and it is therefore gone. In Christ's resurrection we rise forgiven. We rise a new Israel without the law, without the former condemnation that weighed us down. We rise a second Adam, with the commission to rule intact and the presence of God within our hearts to carry that rule out in love. We now rise with reconciliation and love, love in our relationship with God, and love to share with one another, with our neighbour and with the world.

It is the predicament of Israel under the law that Paul is speaking about in Romans 7. As he moves from chapter 5 to chapter 8, Paul is showing Israel's journey in coming under sin, in sin abounding, so the grace of God may far more abound. That after so many sins, by one

act of obedience of Christ, in loving those who killed him, all those sins would be taken away.

So Paul wasn't so much writing a biography about his own experience and how he came to Christ. Before his conversion he wasn't aware of his sin in a conscious manner. Subconsciously he was, and he tried the normal Pharisaical ways for compensating for it, as chapter 7 describes; "the motions of sins that worked through the law," that is, their condemnation and violence towards others, trying to compensate for the guilt of their nation.

If we spoke to the Jews in those days, they would have denied this self-reliance. They would have said they believed they were elected by grace. They would have said they were working for the salvation of their nation, not their individual salvation. They would have said that this national salvation is what the law was for.

Many of them did not have a knowledge of their own sin. They did not have a sin consciousness, that they were aware of. It was working beneath the surface. They were unaware of how the law was working in their soul, making them violent and judgemental against others. Paul was unaware of his sin. He claimed to be spotless in the law, and sincere in his error. (Philippians 3:6, 1 Timothy 1:13) They wanted to do right, and honour the law, but as a nation they were violently breaking the central part of the law; love for others.

They loved the law and said it was good, but they didn't observe the real meaning of it. Their flesh, and our flesh, wasn't, and still isn't able to observe the law. This is why we turn from our own works, which means from our self-justification, to trust, and his Spirit takes over and does what we can't do. We must all turn from being Israel after the flesh, to by faith becoming Israel after the Spirit, from our self-justification, to accepting God's free love and grace.

Paul isn't writing an auto-biography in Romans 7. He is telling the story of Israel. He writes it in the first person, because he is part of that story. He identifies himself with all that Israel passed through in their calling from God.

We know this is the meaning of Romans 7 because this is what Paul keeps coming back to in the letter as a whole. In Romans 3, Israel's sin leads to the glory of God, that is, his great grace. God uses Israel to reveal his glory, and yet Israel is still judged. In Romans 5, it is the abundance of the sin of Israel that leads to the abundance of grace. And it is in Romans 9-11 that the full implications of Romans 7 are worked out by Paul.

In these latter chapters, Paul is explicit; Israel's downfall under the law is the very occasion of our salvation. There, Paul states clearly that God endured Israel's sin to make his mercy known. This was the work of the law, to bring Israel to the point of condemning Christ for our forgiveness and salvation.

We see from chapter 1, from what Paul stated is his overall aim in Romans - to show how God has been faithful to and has fulfilled his promises to Israel - that God has done just this. God promised that through Israel he would both save them and also renew the nations of

the world. The problem with this is Israel were also fallen and partakers of Adam's sin. So how can God carry out his plan through a fallen nation? It is exactly through their fall that God proves his love and grace. It is through their fall that God's forgiveness is righteously revealed and then extended to the world. It is clear then, that Romans 7 fits into this overall purpose of the letter to the Romans.

Therefore, when Paul describes Israel's calling and election in Romans 9-11, we see that God is not unjust for calling Israel rather than another people. His justice is shown in that Israel receives no special treatment. When they sin and fall, it looks like all hope of God's plan is gone. But the surprise, or the apocalypse of the gospel, is that it is this very fall that brings God's plan to its fruition.

The story of Romans 6-8 goes like this. The new Israel crosses the Red sea through baptism into Christ, and proceeds into Romans 7 and receives the law. But because they are in Christ, the law and its condemnation are crucified to new Israel. Instead, the law is written on their hearts by the Holy Spirit and this enables new Israel to pass into Romans 8 and inherit the Promised Land. This land isn't limited to the small boundaries of the Old Testament, but it extends to the whole world and to all nations. So in this gospel of new Israel, the promises of God concerning Christ's kingdom come to pass. Christ, with new Israel, inherits all nations and renews the world. This is the story Paul is narrating.

How does Romans 7 fit into Paul's overall purpose in Romans? It's about building unity into the church at Rome, especially between Jews and gentile believers. New Israel is no longer under the law. We don't have to judge each other according to our traditions. We can observe traditions that point to Christ, but these traditions aren't to be barriers between us anymore. The mark of the church, the outward sign of new Israel, isn't the law, but it is our love for each other. This is the mark of the law in our lives. This is the sign that God is fulfilling his promises and covenant in our world through his new people. Love is the sacrament of the church.

# Romans

Chapters 8-16

## A Call to Serve

Kent Hodge

These notes on Romans have been broken into two sections, one from chapters 1-7 and the other from chapters 8-16. This isn't for any particular structural reason within the letter of Romans, but just because I had a break in writing between the sections.

Going through this second section, from chapters 8-16, we see that the call of Paul to the church is to serve. This then is the emphasis in the notes below. In Romans 8, we are called to serve the wider creation, as God's children bringing renewal to our world. In chapters 9-11 we are called to serve each other from our diverse backgrounds. Paul uses the Jew/gentile dichotomy of his day, but this equally applies to other differing backgrounds today.

Chapter 12 is a call for us to serve others within the body of Christ, as well as our enemies, following Christ, who put the interests of others ahead of himself. Chapter 13 is a call for us to renew the powers of the world through service, rather than revolution or rebellion, again, following Christ, who did the same after his trial by Pilate and the council of Jerusalem.

Chapter 14 depicts the whole body in service of each other, from our various traditional backgrounds, receiving and learning from each other. Chapter 15 is the summary of the letter, which highlights the service orientation of Christ as Paul's main theme.

For Paul, all this summarises the gospel as God's faithfulness, or righteousness, in fulfilling his promises to Israel, not by conquering Israel's enemies, but by serving them in Christ. Chapter 16 concludes by showing that service is the main character and calling proof in all God's true ministers in the church.

## Romans 8

### Gospel Fulfils Jewish & Pagan Aspirations

Romans 8 is where Paul's shows the different facets of Israel's identity and calling coming together in Christ. It pivots on the gospel message, which isn't first of all about how we are saved. The gospel is "Christ is Lord" over a new creation, by virtue of his death and resurrection. This is where he conquered our enemies, just as Caesar claimed to have done. This is the meaning of "sending his own Son." Son is the divine conqueror or ruler in this world.

When Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world, he meant the values by which it operates; not with violence. In the Roman world, the "gospel" literally was "Caesar is Lord," and our "salvation" was in the new community of justice Caesar provided. In spiritualising the gospel, we have taken it completely out of this context.

What is Christ Lord over? First, he is Lord over sin in our lives and over the law. He conquers their power by his cross and Spirit. Then he is Lord over the creation. By dying, the old creation that is corrupt, dies with him. He enters into the death of our fallen world. In rising in the flesh, creation itself is born into new life. This is the "creation groaning" in the pain of birth that Paul speaks of. Creation comes into resurrection through suffering. As our flesh is mortified, the Spirit brings us into new life. While suffering, we are saved by a growing hope.

It is essential to pick up on these background themes in Paul. The gospel message doesn't only fulfil the Jewish Old Testament prophecies, but also the pagan or gentile aspirations. It fulfils the groaning, pains and desires for freedom of all humanity. The way Jesus fulfils both Jewish and pagan expectations is woven throughout Paul's writings.

Take Paul's "there is neither Jew nor gentile, Greek nor barbarian, rich nor poor, male nor female, bond nor free," for example. This was a pagan theme. As Alexander the Great, and later the Roman Augustus, conquered the world, they promised they were liberating the creation, bringing justice to all. They said their lordship was the "good news" for the world. Their rule reflected the need to free all society from the curse. These themes permeate Isaiah, in which a Messiah would bring this vision to pass. Alexander and Augustus, and all the Roman rulers, claimed to be this divine Son.

Jesus came with this very announcement. His kingdom wasn't a religious announcement, separated to a spiritual life, for Sundays, or for heaven. It was the same gospel announcement that the pagan rulers made. It was about the renewal of this creation. As Christ came, heaven was coming to this world in his body, to fill and renew all things. This is what Paul writes about in all his letters. Jesus was announcing a kingdom that would bring justice to all humanity. This is the hope of faith; not going to heaven when we die.

Jesus' announcement was decidedly political, and this is how it would have been taken in his day. But it wasn't a politics of joining any of the parties of this world. It wasn't a politics about dividing from one group and calling the others our enemies. It was a politics of

renewing the world powers, of transforming them. And the point of renewal is the violence, and the oppression of the strong over the weak, of the group in power over the other groups. This is the point where empire must be transformed, and this is where Jesus attacked it.

### Powers Renewed

His parables about the rulers who held wedding parties and sacked cities, and merchants who locked up unprofitable servants, should be taken this way. They are contrasted to the God who gives his life for his creation on the cross. Those parables are speaking about the renewal of brutal world powers by a new kind of king. These parables were given in the context of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem ahead of his crucifixion. The people were acclaiming him king, but he contrasted his coming betrayal and death and his forgiveness of his enemies with the harshness of their kings. True Sonship, true rulership in this world, is shown by a God who gives himself in Christ for his creation.

The cross itself is a parody of empire and its transformation. In the ancient world it was clear that the cross was the crowning of Jesus as king. It was the identification of true power, self-giving, and of the true nature of God. The false rule, pretentious power and oppressive wickedness was stripped naked, exposed and unmasked. As Paul said in Colossians, the stripping of Jesus on the cross, stripped naked the powers of this world and their injustice. His suffering, not his violence, exposed the evil.

So let's compare the Roman emperor with the cross of Christ. The would-be Roman emperor was brought to the Praetorium Hall in Rome with a company of Roman soldiers. Jesus was brought to the Praetorium in Jerusalem, literally "the city of peace," with the company of soldiers. They clothed the emperor with his wreath, purple robes and sceptre. Soldiers brought Jesus the wreath of thorns, and a purple robe and struck him with a mock sceptre. In Rome, they then proclaimed the new emperor. In Jerusalem, soldiers mocked Jesus, proclaiming him king and worshipped him as the emperor son of god. They were really mocking their own emptiness.

Then the emperor was taken in a procession to the highest hill of Rome. A bull was taken along with the procession, to be sacrificed on the hill. This sacrifice represents the pagan form of rule; others are sacrificed for the ruler, rather than the ruler for the people. A slave walked with the bull, carrying an axe, the implement of death. A procession in Jerusalem took Jesus from the Praetorium to Calvary. This time Jesus was the sacrifice, not the bull, and Simon carried the cross, the implement of death. This was Jesus' true "triumphant procession."

Then the Roman people offered the emperor wine mixed with myrrh, which he refused and it was poured on the altar or the bull. Jesus was offered wine mixed with myrrh and he refused. The emperor then walked up the steps to his throne between his second in command and his key soldier, in the middle of the three. Jesus was crucified between his two men, in the middle of the three, not noble people, but sinners.

After the announcement of the new emperor, there was a divine sign of a flock of doves or darkness, if not literally then this was the Roman myth. When Jesus died there were several divine signs, of the curtain tearing in the temple, the saints raised, and darkness over the land. In the same way the presence of the dove at Jesus' baptism was a divine approval of Jesus' new political renewal mission, which is the meaning of, "This is my beloved Son."

All this was unmistakable for the Roman guard at the cross, who proclaimed, "Surely this is the Son of God," which then meant ruler of the world. Jesus didn't just fulfil scripture, but also pagan aspirations about a new world, which their kings promised. They called it the gospel. This is the gospel Paul is announcing in Romans 8. It is a highly subversive message, proclaiming openly who the true king is and how the true kingdom functions in our world.

The whole narrative of the Gospel of Mark was written in the Roman biography format. These biographies showed how great men were born and rose to importance to conquer the world. But in Mark what it means to be great and to conquer is changed by the person of Christ. Like all other scriptural texts, worldly power is transformed into meek power, so the real nature of God's eternal kingdom can be seen. The contrast is deliberate. Pagan self-centred wrath gives way to neighbourly love.

It is the renewal of the whole creation, by bringing into existence God's new covenant people of suffering-service, who forsake the violent and oppressive ways of empire. They are the people of Isaiah, who beat their swords into peaceful serving instruments. The whole scripture is written this way, not just as a fulfilment of Jewish prophecy, but also the fulfillment and transformation of the pagan powers of the world. The principalities and powers of this world are renewed, by their death and resurrection within our own hearts, natures and behaviours towards others.

This pagan background to the texts is common throughout scripture, but we don't see it in our current readings today. We have often divorced the texts from their historical settings. Let's take Matthew 25 for example, where Jesus speaks of his reign over the world. Jesus quoted from Daniel 7, in which the Son of man ascended to heaven and sat on his throne to rule over the nations. In Jesus' time, Rome had claimed that text in Daniel for themselves, saying their Caesars were this son of man/Son of God. This Roman claim was known by the disciples. Jesus was speaking about his kingdom replacing the pagan beast in Daniel 2.

In Matthew 25, Jesus contrasted his new kingdom with the pagan empires. He was speaking about his ascension in those days to rule the world. Rather than being a brutal power, Jesus' kingdom would progress in the world through care of others. This shows an entirely new way of reigning. Rather than having a throne lifted above others, his reign would be among the lowest, just as Jesus earlier taught his disciples about leadership.

His throne would be among the poor, the sick, the refugees, the prisoners. "If you visit and care for them, you visit me. That is where I am, not as the world expects." His throne is at the bottom, not at the top. This is where heaven is.

In all these passages, the purpose of Jesus and of the Gospel writers, is to expose and renew worldly powers. It is to show the type of people, community, kingdom that will renew the

nations, that will bring true justice through mercy and self-giving, not through oppression. This is the way real power works and brings the fulfillment of God's promises to the whole world. This is what God is really like.

### Torah Fulfilled

Not only are the powers renewed, but the Torah is fulfilled. This is another theme that runs through Romans, and comes to its peak in Romans 8. In Romans 2, Jews didn't keep the Torah, but with a circumcision of heart the Torah is kept, not set aside. In Romans 5, the fulfillment of Torah is through the love of God filling our heart. This is love for God and love for our neighbour, which is the central demand of Torah, and of Israel's identity in Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

In Romans 8, the Torah is kept in our new hearts. All who have "faith that works through love" are the new Israel. This is what Israel means, which Paul goes on to demonstrate in Romans 9. The Spirit brings us into a life in which Torah is fulfilled. "To be spiritually minded is life and peace." Spiritually minded means to keep Torah, at least that is what it means to the Jew and to Paul. As Paul said in Romans 7, "the law is spiritual."

The central part of Torah is love for neighbour. Thus Paul said, "The whole law can be summarised in this one word, you shall love your neighbour as yourself." This is what Jesus did for us on the cross. God gave himself in love for his creation, rather than holding their sin against them. He thought of us, not of himself. So in Romans 8, we are moving out of a self-centred life, into a neighbour orientated life, from an Adamic life of taking one's rights, to laying aside and giving one's life, the humiliation of Christ. (Philippians 2)

"If we live after the flesh (self) we shall die, but if through the Spirit, we put to death the deeds of the flesh, we shall live." (Romans 8:13) So life doesn't come just by faith, but by the fruit of faith (*pistis*, faithfulness), which is love in our lives. This agrees with the teaching of James. It also shows that it isn't good works (faithfulness) which Paul's gospel sets aside, as the mark of family membership with all God's people, but ritual works, ethnic or religious traditions.

When the lawyer answered Jesus, "Love the Lord with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself," Jesus replied, "That is right, do this and you shall live." In the gospel we can do this. It is in the doing of it that life comes, not just to ourselves, but to our community and to our enemies.

The gospel is to move us into the Promised Land, the place where we can do the things that bring life to our societies, instead of war and destruction. "What the law could not do, because it was weak through our flesh, God did for us (through the gospel)." (Romans 8:3) Jesus condemned the principalities of Adam and Eve's fall, which operate in our lives, so we can live differently, being free from their dominion. We are now brought back into dominion over the principalities of self within our natures.

“As many as are led by the Spirit, these are the sons of God.” (Romans 8:14) To be led by the Spirit means to fulfil the spirit/intent of the law in our lives. To be led by the Spirit means peaceful, non-violent love of neighbour and enemy, rather than being ruled by our old nature of greed and self-preservation. It is this dominion over the flesh that is the dominion of the sons of God, in reflecting God’s cruciform character in the world. The flesh doesn’t rule over us, but through love we rule over the flesh. This is dominion and sonship.

### The Jubilee of Israel

These themes from Israel’s history constantly ring through Paul’s writing, to show the fulfilment of Israel’s promises in the gospel. “So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.” (Romans 8:12) Israel have been released from their servitude to the flesh, by being freed from the law.

Romans 8 signifies the freedom of Israel from the law. Whereas the law kept them in bondage in Romans 7, in Romans 8 their release from captivity is announced. This has a distinct purpose. It isn’t a private release, so we can be saved privately and go to heaven. It is a corporate release as the people of God. And its purpose is the renewal of creation.

In Romans 7, Israel is frustrated from fulfilling their call in the nations. The call they received through Abraham to bless the whole world, is side-tracked and caught in a ditch because of Israel’s own sin. They are found to be part of the world that needs renewal. So until they are renewed, their original project must be on hold.

Romans 8 signifies the setting of Israel free from the judgment of the law, so they can go on and fulfil their global destiny in the gospel. Now with the law written on their hearts, they are able to be the light of the nations. They are able to inherit the Promised Land. They are now called sons, which means heirs, or inheritors of the promises. Under the law they were unable to inherit them, because of sin.

So it is in being free from sin, in walking new lives in Christ, in bringing forth new deeds and new life styles, that the inheritance of social renewal can be possible. Social renewal is the goal. The goal is changed life styles; moving from self-love to neighbour love.

The inheritance is the world. It isn’t the limited former land boundaries of Israel under the Old Testament. It isn’t leaving this world and going to heaven. It is all the nations. This was pre-stated by Paul in Romans 4, where he said Abraham was made heir of the whole world. Now in Romans 8, it is the whole world that is set free from its corruption, meaning our former evil deeds against others. The inheritance is the world, freed from our former corruption. This is also stated in Psalm 2 and Psalm 8. “The meek shall inherit the earth.”

Jubilee passes to the whole world. In the Old Testament, jubilee was a shadow of something far greater. The application of freeing people from financial debt still applies (and should be applied to debt laden nations today), but its prophetic significance is far wider, as Paul points out in Romans 8. It is the whole creation being set free from its former corruption.

This corruption is seen as sin, and as financial debt, or slavery, but also as the decaying of the whole creation through destructive human lifestyles. Jubilee sets free all who groan.

### A New Creation

Romans 8 is a creation passage, common in Paul's letters. It includes the themes of the first creation in Genesis 1. There is the word, Torah, written on our hearts, renewing our lifestyles, to renew our world. This was the intent of Torah. It was God's spoken word in Israel to transform the creation. The "And God said"s in Genesis 1, became the "Thou shalt"s of Torah, both intended to bring forth new life. Now the "Thou shalt"s are made effective through our new heart.

The Spirit, present in creation, is now present in our lives to bring forth new creation. How does this happen? By reordering our lives, from darkness to light, from chaos to goodness, through reorientating our hearts and works towards our neighbour.

And the darkness of Genesis 1, metaphorically representing the gentile powers of oppression against Israel, still active today against God's gospel people, cannot overcome and separate us from the global renewing love of Christ, which inevitably drives back the world's darkness. (Romans 8:35-39) Paul is drawing on the Israel's main identity themes, this time as God's new creation people.

The theme of sonship is strong in Romans 8, just as it is also in Genesis 1. In Romans 8, Israel's restoration of the Adamic calling to dominion is fulfilled. They receive dominion over the flesh, in order to be able to live properly as heirs, to live in such a way that their communities and nations are delivered from our current corruption.

In Romans 8, the original purpose of God in Genesis 1 is fulfilled. For Paul, this is the Hebrew creation/new-creation gospel fulfilled in Christ. By employing creational themes, Paul is showing that the gospel isn't a spiritual gospel of going to heaven, but of heaven coming to earth, of new creation. It is holistic, or *shalom* to the whole creation.

In speaking of new creation, Paul also employs temple themes. This is primarily about the glory (*shekinah* presence in the temple) that is revealed in us. We are the new temple, which is the joining point between heaven and earth; the conduit where heaven comes to and renews the world. Paul brings in the intercessional theme, reminding us of the priests in the former temple. Christ's intercession is about God renewing the world through his temple, the church. He is subjecting enemies through the sacrificial love of the church.

### Renewing Suffering

The theme of suffering is also significant in Romans 8. It's another one of those themes which forms a major part of Israel's identity. Israel is a pilgrim in the world, often treated as a stranger and persecuted in the ungodly nations, but by its presence it is shining the light of global transformation.

Israel's *chosenness*, which Paul discusses again in Romans 9, is a reflection of Isaiah's depiction of the elect Suffering Servant. This suffering servant is a major part of Israel's identity, especially since their captivity in Babylon. Paul repeatedly shows this call to election, to suffering, continuing in the church, shining the light through our forgiveness, love and service towards the ungodly and enemy. (Romans 8:23-30)

The election of sonship is an election to suffer, not to be a special class. The suffering is to draw the world to Christ through love. It is not a "soteriological election," meaning the way people are saved. Paul is not writing about that. He is writing about how God moves through his people to renew creation. Election is misunderstood when we take it out of this context. Paul is speaking of Israel's election to suffer and serve the wider world God loves, as a witness, drawing all to him. This highlights the purpose of *chosenness*, to serve others, as God served us.

But it is this suffering which also transforms the believers. Through the intercession of the Spirit within us, the suffering, the groaning, works for our good, conforming us into the image of Christ.

In this way, those whom God calls and justifies are glorified, which means made fit to rule in God's image in the world. The concept of the image of God, or image of Christ, working in us, is always speaking of our Adamic rule in the world being restored. Through us bearing the image of God, community, society and creation itself begins to yield and also joins us in the freedom from our former corruption.

In this call to suffering we know that God is with us. The suffering isn't because of our sins, but because we are called to vindicate God's love in the world through our self-giving care of others. We are chosen to take on Christ's path, to be his forgiveness and God's hands of service in the world. Though we suffer, God's love for us is confirmed by the cross, and we know there is nothing he will withhold from us. (Romans 8:31-33)

In our sufferings we don't retaliate with accusations against others, for the accuser in our conscience has been cast out by the love of God. Therefore, love overcomes fear, and care for others overcomes hatred and destruction.

## Summary

When we first look at Romans 8, the background structure doesn't look obvious. But in Paul's day it was clear. All parts of Israel history are crammed into this chapter. Their original creation story. Their call to restore Adam's rule. Their inheritance under Abraham. Their Exodus from bondage. Their new creation calling under Moses. Their desire in the Wilderness to return to Egypt due to fear. (Romans 8:15)

Their passing into the Promised Land. Their bondage under the law. Their sufferings in renewing the nations. The presence of the *shekinah* in their temple. Their overcoming the powers of darkness in the pagan nations. Their call to new creation after exile in Babylon.

This is the template Paul is writing from. Romans 8 shows the whole call of Israel fulfilled through the gospel, the Spirit and the church today.

And in fulfilling the history of Israel, Paul is saying that the gospel, the Lordship of Christ, also fulfils the pagan desires of a new and better world, which the world has been trying to carry out through its military and commercial empires. This is how Israel's gospel serves the pagan world, just as God promised that it would. Israel serves the world through its sufferings and exile. Christ serves the world through his death and resurrection. The church, as the new, or continuing Israel in the Spirit, serves the world from town to town, bringing out forgiveness and love for its enemies by practical acts of kindness and care.

If Romans 1-7 is about God bringing us out of lives of accusing others, Romans 8-16 is about God bringing us into lives of serving others. God's righteousness, or his faithfulness to his promises, is clearly revealed in Romans 8.

# Romans 9

## God's Righteousness

### Living and serving together

There are two major themes running through Romans 9-11. One is pastoral and the other is apologetic, or evangelical. The pastoral theme is about people with different backgrounds, in this case Jews and gentiles, loving and serving each other, rather than competing, within the local and global church. The issue here isn't about Jews and gentiles in particular, but about any groups within the church today living a life of care towards each other.

Romans chapters 9 to 11 also highlight the main apologetic issue of Paul's letter. Going back to Romans 1, Paul presents the theme of the letter, which is the faithfulness of God, or the righteous action of God in being faithful to his promises to save Israel, and save the world through Israel. Romans 9-11 deals with the main point of the letter, God's faithfulness to the nation he called and his justice towards the world.

Going back to Romans 3 we see these questions raised again. If Israel hasn't believed the gospel, have God's purposes failed? And if God has judged and thrown away Israel, then will he do the same later to the gentiles who believe the gospel? Can we trust a God like this? And if Israel's sin led to the glory of God, why is God judging them at all? These are all the same questions that Paul is answering in Romans 9-11.

Returning to Paul's pastoral matter, we see that this is about Jewish and gentile pride. It is about our tendency towards nationalism, even today, among all of our different denominational or racial groupings, to create schisms in our relationships, rather than reconciliation. Reconciling action, which God showed us in Christ, is the mark of love in the church.

Paul wanted to make sure that his mission to the gentiles westward from Rome to Spain, wasn't marred by a breakdown of the gospel message in the church itself. The witness of the church to the world is reconciling family. Paul calls us to bear the image of Christ in the gospel, to serve each other as Christ served us.

We see that these two themes merge in Paul's letter. God's faithfulness is a salvation within our hearts that reconciles us to serving rather than fighting others. This is God's new world.

## How God Saves

A main question that runs right through Romans is about how God fulfils his promises to save Israel and the world through the cross. The major problem is that the cross certainly doesn't look like the power of God. It isn't what was expected. Israel expected that God would save them by destroying their enemies. They thought he would save them by might and by power, not by his Spirit. God had promised he would deliver them from their

enemies. But their Messiah came and went and Israel were still under the Romans. Nothing had changed. How could this be called salvation? Had God failed?

So Romans sets out to show that God doesn't save us the way we expect. Our enemies aren't the enemies that we thought they were. The issue here goes to the centre of what salvation is. This is why Paul looks at this in Romans 10. "If we believe in our heart that Jesus rose from the dead and confess with our mouth that he is Lord, we shall be saved." In what way could this possibly relate to the Jewish expectations about conquering Rome and exalting Israel? Though Paul appears at first, in Romans 1, to join the zealots in exposing Rome's false claims to empire, he doesn't join them in their quest to overthrow Rome to be saved. He has a different path to salvation.

This takes us back to the Exodus. Israel were saved from Egypt by mighty signs and wonders. The plagues upon the empire, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna in the Wilderness. This is the Messiah they were expecting to save them from Rome. But when Israel came out of Egypt many still did not believe. They were not saved. They rebelled against God. Nothing had changed. The mighty signs and wonders didn't save them. This is what Paul means by election in Romans 9-11. Though many came out of Egypt according to the flesh, the actual number of Israel, those who believed, was reduced to a few.

What did save Israel? It's like the proverb we hear, "You can take Israel out of Egypt, but how can you take Egypt out of Israel?" Salvation isn't being taken out of Egypt. Salvation is Egypt being taken out of us. This is why Jesus didn't take Israel out of Rome, but called them to serve Rome, and why Israel didn't understand that. God forgive our stubborn nationalism and pride today!

Salvation then meant that the ways of Pharaoh would no longer be the ways of Israel, whether individually or nationally. This was what the law was about. It contained Jubilee, which is caring for others, which was the very antithesis of Egypt and of empire. It was also the antithesis of Rome. We aren't to overcome Rome by the flesh, which again is Paul's remark about the election of grace, but by becoming the antithesis of power in our personal lives and community, towards the weak and downtrodden.

The law was Israel's salvation, meaning, if they could do it. Especially, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." This Torah, in our heart, would save our own personalities from their selfish disorder and also save our communities by renewing our actions. This law in our hearts would bring about the renewed Garden of Eden. It is the reversal of the curse of Adam, who sought self-expression.

And this is exactly what Paul says in Romans 10. "The Torah is near you, even in your heart and in your mouth." This was their salvation, as Deuteronomy 30 said. It was this word of love. It was the law of love, not the law of religious works, which many Jews were using to divide themselves from others. This law of love is the law that faith brings in our hearts, fulfilling the Torah. This is Paul's point about the gospel.

So the point Paul is making throughout Romans is that God doesn't save us the way we think he does. Yes, God is faithful to his promises, he does fulfil what he promised to Israel,

but he doesn't do it the way the world expects. The salvation of God is the salvation we really need. The other forms of salvation, from natural enemies, won't work. We will just keep on making more enemies by our life styles. The way of peace is the way of reconciling service, which is the way Paul is teaching in Romans 9-11 between Jew and gentile, and which we apply to all our relationships today.

The salvation Paul is teaching in Romans is the same salvation Jesus spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount. It is here that we see that Jesus and Paul preached the same gospel. The faith Paul spoke of means the Torah of love renewing our heart towards our neighbour and enemy, just as Jesus said. The gospel of Paul is the Sermon on the Mount.

At the height of Jewish expectation about the coming Messiah, when they expected, because of Jesus' great miracles, that he would be their king to save them from Rome, Jesus stood to proclaim his message in the Sermon on the Mount. His great miracles showed he was the prophet like Moses. He had the mighty signs of Egypt. But these signs were not their salvation. Instead it was a new heart which Jesus pointed to in his message.

Jesus said their salvation, their new world, would come about through their new actions towards their neighbour and enemy. If they loved them and did good to those who hurt them, then they are the sons of God, bringing peace. Sonship, to the Jews, always speaks of the Garden of Eden, of a renewed kind of world and community. This is what they wanted their Messiah to do for them. Jesus showed them that their Messiah would accomplish this by changing their own hearts.

Their salvation, the promises of God, wouldn't come about through the rigorous keeping of their religious laws in such a way that denied love for their neighbour. These kinds of religious works would further harden and destroy their communities. These outward signs of faith were to point to the law of love, not overthrow love.

### The Swift and Strong

As Paul said, the race isn't to the one who wills, or the one who runs, but through the one who shows mercy. (Romans 9:16) Israel's salvation wouldn't come to pass through the strength of the law of the Pharisees, or by their strength in overthrowing empire, but through acts of mercy. This is God's way. Romans exactly agrees with the Beatitudes on the way we and our world are renewed.

In speaking about the swift and strong, Paul mingles Jewish legalism with Egyptian oppression. They both oppressed. Where there is oppression, then God moves in with election to redeem and restore the afflicted. And God does this through a new serving community, that builds bridges across the classes and races of division, through faith that works through love. This is the good news of the gospel in our world. It isn't just personal, individual and private, but love towards others. It is this love that breaks down legalism and breaks down empire's oppression, bringing a holistic salvation.

And this is the context in which election is introduced in Romans. Israel was elected in Egypt and redeemed, when under the oppressive yoke of Pharaoh. (Romans 9:4) They were not called because they were many, mighty, or righteous, but because God had mercy on them.

Before that, Isaac was elected, when there was no hope of conception for him because of the oldness of Abraham and Sarah. (Romans 9:7-9) Jacob was elected, and not Esau, when Esau was the favourite under the oppressive natural laws of patriarchy and inheritance. (Romans 9:1-13) This was also the context in which Jesus spoke of election. It was against the proud and for the weak (the Beatitudes, Matt 11:25.) This was the context in which Paul spoke of election: "Not many nobles are called..."

This means we shouldn't summons Paul to argue at our debates. We have debates about faith and election, i.e. Calvinism and Arminianism, and we invite Paul to argue in our defence. This is a Western question. It wasn't Paul's question in Romans.

We agree that that there is a kind of mystery about faith, but it isn't Paul's purpose in Romans 9-11 to solve such matters. He isn't speaking of the kind of double election, where God elects some to salvation and others to damnation. And he isn't speaking about how faith comes to us, whether on God's part alone, or whether we have a part in the matter ourselves. This isn't the purpose of Paul in these chapters.

When Paul speaks of election, he is doing so in the Hebrew context. In the Hebrew world, election primarily meant that God called Israel to be his witness in the world. He didn't call Israel to limit others coming to faith. There were others outside of Israel who clearly had faith. And God called Israel to bring many more to faith. Their election was for the world.

Israel knew they were elected by grace. Paul's raising of this fact in Romans 9 wasn't new to them. But they had slipped, building legalism again, to build a barrier of nationalism against others and against the poor or sick. The issue Paul was speaking about when he raised the matter of election was our call to serve the weak.

### Serving the Weak

We see this in every discussion Jesus had with the Pharisees. Today we say the Pharisees tried to be saved by the law and Jesus said it was by faith. But this wasn't the centre of their discussions. In every case, Jesus was pointing out the Pharisees' refusal to serve the weak, using the law as their excuse. They couldn't visit the sick in their homes, because they were sinners. They couldn't help someone on the Sabbath Day, because that was unlawful. They couldn't heal the man on the road to Jericho, because that would make them unclean. They couldn't help Lazarus, because he was accursed. Service, rather than separation and elitence, was the issue Jesus was speaking about every time.

So, if we say we have rejected legalism in favour of faith and still don't serve our enemy, or integrate with a world in need, then we aren't any different to the Pharisees. We would still have our nationalisms and barriers in place. That would be to reject legalism for hedonism, which is a mark of modern cultures, and which is sustained by our wrong readings of Paul,

which point us to a private and personal election or betterness over others. This is the same mistake, or stumbling stone, of the Jews. The faith Jesus was pointing the Pharisees to was faithfulness to the heart of the law, love for others.

When Paul speaks of election he is referring to the call to serve. This was Israel's call. This is why in Romans 3:2 and 9:4-5 Paul reiterates their vocation with the tabernacle and the oracles of God. They were the custodians of God's testimony concerning the coming gospel for the whole world. This was the purpose of their election. Just as John insists, not for us alone, but also for the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

### Serving by Suffering

Paul answered the question of whether this election was unjust on God's part. Why choose Israel and look over other individuals and nations? The answer in Romans 9-11 is that Israel weren't called to special privilege that others couldn't enter. They were called to serve. And this calling, like the calling of their Christ, the "Suffering Servant," was a call to suffer for the world. Not many nations would covet this calling.

Israel's suffering is the theme of Romans 9. (Romans 9:22, 32) The theme continues on from almost every previous chapter of Romans. Israel were called to fall, to have the law, but not to keep the law, to point the world to light, but not to follow that light themselves. Not that this is what God made them do, but because of their human nature. It would have been the same for any of us, or for any nation, in their position. They were called to restore Adam, but they too were in Adam. God had to deal with waywardness in Israel before he could deal with it in the world.

Israel agreed to the call in Egypt, when in slavery. When they chose the law, instead of a relationship of trust with God, the law became their stumbling block. It stirred up sin even more in their lives and provoked them to a greater rebellion against God. When they handed Christ over and God forgave them, they found themselves the representatives of God's forgiveness for the whole world. This brought blessing to the world. Paul speaks of this in Romans 9:23-24, and then again more in Romans 11.

"The fall of the them became the riches of the world." (Romans 11:12) In the Old Testament, rebellion brought Israel into a fall and into captivity in Babylon. This diaspora spread them throughout the known world, bringing their synagogues and scriptures to the nations. This brought the knowledge of God and salvation to millions, even before Christ came. It influenced all world religions, from Greek philosophy to the Far East of the world.

When Christ came, the fall of Israel brought an even greater blessing to the world. Their rejection of God led them to crucify Christ. It was here that God became known to the world. Here God revealed who he was, his whole nature, the way he rules and the way his kingdom works in renewing our globe. The cross happened in the middle of human history, in the middle of our world geographically, at the height of the most powerful empire in history, so all the world could get an open view of who God is and what he is like.

Here we saw on the cross a God who took our sins into himself and forgave them. This would raise up his new people, to spread the life of this God around the world. That is, this new people would follow God, taking the sins of their enemies and forgiving them, and answering with good rather than harm.

But for this new people to arise in the world, Israel must first harden against God, which was accomplished through the law. (Romans 9:22, 27-33, 10:20-21, 11:8-11) This was their call. This serving/suffering/election is certainly nothing for other nations to covet. Israel served the world through becoming sin in the law, and passing this sin onto Christ, who bore it for us all.

This is what Paul said in chapter 9, when comparing Pharaoh to Israel. Pharaoh hardened against Israel for his empire's advantage. (Romans 9:17) God used this for his glory, to be known in the world by Israel's deliverance. But this was for our benefit, so the world could trust him and be freed from the law of death. In the same way, Paul continues, God used the self-hardening of Israel for the salvation of the world, which included Israel's salvation, if their hearts would turn. (Romans 9:22-24)

"What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the gentiles?"

This is Paul's answer to his questions about the justice of God in Romans 3 and 9.

### God's Just Judgement

"For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Romans 9:17)

"God hardened the heart of Pharaoh." (Exodus 9:12) This means God allowed Pharaoh to do his own will. We see this in Romans 2, where God hands man over to his own determined purpose. "Hardening" means God stops appealing to man's conscience. And God did this because he determined to have mercy on the downtrodden. Pharaoh can't blame God for not, in the end, extending grace to him to turn from his destruction, because this was the determined direction Pharaoh himself had set.

Israel also had determined their rebellion, but God gave them enough grace to continue to the time of Christ, but not enough grace to cross their own will and turn them from the path of rebellion they had set. Rather, he endured their rebellion, but he did so with a good purpose in mind, for the Jews and for the gentiles alike. That is, in both the cases of Pharaoh and of Israel, God used the proud to show his mercy to the humble, both Jews and gentiles who believed. But the fall of Israel was their own will, not God's will for them.

So the whole letter of Romans, including here the climax in Romans 9, asks this question. "Is it right for God to judge and reject Israel, when God was glorified and made known to the world through them?" The answer is that God has not rejected Israel. He has freely forgiven

them, as Jesus said on the cross. But he will allow self-prepared judgement to come upon those who do not believe and follow the light he showed us in Christ; the light that loves and builds the lives of others through faith.

Israel was elected to serve the world, and this is what they did, even though they refused and built walls of exclusion to the world. God's purpose was not frustrated through Israel's unbelief, but rather his purpose was fulfilled through their rebellion, which led us all to the foot of the cross and his mercy. The question of Paul about our unbelief frustrating the purpose of God has been answered. And his question about whether God has rejected Israel will be answered in Romans 11.

### The First Fruits

As far as whether Israel's election was unjust, it wasn't:

1. The purpose of election is for us to serve others.
2. And in that service and witness, all have the offer of faith, to believe the witness.
3. Even the elect themselves, Israel, must believe and live out their own witness to be saved.
4. This is the same for the elect today. We also must believe and live out that which we bear witness to through the gospel message.
5. God's salvation mercy isn't restrictive. When it says he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, it means on the humble. This is clear in Romans 11, where he has mercy on all who believe. (Romans 11:32)

We find this is the constant theme of Paul whenever he speaks of election. In Ephesians 1 we are the elect in Christ. What for? Ephesians 1 goes on to describe the same vocation of Israel now being carried forward in the church. It is that Christ might gather all things into himself, and that in his body, he may fill all things, i.e. fill his renewed creation.

The purpose of election isn't self-privilege. It is to serve the rest of mankind and the whole creation. It is to be called with God to give of ourselves for others. God calls his elect because he purposes to use them in grace to show his love and call to all. This is what he achieved through Israel, and this is his purpose in grace for us today.

### Summary

One of the primary themes of Romans 9-11 is introduced in the beginning of chapter 9. Paul's heart and compassion for Israel. This is God's heart. He isn't angry at them for rejecting Christ. He longs for their restoration.

This theme builds throughout the three chapters. This, Paul says, is to be our heart, as gentile believers. We aren't to be proud against the Jews, as we have both been proud in the past, but we are to be grateful for what Israel suffered and have done for us. We are to

serve them, to show them love, as they served us by their witness. This doesn't mean we serve them more than others. That would rebuild the injustice of nationalism once again.

Romans 9-11 is another poetic section of Romans. It begins with lament and ends with praise, just as the Psalms. This Hebrew form of literature fills Paul's life and writings.

Romans 9-11 starts with Abraham and moves on through Moses and the Exodus, to the Prophets, and, from Deuteronomy 30, to their renewal under the new covenant. All Jewish literature at Paul's time was structured like this. Once again, just like in Romans 5-8, Paul moves in Romans 9-11 through the history of Israel, to show their future fate in the gospel, along with all of us who believe.

Paul completed explaining the gospel in Romans 8, now in Romans 9-11 he is describing national Israel's part in the renewed spiritual Israel of faith. Are they included in their own fulfillment, in what they gave witness to?

## Romans 10

### God Saves Through a New Community

Romans 10 follows the theme at the close of Romans 9, that the gentiles who didn't seek after righteousness have found it in faith, and the Jews didn't find that righteousness because they sought it not by faith, but by the works of the law.

So Romans 10 looks at this salvation through faith. It is a salvation that brings us into a renewing community, as followers of Christ. It isn't merely a personal salvation, dislodged from community. Community is the whole backdrop to what Paul is speaking about. A community is the place of mercy for all, reflecting the character of God, rather than the character of Pharaoh, which the Pharisees were showing.

The Jews believed in God's election by grace, but they tried to build a community of salvation from the world on the basis of the ritual works of the law. They tried to build a community on the basis of works, rather than on the basis of God's mercy. They were excluding and destroying community rather than saving it. We all do this today, when we say we are saved by grace, but we build walls of doctrine and tradition between us and others, rather than bridges of service.

We generally use terms differently to the way Paul used them. For Paul, as we saw in earlier chapters, faith meant to trust in God and not in our own works, so that God's Spirit shows us his free acceptance, which we then pass onto to others around us. In passing on this love to others, we fulfil Torah, not by our own strength, but by his Spirit of grace and acceptance living in us and being shared with others.

Faith then is trust in God, inspired by the faithfulness of Christ to reveal God's love on the cross, which leads us into a life of faithfulness ourselves. This faithfulness to the covenant means reflecting the loving kindness of God to our neighbour. This is the fulfillment of the law, and of the image of God in our lives. Thus the meaning of these words is fulfilled, where faith (*pistis*) means trust and faithfulness, and covenant faithfulness in the Hebrew (*chesed*) also means mercy and loving kindness.

So it's the cross of Christ that brings this into our lives, or as Paul earlier said, "from faith to faith," from Christ's faithfulness to our faithfulness. (Romans 1:17) Christ's faithfulness releases our heart from its captivity to the law, and frees us to show forgiving faithfulness to others. Paul turns to this "law of faith" he laid down in Romans 1, to unfold it more here in Romans 10. And it is this faithfulness of Christ on the cross, and this new faithfulness by the Spirit in our Jesus' community, that is the righteousness of God. That is, this is the way God fulfils his promises to renew the world.

For faith, put "faithfulness to the core issues of the law, on love for neighbour." This comes about through the new heart God gives us in the gospel message. This is God's righteousness, meaning his faithfulness to keep his covenant promises, in delivering Israel

and their neighbours through a new Torah working out his blessings through us in our world.

Paul contrasts this way of salvation with the way of the Jews at his time. Theirs' is the works of the law. By this he meant the outward ritual works of the law that demarcated them from others. They sought salvation through building barriers between themselves and others, rather than through showing them love. This didn't achieve salvation, either for themselves personally, as it took them away from the love of God, nor for their nation, as it prevented them from healing wounds in their society.

They were ignorant of God's righteousness. They were ignorant of the way God had set out to fulfil his promises through Christ. They were ignorant of God's self-giving nature through which he would turn our hearts to his kingdom. They set out to fulfil God's promises to Israel themselves, through a kind of exclusion between themselves and sinners.

We still do the same today. We often feel that if we exclude sinners we will purify our society and bring about the world God wants. But God in Christ went about this very differently, by visiting sinners. This was the ignorance of the Pharisees, in the way of renewal of their own hearts and of the lives of others.

Paul's conclusion to this is that Christ is the end of the law to those who believe. The traditions of the law are not to be used as a dividing point between believers, to those who walk in the fulfilment of that law, which is love. These fulfil covenant righteousness through faith that works through love, not through self-righteousness that refuses to act on the simple message of God's law, which is love. We are not saved by setting up a system which rejects others for religious purity. Such would be an antithesis to the incarnation of Christ. It would be unfaithful – lacking in real faith.

### Israel's Covenant Renewal

Paul then goes straight to the promises of Israel's covenant renewal in Deuteronomy 30. They are about Torah. "The Torah is near you," God said to them when they came out of Egypt, "even in your heart and in your mouth."

What was this Torah? It was the Torah of love for neighbour and stranger, of Jubilee, of love for God being expressed towards the community. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, being the centre of their law.) This Torah was the creative word of renewed community, just like God's creative word in Genesis 1 brought order out of chaos. This Torah is what brings order to our world today.

Paul is earmarking the covenant renewal promise in Deuteronomy 30:6.

"Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live."

Note that community life comes from actions of love, which comes from God's covenant renewal of the heart.

Here, God promised that when he returned Israel from captivity, then God himself would also return to the nation. His Spirit would return to them and he would “circumcise their hearts.” Paul claims that his gospel of Jesus the Messiah is the fulfilment of this promised covenant renewal. It is the Torah written on our hearts.

This is the salvation that Paul is speaking of when he says, “If you believe in your heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead and confess with your mouth that he is Lord, you shall be saved.” We will see this again in Romans 11. By announcing the resurrection of Christ from the dead, Paul is announcing the restoration and renewal of Israel’s covenant, the circumcision of their heart, and the fulfilment of their Torah blessing to community in the world, culminating in the new creation of Romans 8.

The resurrection of Christ from the dead signified the covenant renewal promised in Deuteronomy. It signifies that Israel are forgiven, received back into God’s Garden and favour, for a renewed creation. The resurrection of Christ is God’s first act of Israel’s restoration and new creation.

And what is this salvation? It is God’s Spirit writing Torah on our hearts towards our neighbour, enemy and community. This is new creation and the fulfilment of God’s promises. This then is how God is righteous in regard to fulfilling his covenant promises.

### One Lord, One Family

Paul’s point in Romans 10 is the same as it was in Romans 4. And it’s the same theme that goes through Romans 9-14. God is bringing all the nations together in Christ into one family. This is Paul’s point throughout Romans, as he opens and closes the letter. He calls it the obedience of all nations to Christ’s lordship, which is to love one another.

It’s either the works of the law which separate us from our neighbour, or it’s the faithfulness of Christ renewing our faithfulness of love towards our neighbour. This is not saying that the traditions of the law are bad and must be dropped by the Jewish believers, but that they must not be used as a means of nationalism and rejection, to separate from other believers.

The key passage in Romans 10 is in verses 11-13. “Whoever believes on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich to all that call on him. For whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Here Paul quotes Joel in order to show both Jews and gentiles united in Christ. Paul’s point is that if Christ is Lord, then he is Lord over one united global family. And this is the meaning of Paul when he says, “If we confess with our mouth Jesus as Lord we shall be saved.” He is speaking of Christ’s lordship over his whole body, of both Jews and gentiles. Paul is saying that when we come to faith we come into one united body of love with others.

We come under his lordship, which demands that we love, as we have been loved, renewing the world of its hatred. This is the same message as John in his letters. Without this love, we cannot say we are his children, or that we have eternal life. This love is the only way Christ’s lordship is exercised over humanity.

This is the context, or the emphasis Paul is making in the chapter. We have used this chapter to preach our salvation as individuals, which isn't Paul's final point here. The passage is about our neighbour, not about ourselves.

### Beautiful Feet

"How beautiful are the feet of him that preaches the gospel of peace, and brings glad tidings of good things, (that says to Zion, your God reigns.)" (Romans 10:15, Isaiah 52:7)

This is a reference to Isaiah's prophecy about the liberation of Jerusalem from Babylon in the Old Testament. The fall of Babylon, to set the people free from their affliction, was the sure sign of the reign of God. Isaiah was calling the people to flee Babylon.

Jesus was using such texts to relate to his own preaching. Jerusalem was the beast, Babylon, that was facing imminent destruction, and the people of Zion, the true Zion, were told to flee and were about to be rescued.

We see here all the same underlying points that Paul was making in Romans 9. Jerusalem had become like Pharaoh, like Babylon, who had kept the people in bondage, just as Jesus taught the Pharisees at length. God was coming to set his people free. The coming destruction of the temple, was the announcement to the world that the former restrictions on worship were gone, and the world's salvation had come. The destruction of the temple was the announcement that God reigns over all flesh, over all the world and is building one new community of all. This is Paul's overall message in Romans.

So again, Paul is using this Old Testament text to announce a salvation of community. The nationalism of the beast of Jerusalem was falling and salvation has come to all on the basis of faith. In this way, and not through ritual traditions, God was reigning over all flesh. It's the same message of Jesus, who announced he was the new temple in the world, in which the unity of God's people would be through being one with him, and not by insisting upon the former hand washing ceremonies of the old temple.

The handwashing debate Jesus had with the Pharisees was about the temple. The Pharisees had built up an elaborate table fellowship system that emulated the ceremonies of the temple, to replicate temple regulations in their synagogues. So Jesus was bringing this whole basis for table fellowship into review, and saying it was now based on union with him, open to all. Jesus was clearly proclaiming a revolution against the old order of Jerusalem, but a kind of revolution that they didn't yet understand: a common table fellowship!

But the real beast here wasn't just Jerusalem, destroyed in AD 70, but the beast within, which builds self-centred walls against our neighbour. This beast was destroyed on the cross, when Jesus set us free from our prisons of self. This is the salvation that Paul is declaring, that God reigns in our hearts, and calls us into loving community by faith. This is the message of the beautiful feet. The cross is the declaration that "our now God reigns" and the Babylon within us has fallen.

## Enemy Love

Paul then completes chapter 10 by referring back to his main question at the beginning of chapter 9. If God has been faithful, then why hasn't Israel been saved as a whole? The point again is that God doesn't save them by destroying their enemies, like Rome. Instead he saves them by giving them faith, or faithfulness in a new heart towards their enemies, to serve them.

This sounds just like the message of Jesus at the synagogue of Nazareth. Nazareth was a nationalist settlement from the days of the Maccabees. They hated the foreigners in their midst. Jesus' message pointed to God's love for these foreigners as the fulfillment of the gospel and the Messiah's coming. The gospel was God's call for them to serve their enemies. Paul is sharing the same message in Romans 10. Paul is showing in Romans 9-11 how the Jews largely refused to serve, but in that way they did serve us all.

This is God's salvation or renewal plan, of moving all his people, globally, into one serving body. This new community is God's way of saving the word and fulfilling his covenant to Israel. This heart renewal faith comes by hearing the gospel message about the love of God, the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, his cross and resurrection.

And it isn't that the message hasn't been preached to all Israel. The message has gone to the ends of earth, but not all believed. And this isn't because God has in any way rejected Israel. Christ being raised shows that their exile is finished, God has forgiven them and received them back to himself freely. He has reconciled them. They only need to believe and allow the love of Christ to renew their hearts towards him and towards others whom they reject.

This new faith even produces in our hearts enemy love, which Paul centres on in Romans 12, uniting Jews and gentiles, and the whole world, in Christ. Paul's discourse on enemy love comes immediately after chapters 9-11. Having called Jews and gentiles to one reconciling community, having explained that this is what faith in the Messiah is, Paul then calls us to a fully renewed mind on this basis. This, Paul says, is lived out as a counter culture towards worldly us/them attitudes, in how we treat all people, including enemies, with reconciling love. This aligns Paul's message perfectly with Jesus' message of the kingdom.

# Romans 11

## Romans 11-14, Cooperative Living

This wider section, of which Romans 11 is a part, is about a new kind of cooperative living. Instead of living in competition, as the whole world has been used to, we are to see the world through the eyes of God, and his uniting self-giving on the cross. This is to reorientate our whole living. In Romans 11 we cooperate with other races. In chapter 12 we cooperate with the world by loving our enemies. In chapter 13 we cooperate with governments while renewing them with self-giving. In chapter 14 we cooperate with each other of different traditions around one table of fellowship.

These chapters aren't about the kind of questions we ask today concerning the land of Israel, or election. They are about us loving our enemy.

## Election

Paul's backdrop to the election of Israel in chapter 11, is their beginning calling in Egypt. There, Pharaoh ruled over them in greed and oppression and his idolatry was interwoven as part of the system of abuse. This Pharaoh-background to the text runs through Paul's passage from chapter 9. Pharaoh is the one who "wills and runs," who uses his strength to subjugate others. God is the one who shows mercy.

After the Exodus, during the history of Israel, Israel by and large returned to Pharaoh's ways. Instead of following Jubilee from their law, they followed the greed and oppression of empire. Their idolatry, just like the idolatry of Egypt, was part of this process. The idolatry was used as a means of ruling over others in corruption and self-empowerment.

Paul said that even at his present time they remained an election of grace, meaning those who hadn't bowed their knee to this idolatry. (Romans 11:4-5) In Paul's day, overt idolatry was a thing of the past for Israel, but the idolatry of greed, of mammon, was rampant. Jesus spoke many times about this.

This is where Paul compares grace to works, which resembles Jesus' Beatitudes. (Romans 11:6) God extends grace to the humble. The works of the law are used to buffet others, and maintain the classes of privilege within Israel, and between Israel and other peoples. Religious elite operate in the same way in our own day, especially when they join with the current political powers, as Jerusalem then did with Rome.

The Jews of course said that their works were to save Israel, but what they sought through these works was actually unobtainable. (Romans 11:7) Instead, they should have sought God through grace and mercy towards each other. This would have both healed their own hearts and the lives of those around them. However, their greed blinded them. (Romans 11:10) We can't love God and mammon; mammon and people.

We see here, in the overall context of Paul, especially when related to the teachings of Jesus, that the discussion about righteousness, faith, works and grace, is as much about our community as it about our private walk with God. And the discussion about election, in the context of idolatry, and its oppressive use in unrighteous rule over others, is more about God choosing those who turn to help and care for others, from whatever background. The context in Romans 9-11 is God helping the humble over the proud.

We also see here that what it means to receive Jesus is to receive his kingdom and message. To believe means to follow him into our communities. When we fail to take Paul in his historical setting, into which he was then speaking, about the Jews and gentiles and their call to love each other, we spiritualise his message and miss its thrust. We then think that “believing” is about an isolated faith, divorced from enemy-service within our wider community.

But now we see that Paul’s message was aligned with Jesus, and even with the letter of James. This way of looking at Paul may not be favourable among some today. The Reformation for a time had thrown out James altogether. For James, to believe meant to break down social barriers and help the poor. To believe in Jesus meant to believe in his “royal law,” to love neighbour as our self. To believe meant to do the transforming works the law gave witness to. This is the message of Paul in Romans.

### The Restoration of Israel

For the remainder Romans 11, Paul explains that God has not cast away Israel. The opposite is true. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has forgiven and restored Israel to himself.

We spoke about this briefly in our notes on Romans 6. We note again here the background issue in the mind of Paul to this part of Romans 11. We will see further below that Paul brings in the Prophets, in speaking about God’s promise to fully return Israel from exile to his favour.

God would carry out this promise through the *Suffering Servant*. That is, Christ becomes the representative of Israel. In death, he identifies with Israel’s fall and exclusion from God’s covenant favour, so that Israel may identify with their Messiah’s resurrection, which is their restoration from the curse, from banishment, and return to the presence of God. This is how Paul is speaking about the restoration of Israel in Romans 11.

In chapter 11:12 and 15, when Paul speaks of Israel being cast away, and then being restored, he is speaking of the death and resurrection of Christ. He is not speaking of some future restoration of Israel in their Old Testament land. The statements of Paul in this chapter are specific and clear.

## Israel>Christ>Church

Paul paints the picture where Israel's identity and call is passed on from them onto Christ, as their representative, and then from Christ onto his new community, in which he shares his inheritance with Jews and gentiles alike. This is not replacing Israel, but Israel are moving into their Messiah and then into his renewed Israel, his renewed community. The church is the new creation, the healed and restored Israel, containing both Jews and gentiles.

Paul paints this picture through the service scenario. Israel is called to serve, and this serving calling passes to Christ and then passes to the church. Paul sets up this service scenario as the means by which God fulfils his promises in the world.

First, Israel serves the world, as it is through Israel that the Messiah comes. Through Israel's rejection of Christ, by their false judgment of his covenant unlawfulness, by scapegoating him, Christ dies for us all. In Christ, Israel act out and fulfil their own rejection under the covenant. Christ becomes Israel cast out of the land, executed outside the city, in exile, bearing the curse of the law. Through their fall Israel serves the world.

Next, the Messiah serves the world, by taking our sin and forgiving it, showing the forgiveness and love of God towards his whole creation.

Third, the gentiles now serve the Jews, in gratitude for this immeasurable gift, by returning love and kindness to them, even though they persecute the church.

Service is the way in which the whole program of God is carried out. In Romans 9-14, this service is contrasted with Pharaoh and Rome, and with our modern self-centred ways and "empires."

Paul asks, "Have Israel stumbled that they may fall (irreconcilably) as a nation? No, rather through their fall salvation comes to the gentiles, in order that the gentiles may provoke Israel to jealousy." (Romans 11:11)

Here is the serving part of the gentiles. This provoking isn't one where we taunt the Jews for falling. It is provoking done through service and kindness, in which we show the love of God in our lives towards them. We show them the kindness and mercy that they have given us through Christ, their Messiah. It's like Paul says in the next chapter, pouring hot coals upon their head, touching their conscience with the love of God.

Paul refers again to Deuteronomy 30-32. In chapter 10 we saw that in referring to faith, which would come about through a renewing Torah in our hearts, Paul was speaking of our interrelationships of service towards our enemies, under the new lordship of Christ. Here, Paul refers to Deuteronomy 32, in which God speaks of how he will bring many Jews to faith: through the "enemy service" of the gentiles.

"They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry (to break them, to provoke them by love) by a nation that has no understanding." (Deut 32:21)

Israel provoked God with evil. God provokes them back with mercy, through his cross and through us gentiles, in a cross-shaped serving faith. God returns good for evil, mercy for oppression. This is why God calls us to do the same, as his children. He calls us to overcome evil with good, because this is what he does. He planned to overcome the evil in Israel by the goodness of his cross, and by the goodness of his new people showing Israel love.

It is in chapter 12 that Paul calls us to overcome evil with good, but this is the process of salvation that Paul is outlining here in Romans 11. The process starts with Christ, who shows good to us all, then to Christ's people showing good to the Jews and to all others in the world. Paul's pastoral injunctions in Romans 12 come directly from a review of God's plans and actions in chapter 11.

### Israel's Restoration

Paul continues in Romans 11, "If the fall of them (Israel) be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the gentiles, how much more their fullness." (Romans 11:12)

This verse uses a common poetic style in Paul. Jesus used it also. "If you being evil know how to give good gifts, much more your heavenly Father..." "If by one man's sin all died, much more by the obedience of one shall all live." (This isn't speaking of universalism; it is participatory language. Those who participate in Adam; those who participate in Christ.) So, if we, the gentiles, were blessed by Israel's fall, much more shall we be blessed by their restoration.

The word "fullness" in the above quote means the Jew's restoration. This is where there has been much speculation in Western theology. Going into the history of this, we see that since fathers like Augustine, Israel were often viewed unfavourably by the church. There has been a "replacement theology" taught. This is basically theology from our gentile view. It believes that the gentiles have replaced Israel, and that God has no further use or plan for the Jewish people. The above quote from Paul seems to contradict this view. Paul seems to claim that Israel will be restored.

Another view in church history is known as Dispensationalism, or today known as Zionism. It claims that at the end of this age, just prior to Jesus' return, Israel will be saved en masse. There are variations of this view, from the total salvation of the Jews, to the near total salvation of the group; from the Jews alive at the time, to all Jews in history. It is claimed by some that all Jews will be saved by virtue of their Abrahamic promises, as a separate covenant distinct from the church.

The above quote from Paul has also been seen as the key to Postmillennialism. That is, just before Jesus returns, it is believed that there will be a sudden coming to faith of the whole Jewish nation, which will spark off the blessings of God in such a powerful way that the whole world will turn to Christ and experience resurrection power, i.e. the literal resurrection of all. This has been a common view since the Reformation. It claims that if

Israel's rejection saved the gentiles, their future restoration will spark a far greater blessing in the whole world.

Sometimes these views have been held as a correction to gentle replacement theology. Especially since WWII, when the Jews were so terribly treated, many Christians have softened in their hearts towards Jewish people, after more than a thousand years of hardness towards them. In the first years of the church, Christians loved the Jews, even continuing in fellowship with them in the synagogues and the temple and caring for their poor. But after Constantine, the church often turned against the Jews and even persecuted them.

### Gentile Gospel

I think that both of these views, whether replacement theology, or dispensationalism, are gentile views of Israel. They have both developed to serve gentile interests in the world. Replacement theology developed to serve gentile interest in displacing the Jews. Today dispensationalism is used by gentiles (Western Christian nations) to displace Arab interests.

These are both political views. And both views say that gentiles have been the main custodians of the faith throughout church history, and both say God has largely rejected the Jews for most of church history. Neither of these views are true. Neither of them see Israel as Paul describes the nation.

The problem comes in the way the text from Paul is read. The text is read as a future restoration, but this isn't what Paul was saying. As noted above, and as noted in our comments in Romans 6, Paul was referring to the cross and resurrection of Christ. This represented the exile and the restoration of Israel as the people of God.

### Paul's View

Christ took on the identity of Israel. He was cast out of the land in his crucifixion, into exile. He was received back into favour, he was restored from the curse, in his resurrection. When Christ died, Israel died with him, and when Christ rose, Israel rose with him. This is Paul's teaching throughout Romans.

Just to repeat the above verse from Romans 11: "If the fall of them (Israel) be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the gentiles, how much more their fullness." If the death of Christ meant the carrying away of our sins and God's forgiveness, then much more the resurrection of Christ shall bring fullness to the world through new creation.

The term "fullness," when used for Israel, means their return to God's favour, which was signified by the resurrection of Christ. It isn't a future event for Israel. Israel was restored to God, along with all of us who believe, when Christ was raised.

The passages from the Old Testament that Paul used in Romans 9-11 show that Israel was restored in the resurrection of Christ. Paul quoted from Deuteronomy 30:6 about the day that God circumcises their heart to restore his covenant blessing to them. Paul is showing how Christ fulfils this promise of God to Israel in his death and resurrection. This is the subject matter of the whole letter of Romans.

### The Jew First

When speaking of Israel's restoration, Paul quotes Isaiah 59:20, "There shall come a deliverer out of Zion, who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." (Romans 11:26) It's interesting that Paul misquotes the Hebrew text of Isaiah in this verse. Isaiah said that the redeemer comes *to* Zion. Paul said that the redeemer comes *out* of Zion to the world. But this is the point of scripture. The redeemer comes to Zion first, to restore Zion, and then from the restored Zion, he goes out to the world.

The Jews said "out of Zion" as a way of combining the whole process of their eschatological thought: when God restores the Jews, the world will be restored. This is the gospel, of the faithfulness of God, that Paul is describing throughout this letter. We cannot have a gospel that hasn't restored the Jews first, or God hasn't been faithful to his explicit promises about them being first, and from them the world.

This was how Jewish eschatology was viewed in Paul's time. It said that when God restored Israel, then the gentiles would be restored. This is the way the Prophets foretold it. This passage in Isaiah comes from *the Servant Songs*, in which Israel's restoration comes before the restoration of the whole world.

Like Isaiah 2 said, when God restores Zion, then all the nations of the world will flow into it, or as Paul says, be grafted into their restoration. The gospel will go forth from the restored Zion to the world. As Ezekiel said, when the temple is restored, which is Christ, rivers of life will flow to the gentile nations. (Ezekiel 47, John 7: 37-39) This is what Paul claims is happening at his time, through his ministry.

But gentile eschatology, as described above, reverses this. Gentile eschatology puts the gentiles first. It says that when God saves the gentiles, then, in the end, the Jews will also be saved. It's a gentile-centric worldview.

Biblical eschatology is Jewish-centric. It says the fullness of the Jews, the fulfillment of God's promises to them, comes first in God's program. "To the Jew first..." From the Jews, e.g. from the 144,000 in Revelation, symbolic of the first Jewish believers and early church, and from Jerusalem, the gospel goes out to all the world. (Zechariah 14:8)

## World Renewing Community

This is how Paul's eschatology works:

1. God restores the Jews, fulfils their promises. Israel are forgiven and restored to full fellowship with God in the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection marks the complete fulfillment of all God's promises to Israel. That is, there is no rejection of Israel by God. There is no church parenthesis that is just for the gentiles. There is only one people of God, made up of all who believe. But only a remnant of the Jews believes at first.
2. This restoration of the Jews sparks the inclusion of the gentiles through the gospel message. The Jewish apostles take the gospel to the world. The world is invited to believe and partake in the promises of God to Israel. The gentiles can't participate in the promises to Israel until these promises to Israel are fulfilled. The gentiles come in on the back of the Jewish restoration and fulfillment. Until the Jewish gospel is complete, no one else can share in it. Until the Jews are restored, no gentile can be included.
3. For those Jews who don't believe, the gentiles serve as a further source of provocation for more Jews to come to faith. That is, gentiles are called to serve the Jews, rather than be boastful against them. God works the process so that we can't be complete without each other. We need the Jews, to be saved through their gospel and their restoration. The Jews need us, through our service and love towards them, in our gratitude to them and to God. This is how God builds community in the world, and this community service is Paul's main point of the passage.

So, what Paul is saying in this Romans 11 passage is, "If the casting away of Israel, represented by the death of Christ, brings forgiveness of sins to the world, what shall the restoration and receiving of Israel be, seen in the resurrection of Christ, but life from the dead and new creation to the whole of God's world."

That is, the resurrection of Christ, the restoration of Israel, indicates the beginning of God's church, his new creation program to the whole world, as Paul showed in Romans 8.

"For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:15)

This is a "resurrection of Christ" verse. The resurrection of Christ indicates the acceptance of Israel. As Christ is Israel's representative, his resurrection shows that God has received his people through his Son. He has returned them from their exile.

This is exactly how Paul viewed the gospel and its relationship to Israel. The verse above tells us that when God restored Israel by the resurrection of Christ, it began the program of new life to the whole world. The whole world will come into renewal from the curse, through the church. This is God's covenant faithfulness, which the whole letter of Romans is outlining.

## First Fruits

“For if the first-fruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.” (Romans 11:16)

If Israel is made holy by the resurrection of Christ, if they are accepted and restored back to God, then all who believe, all who join them, are also holy. If Israel are restored, then all believers are restored. In this verse again, Israel are restored first.

The second part of this verse mentions the root. The root is the people of God, now God’s restored community, consecrated to God through the resurrection of Christ. The branches are all those of faith.

“And if some of the branches are broken off that you may be grafted in...” (Romans 11:17)

That is, if some of Israel did not believe, as Israel fell, that Christ may die for us all, then we shouldn’t boast, but we should be grateful and have compassion on those who fell and reach out to them in love.

Paul continues, saying, we are grafted in, to partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree. We benefit from the restoration of Israel, from the restoration of God’s community, in Christ’s resurrection.

As a side issue here, when a plant is grafted into a root, it brings with it the culture of the new plant. This receiving of each other, with our variety, is one of the main points of Paul in Romans. The root is the truth of Christ in the history of Israel, and that is good. But the fruit grows on the new grafts, where it is no longer nationalistic, but varied and nutritious among the various peoples.

## Fullness of the Gentiles

“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the gentiles be come in.” (Romans 11:25)

This is the mystery that Paul has been explaining all the way through Romans, from the first chapter. Israel were hardened through the law, so that they may fall. And the purpose of this fall was so that the gentiles may be included in their blessing through the death and resurrection of Christ. But not only the gentiles, but also the whole of creation.

The “fullness of the gentiles” does not mean a full number. It doesn’t mean a complete number, or time, like a so-called gentile age of the gospel, after which all the Jews are saved in the “last-day.” There is no such purely “gentile age” in Paul’s mind.

Fullness means the fullness of Christ being shared with the gentiles. “Of his fullness have we all received.” (John 1:16) It means the joining of the gentiles to the gospel of the Jews through faith. This is why the food laws were relaxed in Paul’s writings, to allow for the gentiles to come into the Jew’s fullness.

This is what this phrase means: “Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the gentiles, until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:24) This is about the hardening of the Jews, the death of Christ, and the destruction of the temple, all of which made way for the gospel to go to the gentiles. The gentiles destroy God’s city, and God responds to them by grace, by including us in his covenant blessings.

Jesus spoke here of the “fulfillment” of the prophecies about the gentiles. This is a passion narrative, about Christ’s passion and death and Israel’s sufferings, which the gentiles would bring upon them both through Rome, but which would also lead to the gentile’s inclusion in the restored covenant blessings of Israel.

Jesus was speaking about the then coming consummation of the Prophets, which was the fall of Jerusalem in that century, so that the gospel may fully embrace the gentile nations. During that period, Jerusalem tried to stop the gospel going to the gentiles. Including the gentiles fully in the gospel would take the death of Christ, his resurrection, and a new living temple in all nations. This was God’s plan when Jesus was speaking.

#### Gentiles Join Israel

The hardening of Israel was for the purpose of their rejection of Christ and his death. The fullness of the gentiles is our sharing in the blessings of Christ’s resurrection.

This means that God allowed blindness to come to Israel, so that Christ may die, so that God may graft the gentiles into Israel’s restoration when Christ rose, to include us in the fullness of God’s covenant blessing. This was to enable Israel’s covenant fullness to be shared with us all. This is God’s faithfulness to his covenant promises.

This means that Israel was hardened in part, so that Israel may be extended and made complete, by including the gentiles in their new community through faith. The idea of Israel’s fall was for Israel’s expansion through the nations. The idea was to include the gentile believers into Israel through faith. This then fulfils the promises about Abraham’s seed, the seed of faith, from the Jews first, and also from the gentiles.

“For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities.” (Isaiah 54:3)

“I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live.” (Isaiah 65:9)

“The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, ‘This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in.’ Then you will say in your heart, ‘Who bore me these? I was bereaved and barren; I was exiled and rejected. Who brought these up? I was left all alone, but these—where have they come from?’” (Isaiah 49:20-21)

It was through Israel’s blindness that God carried out his promises to renew the world. God has been righteous, who fulfilled his promise through a nation who fell. This is the quandary

that raises so many questions in Romans, about whether God can justly use Israel in this way. The answer: God has not used Israel so as to reject them, but to bless and enlarge them.

“And so all Israel shall be saved...” (Romans 11:26)

All are grafted into the root of Israel, which is God’s entire community people. Christ restored this community to new life through his resurrection. All are included in this new community of Israel by faith, both Jews and gentiles. This is the theme of Romans: both Jews and gentiles! The first fruit and the gentiles who believe, are all holy, all are part of the same one tree, all are Israel, all are the new community in Messiah.

Israel as a nation are already restored as the foundation and root of the new community. And just like us, as individuals, they choose to be grafted in by faith, or they choose not to be. There is no difference here between Jew and gentile.

And what’s the purpose of this whole discussion? Is it theological speculation about Israel and the future? No, certainly not. The passage starts in chapter 9 with Paul’s concern for Israel, his own natural people. It ends here with “that you might not be wise in your own conceits.” (Romans 11:25)

It is the same call throughout Romans, that we should not be proud, but rather serve each other. This is Paul’s hope for his people, that those he is reaching with the gospel, will in turn love and reach his own nation. This is the wisdom of God that Paul points to at the end of chapter 11. God has mercy on us all, so that we might have mercy on and serve each other, so that we might become like God.

## The Land

### And Replacement Theology

Paul’s theology of land in Romans is the same as Jesus taught. The Promised Land, or the good land, the renewed world, is reached by a new community, through an inward Torah working in our renewed hearts. This was the whole purpose of the ministry of Jesus, to bring us to this land through the new covenant. The land is not obtained the Old Testament way, through wars, swords, economic force or strategic alliances. If we don’t get this, we don’t get the person or ministry of Jesus.

Western theological views on Romans 11 have often very unfortunately resulted in the exact opposite outcome that Paul was urging for the church in that chapter. Firstly, replacement theology became an excuse for the church to enforce gentile domination over the Jews for so many years, in which the church often contributed significantly to suffering, rather than acted as a healer of those who are oppressed and of their enemies.

To achieve this negative view of the Jewish people, the church had to shift in its theology of Paul. Paul, as we have seen, was not against Jewish traditional practices. He was not against the “works of the law,” meaning their Jewish ritual practices inherited from the Old

Testament. But the church began to teach that these works were wicked, in and of themselves, just like we later preached about all the Catholic traditions. The Reformation was also as much political as it was about personal faith.

This demonising of the Jews has taken place through a “gentilisation” of Paul’s theology, especially in his writings such as Galatians and Romans. The main issue of Paul in these letters, of drawing people together at one table of fellowship, changed, to depict Paul as calling us to separate from those, even believers in Christ, who practice the works of the law. This is the way political theology works. It always starts by demonising the target group.

As we will see in Romans 14, Paul rather encouraged us not to put down or in any way discourage the faith of those who practiced customs different to our own, and this included the Jewish customs. The only thing Paul said about these works, is that they must not be used in the church to divide between believers. This is what Paul strongly insisted upon.

But the church later changed in their interpretation of Paul. Many held Paul as anti-Jewish. They said he condemned their traditional practices, “works of the law.” This then excused the church in persecuting any who held to these practices. This allowed the church to ridicule and disdain the Jews, exactly oppositely to what Paul commanded us.

Paul instructed us to love, care for and have compassion towards the Jews. Even more than that, to treat them as those to whom we owed a great debt. Replacement theology has left a legacy of great harm to people, and a great false image of God has been portrayed, many times, by a wayward, institutional church.

This teaches us a lot about our relations with Muslims today. We also put them down because of their religious traditions, which are often carried out sincerely by God fearing worshippers among them. When we do this we betray a possible arrogance and ignorance on our part. We often understand very little about what is behind the traditions of others. It is better to witness to Christ through our transformed lives and respect of others, and this is what Paul was teaching us.

But in repenting from our wrong concerning our treatment and attitudes towards the Jews, we have held on to the same attitudes towards Muslims. This shows we haven’t yet grasped Paul’s message to the church, which is about how we treat all people, not just Jewish people.

## The Land

### And Dispensationalism

On the other hand, dispensationalism has exacted harm in another direction. Since the church and the West “repented” of its treatment of the Jews, especially climaxed under WWII, the land of Palestine was divided up and given to the Jewish people for a homeland.

The argument was that the Jews owned the land, due to the promises of God to Abraham. But the problem was that Palestinian people living in that land had to be displaced. And this has been done, in different ways over the years, as many have lost their former dwellings.

With the aggression of some of the Palestinians towards this plan, an antipathy has developed generally towards the Arabic people, alongside various end-times theories of the coming destruction to "Israel's enemies." I have frequently heard in churches how "God plans to kill millions of Arabic people through a pre-emptive nuclear strike from the USA."

It's a very sad state of affairs, far removed from the life style of the early church and from the teachings of Jesus. The early church continued in fellowship with the Jews, in their synagogues and temple, though the Jews killed them and though they were opposed to Christ. The Christians sought to win them, by loving them through the persecution. This is the same way we should reach out to Muslims, who also claim in some way to be part of the Abrahamic family.

The primary factor here is the teachings of Jesus. His whole teaching ministry was about the Promised Land. He said this is the land where strife is not settled by war, or by force, or by displacing our enemy, but by kindness and service, taking up our cross, being willing to suffer, and going the extra mile. He said this is the light of the world, or God's way in which land is inhabited and the people of that land, including enemies, are renewed. If it is done any other way it is not God's kingdom, but merely self-justified.

## The Land

### And Jesus' Teaching

Over the years both replacement theology and dispensationalism have served political ends and both of them would have been avoided if we had heeded the message of Paul in Romans 11.

Paul calls for a reconciling and healing life style between ourselves and others. He shows that the Jews have never been rejected or replaced. He shows that the Jews aren't saved by some future political arrangement between nations, but by the cross and resurrection of Christ. He shows that the true Israel transform the nations, and bring in the good land God promised by loving their enemies, being willing to suffer for them in service, just as Christ, their representative Saviour, showed us in his own life.

Rather than replacement theology, or dispensationalism, the church should be willing to love both Jews and Muslims and suffer for them as a demonstration of the love and acceptance of Jesus Christ. Its only when we fail to do this that we develop the kind of attitudes towards other groups that Paul was contesting all the way through his letter to the Romans. We are called to serve all in the love of Christ, as God has laid down his life and served us in Christ.

We find out why God called Israel. He loved them in their rejection and he loved the world he purposed to save through them. We find out in Romans 9-11 that the people God

identifies with in election are the suffering, those who can't run, but who are run over by the strong.

These are the ones Christ identifies with on the cross, in his own sufferings. He becomes flesh and blood with the suffering of the world. He identifies with all flesh, all on the road to Jericho. "I was hungry and you fed me." These are the "Israel" God calls, as much as this shocked those who heard Jesus teach. And when he calls us, he calls us to forgive and to serve, just like him.

"As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sake, but as touching election they are beloved for the fathers' sake." (Romans 11:28)

Israel made themselves enemies of God so that we might be saved. But on God's side they remained loved by him and dear, reconciled, forgiven and restored by his promises in Christ. He calls out to them still today to receive his love, and he calls us to show them that love.

### Summary

Concerning Paul's questions in Romans about the justice of God, we have the answers. Has God abandoned the people he made promises to? No, he has fulfilled his promises in Jesus Christ. He has done this for the Jews and for the world through the Jews. The fact that many don't believe isn't because of God's rejection of them, nor does it nullify the promises of God for them, but it is so the gentiles may return their service of love towards them. This way he transforms us into his image.

## Romans 12

### Sharing, Not Violence

Having spent much of Romans tracing the history of Israel and the fulfillment of their call and of God's promises in the gospel, Paul now returns to his main consideration about our new lives from the first part of chapter 5.

In the first part of chapter 5, Paul was outlining how God overcame sin in our lives, that is, the condemnation in our own hearts and our condemnation or accusations towards others. This is what has broken the world apart, divided us up through accusing and separating from one another, and led us into violence instead of serving. God's answer to this evil was the cross of Christ – giving himself. God overcame the accuser through giving himself.

If you remember our discussion from chapter 5, it was the love shown us by Christ on the cross, by his forgiveness of our sin which we committed against him, that has set our hearts free from our self-inflicted captivity to the law and guilt. On the cross, God proved his love towards us, rescuing us from behind the bush of shame, bringing us back into his presence.

And this love which he has shown us has freed our hearts from fear. The love of God towards us has restored our relationship with him and filled our hearts with his love, rather than our former self-justifying actions against others. The love of God on the cross has come into our hearts and transformed them, and from our hearts, this love has passed onto our neighbours and enemies.

We have moved from accusing our neighbour to serving our neighbour, in gratitude for the free forgiveness we have been granted by a God who has been rich towards us. The outcome of this is seen in chapter 11. God has shared the restoration of the Jews with us gentiles and has called us to break down barriers of hatred, resulting in a new loving unity in Christ, where we share our bread.

### Following God

In chapters 12 to 15, Paul continues this theme of the cross bringing out a new way of living, from accusing to honouring others. The key theme in Romans 5 is that God overcame evil with good. He overcame our self-centredness with his self-giving. This is the theme Paul returns to in Romans 12: "Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." God overcame the evil in our conscience, which produces general enmity, with the good of his personal giving and forgiveness.

Chapters 12-15 is our call to follow God. It shows us how to do this, how to live out the selflessness of the cross among our members and within our nations.

Romans 12 starts with Paul's plea to the church: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." This means, "Look back to

Romans 5, at how Christ overcame evil in our hearts, by giving himself in love to serve us. Take that as your lead on how you are to live among yourselves and in the world, unifying and drawing others into reconciliation with God, through serving. Follow Christ. Overcome evil in the world the way he did, by forgiving and showing the love of God, pulling others into compelling love relationship with our creator/redeemer.”

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2)

Christ’s life is compared with Caesar and the Roman world that the church was then living in. This brings in Paul’s comments on comparing Christ with Caesar in Romans 1. In Romans 12-15, Paul is drawing comparisons between these two kingdoms, one that divides between people to enrich the empowered, and the other that draws all people together to serve.

This comparison is what struck the early church’s culture the most over the following 200 years. The pacifist life of Christ, compared to the inhumanity of worldly empire, stood out as the number one area in which believers were to “not conform to this world.” Instead they strove together to be transformed into the same image of Christ that we see in the Gospel accounts, of his life, death and resurrection.

Romans 12-15 is Paul’s response to his strong contrast between Christ and Caesar, which he began to note in chapter 1. The authorities of this world are deficient. The Jewish zealots are correct. The authorities rule with an inhumanity that is far from the heart of God. Revelation calls these powers the beasts, both the rulers of Jerusalem at that time and the rulers of Rome.

But Paul’s remedy for this isn’t the violence of the zealots. It isn’t to overthrow these powers. It isn’t revolution. The musical called *Les Miserables* portrays the corrupt rule in France. The elite prospered, while the poor were forced to steal to eat. Some looked to a harsh implementation of the law to heal the nation, like Saul and the Pharisees did. Others looked for a revolution, like the Zealots of Israel, which brought a blood bath. The musical portrayed Christ’s answer: the mercy of Christ on the cross, being transferred from us to those around us.

We can see the same issues at work in today’s world. There is a rampant globalism, that is empowering the rich, much as it was then with Rome. There is a retreating nationalism, especially being seen today in European nations, like Britain, and in America and Australia. A local protectionism is rising, with the danger of violent zealotry. The church’s solution to today’s challenges is the same as in Paul’s day. We are neither globalists, nor nationalists. We are lovers of neighbour, whether locally or globally.

### Transforming Rather than Transferring

In Romans 12-15, Paul is depicting his theology of the cross and how it relates to our lives in transforming the cultural and governing powers in the neighbourhoods of our world. The transformation starts with us, in getting the values of Rome out of ourselves.

The powers are a mixture of cultural, demonic and human governmental authorities in our lives. They are depicted as heavenly, meaning high, ruling over men. The powers are also sinful impulses that reign within our hearts, ruling our thoughts and actions, which need to be taken captive in Christ's cross and transformed within us by the Holy Spirit.

Like someone said, "That which is not transformed, will be transferred." God has called the church to transform evil out of the system, rather than transfer or pass it on to others. This is what the cross does when we live by it ourselves.

Paul spoke at length on this to the Corinthians. God is bringing these powers down (renovating their old values), bringing the powers' control to nothing, first in our own lives. Division, party spirit, greed, immorality and not serving the poor in the hospitality of our homes, are among those things that depict this world, which are not to be among us as Christ's followers.

In Ephesians and Colossians, Paul speaks of Christ reconciling these powers on his cross. He reconciled them by exposing their corruption and violence and by showing the church his example of service, as the way to renew leadership, to renew power. God is not calling us to destroy the governments and cultures of the world, but to change them, by his Spirit changing us in our fellowship with each other.

In Ephesians 3:10, Paul claims that these powers are transformed through the church, revealing to the world the wisdom of God. What is this wisdom? It is the cross of Christ. It is God's self-giving, which is wiser than men. The world trusts in its use of power against others. God displays mercy and kindness towards others. This is his wisdom, which transforms us in our Christian fellowship, and then the world through us.

## Mind Renewal

This is Paul's thinking when he comes to Romans 12-15, and calls us all not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind. The mind renewal means a transformation in us, from the ways of Caesar to the ways of Christ. This is what marked the early church more than anything, in their ambitions. The transformation, as depicted by the Revelation, was from beast to lamb.

What is this mind renewal Paul speaks of? We get all kinds of answers to this today, many of which are divorced from what Paul was saying. Some say our mind must be renewed away from poverty and sickness, to wealth and health. Paul was not saying this. This is more opposite to what Paul was saying. Some say our mind must be renewed from seeing ourselves small, to seeing ourselves great; from insignificant, to significant.

The mind renewal Paul is referring to is the same he referred to in Philippians 2:5-11. Paul said we are to have the mind of Christ. What was that mind? It was to let go of privilege, to serve others. It wasn't about considering ourselves to be anything, but considering others to be better than ourselves. (Phil 2:3)

Philippi was a major, important Roman city. Many of the highly esteem lived there. Paul was saying that they should mirror Christ, who let go of privilege to be near to and serve outsiders. In Philippians 3, Paul showed how he had done this also, in letting go of his Jewish privileges, and even his privileges as a Romans citizen, to identify with Christ and his sufferings. This is the mind renewal Paul is specifically speaking of.

In Romans 12, Paul immediately begins to apply this mind of Christ to our fellowship with one another, in not considering ourselves better than others. The gifts of the Spirit aren't to make us more special than others. This is compared to the way people looked at careers in the Roman world. They received education and training to get positions in the empire that would enhance their personal lives. This mind shouldn't be us. The gifts that God gives us aren't for ourselves, but to serve others.

### Mind to Non-violence

For the rest of Romans 12, from verses 9-21, Paul lays out the specifics of our mind renewal and transformation. All of these are about lifting up others and not our self, which again, are exactly what the incarnation of Christ was about.

In particular, is Paul's remarks about violence. This is what distinguishes us from the world more than anything. All the world relies on force. Christ didn't. When Pilate confronted Christ, Christ answered that if he followed this world, then his disciples would fight. In the early church, we never see the church fighting against their persecutors. This is the mind renewal Paul is speaking of.

We are not to recompense any person evil for evil. We are not to react non-peacefully to any person. We are not to take revenge against any loss. Instead, we are to feed our enemies, and provide for them in any way they need. We are to treat our enemy as our self, and this way we are to shine the light of Christ in transforming our world. This is how we are to overcome "Rome." "Do not be overcome by Caesar (don't become like him), but overcome Caesar with good."

The essence here is that we cannot transform the powers if we follow their ways. We can only transform them if we follow Christ. And this is why the cross is the centre part of Christ's resurrection, or new world power in the church.

This is the way the early church walked. This is what Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the point of the whole letter of Romans. This is how God fulfils his promises to Israel, by giving them, and us, a new heart to care for the world in which we live. This is what transforms us and the world. This is what Jesus told the church and what the whole early church lived out. This is the mark of the church.

New believers were not permitted into the early church without this mark. Killing was "illegal" in the early church. Killing of babies, killing of sick people, or old, executions of criminals, and killing in war, was all "illegal" for believers. No believer was allowed to kill in the Roman army.

Instead, they helped women with babies, and they served criminals, and their enemies which Rome warred against. This is how they overcame the world. They said they were the people of Isaiah, who had beaten their swords into instruments of service.

This message of Christ in the Gospels is the message of Paul to the Romans. It is the reason he goes through his teaching on justification in the earlier chapters. Paul shows:

1. That we have a common justification, from whatever background we come.
2. This justification is through the blood of Christ, and it doesn't depend on our different cultural or religious traditions. We are one by having the same faith.
3. We have all sinned, so there can be no cultural pride. This goes for Jews, who had the law but who didn't keep the law. It goes for gentiles, lost in their idolatry. So none of us can be proud against the other. We are called, in a common justification, which is a free gift, to love and serve each other.
4. This brings us back to the "love our neighbour message" of Jesus, which is the foundation of Paul's teaching all the way through Romans. This is the gospel Paul is preaching; the gospel of the good news of Jesus Christ, who is Lord over all people, and who calls us all to serve all, as he served us all on the cross.
5. The Lord reconciles all people, all powers, all cultures, all faiths, to himself, and he calls us to live out that reconciliation towards all others, to bring about the reign of Christ this way in the nations of the world. This is the concluding remark of Paul, as we shall see in the chapter 15:12, "There shall arise the root and Jesse, and he shall ruler over the gentiles", i.e. the world.

## Romans 13

### The Church and Babylon

Having introduced the fallenness of human government in chapter 1, and retaining this theme as a background to other portions of Romans, especially in the comparisons between the cross of Christ and Caesar's coronation, and the fact that Christ has taken back all his titles to world government, chapter 13 is entirely necessary. Paul must explain that this is not a call for us to rebellion or revolution. It is quite the opposite. It is a call to renew government through serving witness.

The only rebellion of the church was that they didn't obey laws that are contrary to God's will. In the early church this included idolatry, emperor worship, killing in the army, and other forms of violence like the games. This conscientious objecting has a witness throughout scripture, like Israel refusing to kill babies in Egypt. Even cultural institutions, like slavery and patriarchy were renewed, as Peter instructed, through the spirit and example of Christ, rather than by rebellion. Paul's teaching concurs with this. They did not uphold hierarchy, but serving love in relationships.

The non-cooperation of the early church was in social activities that were self-centred or oppressive. This gives us a lot of scope for application in today's world, considering how our ways of life impact other people locally or globally. This was certainly the major concern of the Old Testament prophets, and so it should be of the church today. And as Paul mentions the Prophets all through Romans, it is this type of merciful justice being shown by the church in the world that he definitely has in mind. This is exactly the world renewing kingdom the Prophets were referring to.

However, the church is not to use "obeying God and not man" as an excuse for general non-cooperation. The church is to participate, serve and build at all levels in society, enthusiastically. The church is not to shun the world in a general sense. The world is God's creation and good. Living in the world is a very major part of the gospel/new creation project. We can't be a transforming light, building a better future for others, if we are not in the world.

### Pilgrims in Babylon

Romans 13 is a pilgrim passage, very similar to Peter's letter. This word "pilgrim" appears in Peter's letter, meaning stranger, or ambassador. Paul was outlining our relationship with the powers, as strangers, ambassadors and witnesses to those powers. The concept of pilgrimage is another part of the identity of Israel that carries over into the church. All through Romans, Paul picks up on Israeli identity to reflect on the calling of the church. Chapter 13 is the same. The Jews were pilgrims in Babylon, when in captivity. The church is like Israel in diaspora, bringing renewing light to a foreign land.

The way Paul speaks of government is exactly the way the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Israel about Babylon. Israel, in Jeremiah's day, were resisting Babylon and Jeremiah told them that Babylon was appointed by God. If they resisted Babylon they were resisting God. Babylon was the power of the day. All powers are appointed by God in this way. It isn't the church's role to resist power, just as that wasn't the way of Jesus in his life or message.

Babylon was an evil government, though it was appointed by God. This means that God determined the government's time and boundaries in the world. The government itself was human, and its laws were human. In fact, governments are demonic in their centre. This is clear by the temptation of Jesus. Satan brought all the powers of the world before Jesus and said they were his and he would give them to Jesus if Jesus worshipped him. These powers are not in harmony with God or his will. The church's role is to reconcile these powers to God for the purpose of blessing the nations. The way this is done is the subject of Paul in this chapter.

Paul spoke here exactly as Jeremiah spoke to Israel. When Israel were going into Babylon in captivity, Jeremiah told them not to resist Babylon, but to submit to their rule. They were to benefit from the good aspects of their rule. God would use the government to keep order, just as Rome was doing in Paul's day. Though the government was corrupt, unjust and abusive of many, it did keep a form of order that was a benefit to the world.

Jeremiah told Israel to seek the peace of Babylon, for in the peace of Babylon, the Jews would have peace. This is what Paul was saying to the church. They are to see themselves, like Israel, as pilgrims in a foreign land. They are citizens of heaven. They are the people of God. But they are to honour the land, honour the government and pay the taxes and fulfil other dues of the land.

The church itself would benefit from the order that government would bring. This is the sense in which Paul was speaking of government. He was not saying the church should in some way side with government, to use the government for its own purposes in the world. He wasn't saying that God gave the sword to the government for the church's benefit against its enemies, or to protect the church in particular. The protection the church was to enjoy, by paying taxes, was the protection all citizens of the land were to enjoy.

### Restorative Church

It isn't correct to say that God set up government this way so that the wicked are killed by it. Jesus' government wasn't introduced to punish the terrorist Barabbas, but to redeem him. It is fallen human governments that punish the wicked. The fallen punish the fallen. They are ministers of God only in the sense he allows the fallen society to function this way. This was God's explanation to Habakkuk, when Babylon overthrew Jerusalem. But God calls the church to live and teach restorative, rather than punitive, justice. He calls us to reflect his government.

If this was not the case, if the action of Rome against the wicked was the will of God, why did the early church strictly forbid any believer to wield the sword of government? There

was not even debate about this among the fathers. The early fathers tell us why. They believed they were setting up a new kind of rule. They believed that whatever they did to heal the wrong of society must reflect the image of their King on the cross. This was the way their King ruled.

And it was also because of the early church's view of the cross. They didn't see it as God's punitive justice against sin in Christ. They saw it as God's restorative mercy in Christ. It is this view of the cross that Paul portrays in Romans. The "redemptive violence" of the kings/governments of the world is contrasted with the suffering redeemer God. The Father didn't punish his Son on the cross. The cross is the place where God forgave us our sin against him and against our neighbour.

The church was not to seek any special place with the government. The church was not to curry any particular favour with the government. If the church did curry such favour, this would reduce the church's renewing witness with the powers of the world. The church would then fail to be the blessing it was sent to be. Instead, the church should embrace the cross, in order to maintain its proper role as a prophetic witness to Rome. The same is the case for the church today.

If the church sought to use the government against its enemies, whether by the sword, or whether by legislation, then the church would make further enemies. The church would then be seen as just another power broker in the world. The church is rather to influence the world through love, through service and in giving its life for the world, as Christ did. God, not Babylon, is the saviour of the church.

### God, Not Babylon

This is where the church was significantly different to the Jerusalem of Paul's day. Jerusalem then curried favour with Rome, and became known as Sodom, the false prophet, the whore of Babylon, the second beast, which rode upon the back of the first beast, Rome. Jerusalem used Rome for its own ends. As a landlord and not a pilgrim in Babylon, it adopted its ways and became Babylon.

The church was never meant to do this with the demonic powers of this world. Even our governments today, even in Western nations, are still in this category. All government are, whenever we walk in a compromising relationship with them in this way. We are not to seek to use governments for the church's own interest, but we are to remain free to speak to them as God's witnesses for the common good of all the people.

The book of Revelation highlights this relationship between the church and the powers of the world. The church was to overcome the beast by not loving their own lives, even to death. Paul is writing in this same apocalyptic theme in Romans 13. The church is to walk innocently through this pagan world, neither using the government and staining its hands with its blood, nor rebelling against the government. The way the church is to renew the powers is by doing good, by love, which does no harm to others.

“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For 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: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Romans 13:8-10)

Do this and we will have praise from the government.

## A Near Salvation

It is at this point that Paul says, “Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.”

“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” (Romans 13:11-14)

Our armour isn't the armour of Rome, but the armour of light.

People have taken the phrase about our salvation being near in different ways. Futurists say it means that the rapture of the church is now at hand. Others say Paul thought that then, but was wrong, for 2,000 years have since elapsed. Preterists say Paul was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, which was then close at hand. This would save the Christians from the then Jewish persecution. Others say it refers to Nero, the greatest of the persecutors of the church, who would soon die.

But I think this is a phrase about the church in Babylon. The people of God in the Old Testament were only in Babylon temporarily. God had promised that he would visit them and take them out. This is the promise Paul is referring to. Paul is likening the Jew's stay in Babylon with the church's stay in this current sinful world. This current age is passing away, and all the corrupt ways in which this world lives. The church is the witness of a new age, which is already dawning in our lives and shining out from us to the nations.

Paul's phrase about our salvation being near isn't a time phrase. And it isn't about God taking us out of the world. In the Old Covenant, Israel's promise was of a natural city, coming out of Babylon to go to Jerusalem. This was the salvation God promised them, and he promised them it was near. Paul was using this Old Testament promise to Israel, to reflect on the church's identity and call in the world.

We are pilgrims, renewing Babylon by our Spirit filled lives in community. This is producing a renewing salvation in the world, the ultimate fulfillment of all of God's promises, in which we are already participating through our new lives, and will soon participate fully in the resurrection. God will visit us in Babylon and complete his promises for the sake of the whole world. This was Paul's claim in Romans 8.

“Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” shows our call to live as the people of God in this world. We are strangers to this old world of corruption. We live as people already seeing the new world, throwing off the clothes of our old way of life, and putting on Christ, to live and to show out what we see. In living this way, we are shining God’s light of transformation, sowing new world seed that will reap a harvest in season. God is now visiting the world through us “to make all things new.”

This is exactly Peter’s theme in his letters, and the theme of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. We are pilgrims, and the purpose of our pilgrimage is to be God’s temple in the world, to bring renewal, to bring heaven to earth. And for each one of us, it is just around the corner. For soon we sleep, to rise with Christ in the resurrection.

“All her children, they are slain in a day. No more will you hear the sound of buying and selling. The smoke of her burning is there for all to see. No more will you hear her soldiers in a victory procession. All her parades, they have come to an end. Even her language is taken away from her. Scattered is her power for evermore.”

It’s difficult to hear this song called *Babylon is Fallen* by Chris Delvan without weeping. The symbolism of Revelation fills us with hope. The “children” are the mercenaries who sell people for a dollar, as it is today all over the world, whether for sex, or as victims of our global economy, or of wars. All such inhumanity is gone forever. The language of propaganda and of demonising the victim has gone. The power of selfishness is broken in the city of God. What a wonderful picture Revelation paints!

## Romans 14

### The Pinnacle of Paul's Message to Rome

From Romans chapters 11 to 14 we see Paul building a description of how believers are to live in our new world, which has already begun through Christ's resurrection. This group in Christ is an intercultural group, breaking out of the past racial and national barriers of enmity.

In chapter 11, believers were to break down former nationalist barriers and learn to share in each other's lives, bringing service and healing to communities that were once divided. The basis of this was the common grace in the gospel that we all share, which deals with the pride, which previously held us apart. This pride was the principality that ruled us. This is what chapter 11 is primarily about, not the sideline theological issues about Israel and gentiles.

In chapter 12, Paul is showing us how to go on building relationships with each other. He uses Christ's example of service to illustrate how we give ourselves for others, thinking of their welfare, rather than of our own. Paul claims this is how the church overcomes evil in the world, hitting back at darkness with light.

In chapter 13, Paul raises the bar of the church's influence to include the powers of the world. These are seats of satanic stronghold that bring about division and suffering to many. Paul is showing our call in bringing a witness to these powers, which in turn renews the powers to bring about merciful justice in our nations.

In each one of these chapters, Paul is dealing with division. Division is the *modus operandi* of the satanic rule of our world. The powers maintain rule over others through dividing people against each other. People fight, rather than come together to call on the powers to renew and share with those in need.

Instead of division, the church reflects the light of a new kingdom, which draws people together to share mercy. This new way of living is a challenge to those in the world who don't like to share. This is why the church is persecuted. But the church that joins with these powers, instead of joining with the people, will become irrelevant to the world, and become un-Christlike in its life and mission.

In chapter 14, Paul continues by showing that we must not allow our differing traditions to divide us. We are to consider more central issues in regards to right and wrong than the outward practices of various sub-groups. Judging matters righteously, rather than by outward appearance, as Jesus also told us to do, is a key to bringing us all together in one family of grace, sharing support for each other. This is the kind of family the world needs.

These are principles that are not only key within the church, but also key as the church shares its new nature with the world. That is, our lessons in chapters 11-14 don't only relate to our experiences within Christian fellowship. They also show us how to be the people of

God in a divided and unjust world, responding with healing instead of with isolation and violence to the world's needs.

### Updating the Text

The main issues we find in chapters 11-14 are not to be just left in their historical context. Paul speaks of issues the church was facing in his time. As interesting as the biblical study might be, the vital issue is that we lift these lessons out of that time and begin to live them in our own day. Instead of gentile and Jewish believers, put Australian and Palestinian believers, Aboriginal believers and refugee believers.

Instead of limiting these lessons just to enhance love between Christians, use the same principles to enhance love between Christians and non-Christians in the world. This is one of the main points running through Paul's text.

God has called us to be believers ("the elect," if you like), in order to teach us things within our fellowship community, precisely because he wants us to share these things with the wider world, to bring relief to many others through the church. And not only relief, but a witness also to the gospel, that is, the gospel of self-giving that Jesus lived for us all. God wants to call the world to Christlikeness through this wisdom the church shares with it.

When we look at chapter 14, which shows us how to accept each other within Christ's body, with our differing traditions, this also shows us a lot about relating with people of different races and faith backgrounds in the world today. It is teaching us to break down our prejudices, that have divided us, the walls of propaganda against others. It teaches us to honour other people who are different, rather than separate from them in self-righteousness, believing we have nothing to learn from others.

This last lesson might be the greatest lesson the world needs today, in our increasing climate of fundamentalism. There are many religious practices in other faiths and nations, that, though very different to ours, have a lot to show us about life and faith in general. They give opportunities to build bridges to other communities, to share the love of Jesus, based on the things in common traditions point to. If we learned to look at differences this way, to respect and honour people, we could build bridges across the globe to the gospel message and life.

As I write these notes "Donald Trumpism" is growing in the world. There is fear about the challenges globalism is bringing, and the injustices that are building. There is fear about terrorism, about Islamization and about refugees causing social and economic problems.

Romans chapters 11-14 tell us how to respond to these modern challenges in God's way. They tell us to accept and serve others, to give our lives to love and care for them, not to use government forces or national borders against masses of people in need, and not to allow the differing cultures to become a barrier in drawing near, to show others the love of the gospel.

## Honouring the Faith of Others

Chapter 14 has a huge lesson for us today. In this chapter Paul speaks about honouring the faith of other people. He is speaking about our fellowship within the church, and how people live out their faith to Christ and shouldn't be judged as concerns their traditions. He said the faith of others should not be disregarded or dishonoured.

This also shows us how we are to share the gospel among non-Christians, those of other faiths. Peter said to do it with respect. That is, the faith of people is important. It should not be ridiculed. Paul said that, "whatever is not of faith is sin." Other people, those who sincerely do things out of love for God, should not be put down.

If we dishonour the faith of others, without regard to this common godliness that Paul and Peter speak of, how will people think the "gospel" we are sharing is of any value? How will they think that we know what we are speaking about, if we don't know the basics about common respect, both for people and for godly traditions?

Paul is sharing with us how to live in a multicultural society. We could say that Romans 11-14 are about Christians in a multicultural/multi-faith world. This is where we find ourselves today as the church. Some years ago this wasn't the case. Our cultures and faiths were isolated. This is changing and the response of many is fear. We need to go back to Paul's teaching and resurrect the beginning principles of the church, rather than respond with enmity to others.

This was the challenge when the gospel of the Jews went out to the gentiles. The Jews had to adjust to a whole new set of values, like love and respect for others. This is also a great challenge to many of us today. Having a better understanding of God isn't an excuse for us to tread on the faith of others, but rather this better understanding should be shown by our love and patience.

"The kingdom of God is not meat or drink." (Romans 14:17) The differing religious cultures and traditions across denominations or across the world simply don't matter. Don't spoil our witness for the sake of them. Let Christ put on the outer garments of the different cultures, like he did when he came out of the Hebrew culture into ours. We need to celebrate difference in outward expression. It's the heart that matters.

We are concerned by the open disdain for sharia law in some of our nations. Some people hold to sharia law for political, or ideological reasons. To these people, genuine faith doesn't matter. It is an excuse to be violent and abusive of others in the name of God. But for others, sharia contains principles of decency, faith and true morality for God fearing people. Jesus didn't disdain faith when he met it in non-Jewish people. Even if it was just a "smocking flax", he wouldn't quench it. He used what he found to fan something greater.

It is a problem when we invite Muslim people into our nations as citizens with us, but we don't honour their personal sense of faith, but tell them they can't have it in our nation, and that that their faith is of no use. To many of these people, it is what they grew up with. And they honour God with it.

Faith isn't compulsory. It isn't to be forced on others. If we love others we accept them with their conscience and share the love of Jesus with them through service, love and care. This is the spirit, and the method, Paul is outlining in Romans 11-14. This is how we win those in the world who don't know Jesus.

We might say that others may not extend the same courtesy to us, but will enforce their faith on us. Some will, some won't. That's the cross. But God's kingdom will win in the end. God is able to keep his promises and he doesn't need us to enforce them. He doesn't want us to revert to Constantine's principles "for the kingdom's sake." The church overcame Rome the way Paul outlined in Romans 11-14. Rome was about the worst we have seen.

In Romans 11-14 Paul was sharing new kingdom principles. These aren't narrow principles, just about the Sabbath Day, and other like issues people met in the Jewish/gentile world of their time. These are principles that relate to kingdom life style in every generation. We must apply them to our multicultural world today.

You remember in Acts 15 the church was encouraged not to offend Jewish worshippers in nearby synagogues. This is the spirit we need to practice today, instead of arrogance and force against others. We must apply Paul's teachings in the world we live in, to share the gospel with the right spirit, reflecting the right church, which is like Jesus.

Jesus' problem with the Pharisees was that they wouldn't do this to the people around them, but instead they just condemned them. That isn't the love of God, and that isn't missions. The only other choice we have is violence, which includes the downfall of many innocents. This is choice Paul outlines in Romans 11-14. It is a choice of violence against others, or peace through service.

## One Church of Love

Chapter 14 is possibly the pinnacle of the Paul's letter to the Romans. Everything Paul has been saying before this leads up to what Paul portrays in this chapter. Believers are justified equally by faith, which clears the way for any of our cultural or religious traditions in hindering our relationships with each other. We can now receive each other in faith, without the former barriers in our way.

The place Paul paints this picture is around the table of fellowship. This symbolises the closest fellowship between people in the scriptures. David spoke of it in the Psalms, saying those he ate with were his closest friends. In Acts, the believers from all different backgrounds "broke bread together." The communion wasn't a ceremony, but a time of closeness and sharing between God's people, which symbolised the sharing of their lives and their substance for each other, even to death.

In Galatians, table fellowship was the issue most in debate in Paul's mind. Peter drew away from this table in regard to the gentile believers. This, for Paul, was to cut out the very centre of the gospel. We must share in all things with all believers, with no division or classes, no superiority among any of us. We are a community of mercy justice for all in the

world, or we are not the church at all. We aren't saved for our individual "going to heaven," but to be this community in the nations. If we aren't embracing this, then we are embracing "another gospel" and we may as well forget it.

This was also Paul's major issue in Corinthians, when the church came together for their meals and didn't wait for the poor, or the sick and feeble, but the strong went ahead and fed themselves. This speaks to the heart of our Christian fellowship today, locally and globally.

In so many ways, this is how we live our Christians lives today, in separation, isolation and injustice. In Paul's time, the poor likely worked as slaves, were underfed and couldn't get to meetings on time and missed out. Eventually we separated from them altogether and set up churches among the people we were more comfortable with.

Fellowship in Christ is meant to apply love and correct these worldly imbalances in our lives. Instead, the Corinthian believers went right along with the powers of their day, rather than transforming them in their fellowship of care, and reflecting this new life to the world. This is what it means for Jesus to be Lord, over the lords and powers of separation and selfishness in our world. This was the main issue in his whole letter to the Corinthians.

Coming back to Romans 14, we find Paul at the same place. After presenting his gospel from chapters 1 to 13, he brings all believers together at one table. This is the pinnacle of his letter. This is what all his theology brings us to. Not only is it the table for us to share our lives as one, to serve each other in grace, but it is also our witness of the real kingdom to the nations. All kingdoms divide. God's kingdom unites through love.

If the church can't sit at one table, from all our backgrounds and denominations, we have no witness of the gospel. We do not show we believe Jesus is Lord over one creation and one people. We do not believe he has risen from the dead to rule over one new creation. We do not obey him as Lord. We are still dividing ourselves, just as the world divides itself into groups for advantage. We are saying Jesus is Lord, but we aren't obeying him as Lord. There is no witness in that. This is why this matters so much in all Paul's letters.

And when we receive each other, from all our nations, from all our historical persuasions, in Christ, we are ready to draw others into this fellowship. We are ready to invite the world, saying, "We have a different way of life, to share with others. Come, join with us under the Lordship of Christ, who calls us to love one another, and to share for the wellbeing of all."

Our witness is credible, our call is valid and has power. This is the church in the world, living out table fellowship with others, sharing our lives with all, as Christ shared his body and blood for all. We live out the same thing Christ. We do the same for the world, as we declare the new world of Jesus Christ.

Christ's body and blood shared for the world must also become our blood and body shared for the world. We are his disciples, called to do as he did. We are members of the same family, calling all others to also come and share with us. We hold nothing back. The table is the pinnacle of Paul's message to the Roman church.

## Romans 15

### One Justification

Paul begins to draw his themes in the letter of Romans together, to conclude. The opening of Romans 15 summarises the praxis of chapters 8-16. Praxis means the practical life of the church, which is modelled after the cross of Christ. This is exactly how the first letter of Peter was written also.

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, “The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” For whatsoever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” (Romans 15:1-7)

Christ bore the hatred of humanity against God. He allowed that to come upon himself, rather than to strike those who hated him. This is the love of God. He would rather bear the violence against himself than to do violence against others, if that could lead to their healing and salvation.

And this is the mark that God asks his church to bear in the world. Not just among ourselves as one family, but also towards the world itself. He asks us to follow Christ, who bore the reproaches of those who hate God. He asks us to bear these reproaches as well. This is a quote from Psalm 69:9. Paul says that these things were also written for our learning and encouragement, that we might have hope.

This means that the texts also pertain to us, and how we are to live among our enemies, not just to Christ. We also are to bear the reproaches of our enemies, and to do so in hope. What is our hope? It is that if we suffer with Christ we also shall reign with him, not just us, but others and our communities as well.

This suffering is service. It means we set out in this world, not just to please ourselves, individually, or as a church of God’s people, but to please our neighbour, to live for the good of those who don’t know Christ. This is what Paul has been teaching from Romans 8-16. He isn’t teaching the intricacies of theology, but simply about serving in our day and time.

And how do we serve? We serve by “receiving one another,” as Paul said in the above passage. This is all Paul has been teaching through chapters 9-15, and even more than that, throughout the whole letter. It is the reason he spoke of justification in the earlier chapters. We are not justified for our individual lives, but to equally and freely receive one another and be one body in Christ.

This is how the church overcomes the powers of the world, which seek to divide and destroy. The church's mission can only be won in unity, and this is why Paul seeks this unity in Rome, as it becomes his base for his westward mission journey to Spain, to push the gospel into further new territory, as Paul explains in chapter 15. There is no victorious gospel without the unity that the letter of Romans is designed to build.

There can only be one means of unity. And that is "having the same mind with each other," as Paul states above. This mind is the mind of Christ, who sought the advantage of his neighbour, rather than the advantage of himself. This is what the unity of the church is built on and this is what the creation of the new world is built on. This is what turns everything upside down in our nations. Certainly it means we carry our cross.

Many don't want this kind of life to prevail in the world. Others will take advantage of it. But the truth will triumph. And those who live it now, will continue to live it with Christ in the resurrection.

### The Righteousness of God

"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the gentiles, and sing unto thy name." (Romans 15:8-9)

After summing up what is the main pastoral concern of the letter, the unity of the church and its witness to the world, Paul next sums up his opening theological concern, from chapter 1, the faithfulness, or righteousness, of God. In Jesus Christ, God has confirmed his promises to the fathers of Israel.

But he hasn't done this in a way that was expected by Israel. The main difference? God didn't raise Israel over their enemies as they thought the Messiah would do. Instead he brought in the gentiles to make us all joint heirs. This was the pill many found so hard to swallow from Paul's ministry. This is why they persecuted him so much.

And this really brings us back to Paul's pastoral concern. God fulfils his promises in such a way, not to lift us above our enemies, but through our serving of our enemies. This is what we must translate into today's world, challenges and experiences. How do we live this in our time, in the racial and religious groups we are neighbours to?

He calls Jew to serve gentile, and gentile to serve Jew, and today, all of us to serve each other. The reason? So that none of us will be complete without each other, that no foot can say to any hand, either inside or outside the church, "I have no need of thee."

Any why does God fulfil his promises through our reconciling with and serving our enemy? Because this is what he himself does. This was his action in the incarnation, cross and resurrection. He suffered and died, serving his enemies. And if we are going to be his children, then we are going to look like him, act like him and follow him. The gospel of Jesus Christ makes children, like himself, transformed into his image.

So this is how we are going to gain victory over our enemies today. Not through natural conquest, which we have tried over and over again since Constantine. But through service. And this is what history is waiting for. For the manifestation of the sons of God, those who win the way God wins. These are the ones, who through divine and sanctified courage, renew the word.

After verse 9 in Romans 15, Paul continues listing texts in the Old Testament that show the reconciliation of the gentiles, the enemies of God, with the Jews, in the fulfillment of God's promises. The Jews cannot be complete without us.

And neither can we be complete without our enemies today. So instead of isolating them, we must go to them, include them and draw them into the love of God. Light is greater than darkness, if we follow the light ourselves.

### Paul's Mission to the Gentiles

Following this theological/pastoral exhortation, and an encouragement to the church, whom, Paul believes, will follow his counsel in this gospel, Paul completes the chapter with an outline of his mission to the gentiles, westward to Spain. This is the third reason he is writing this letter, which he concludes on in this chapter.

But all of these reasons for writing to the Romans church come together in one. Paul's mission to the gentiles means they must understand the gospel. They must understand that Jesus Christ is not the rejection of Israel, but God's acceptance of them. The gentiles therefore can trust in this God as well, who will likewise be faithful to them forever.

Secondly, Paul's mission to the gentiles will only work if the churches grow in unity with all the members together. Without this unity the mission of Paul westward would fail. The church would fail to bear the marks of Christ in love and service. The church would fail to challenge the world, it would fail as a counter culture mission and would disappear in insignificance.

We can see that all Paul's themes in Romans merge into one motive. Paul is writing to the church to strengthen it for its mission to the gentiles, which is Paul's calling. The letter to the Romans is designed to buttress Paul's very calling, as he expresses it in chapter 15. But this calling isn't only Paul's. It is the calling of us all in Christ.

"That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit... But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you; Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be helped on my way by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company." (Romans 15:16, 23-24)

We should take the lessons of this letter in our mission to the gentiles today. We should accept with joy that we live in a multicultural and multi-faith world, and instead of trying to protect ourselves from it, go into it as Jesus came into our multicultural world with the good

news. We should learn to bring down the walls that fear and self-interest have built, and be willing to take up our cross to live out the love of God among those of different backgrounds to ourselves. This will bring glory to God in our time.

### Our Debt to the World

Next Paul speaks of his service to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. He intends to pass through there before reaching Spain. The believers in Jerusalem have been suffering a drought and food shortage. Paul raised an offering at Corinth, among the believers there, to help.

Some say Paul did this to curry favour with the church leaders in Jerusalem, such as Peter and James, so they would accept his ministry among the gentiles. But the main reason I think, apart from the obvious help the believers needed at that time, was to show that the church was one. We ought to care about what our fellow believers are suffering in other lands, whatever nation or racial background there are from. This is all that Paul is doing. He is living out the message of Romans.

“For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them truly; and their debtors they are. For if the gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in carnal things. (Romans 15:26-27)

Paul is showing our mutual service to each other. In this case, it is between Jews and gentiles. The gentiles have profited from the gospel of the Jews. They should help the Jews when they have a need. This way, we help each other.

Paul isn't establishing a hierarchy here. He is just speaking about mutual support. And he isn't establishing an age old principle of Jewish supremacy. That would be contrary to his whole letter and would realign with the old Jewish nationalist heart that God is defeating in the gospel. Paul is just showing that we would should help and care for each other.

Today the same care may work between Jews and gentiles. It may also work between people of others groups. The point is, let us think of each other, not just of ourselves, and see how we can care for them.

And we should remember, when people have done good to us, whether they have preached the gospel to us, or done good in some other way, that we have a debt to mankind to support others ourselves. We have been helped, so that we might help. We have been made strong, so that we may support the weak.

When we help others, we may not always be helping those who have helped us. They may not need help in return. It may be different people we are helping. That doesn't matter. What matters is that we serve the world, just as God has served us in Christ. It is more often the case that we will be helping different people, as Jesus said, “Don't give to those who will give back to you in return, but give to those who cannot repay you.”

## Romans 16

### Women in the Gospel

I would love a full description on chapter 16. It is filled with the names of Paul's co-workers. Paul had a very large team of people he worked with, planting and overseeing churches. Each one of their lives would be so interesting, living in such a pivotal time in history. It would be great to know more about each one of the people Paul mentioned.

But just a few comments on the women on Paul's team. In this short passage several are mentioned. First, there is Phoebe, the lady who was commissioned to take Paul's letter to Rome. It was the custom then for the one carrying the letter to also read the letter to the recipients and to explain the letter. They would clarify the author's mind and answer any questions about the meaning of the contents.

Paul also asked the Roman believers to assist Phoebe in whatever business she had, He said she had been a help to many, including himself. Phoebe's role and Paul's comments show Phoebe's level in ministry in the church. She was a teacher and a leader, possibly an apostle with Paul.

Priscilla should be considered the same way. She was mentioned before her husband, which in that day meant that she was the leader in the church of the husband/wife team. She probably led the churches in Rome. She was a member of Paul's team, and through her Paul was the leading apostle of the Roman churches.

Next we have Mary, who also "bestowed much labour upon us." This is also likely related to gospel ministry. Then we have Junia, who was not only an apostle, but notable among the apostles. She was a leading apostle.

We can see here that Paul's team contained a mix of people, and there was no distinction made between male and female members. It wasn't common in the cultures of that time for women to have such roles. But this shows the liberty of the gospel message, where even Jesus allowed Mary to "sit at his feet," a term which refers to a learning/teaching disciple/rabbi.

People have been confused about some of Paul's comments concerning women. This is not the place to go into these in detail. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul brings up the view of patriarchal Corinthian believers, who regarded women as the glory of man and thus subject to man. Paul corrected this issue. The confusion comes when we put the words of the Corinthians in Paul's mouth.

Similarly, in Timothy, Paul noted that women should not usurp authority within the church. But he had earlier said the same about the men. He noted the cultural tendency to restrict women because, "Eve was deceived." Paul turns this back upon the patriarchal believers, saying if that is how they put it, then the women should be permitted to learn. This was a major cultural shift for most then.

Then, people may quote Ephesians 5, where Paul speaks of marriage, and the wife's submission to the husband. This was a reflection on the social customs of the day. Paul's teaching was the same as Peter's here. They both taught that social authorities should be honoured, so the liberty in Christ we have isn't taken the wrong way. They both used Jesus as our example, who obeyed Pilate, and overcame wrong through submission, rather than rebellion. In this way, we are to submit ourselves to each other.

We have a problem if we say that what Paul taught contradicts the plain facts in the early church. Women functioned at every level in the ministry and leadership of the early church. Patriarchy was not part of the early church's gospel message or practice. Patriarchy came into the church later. In the early church, women were prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors and apostles.

This is about living out the gospel message Paul was teaching. If the kingdom of God is about caring for others, then men shouldn't dominate in the church as they do in our cultures. Male domination is part of the fall. If we are stronger physically, that is to serve others, not ourselves. In the kingdom of God, to be reflected in all transformed cultures of the world, strengths are to be used for the wellbeing of the weaker vessels. Governments also are to learn this through the life of the church that we show them.

### Service, not Gender

The second matter to discuss here is far more important. This is what Paul consistently said qualified a person for true ministry in the church. It wasn't gender, but character, the character of Christ. This character was service.

Phoebe gave assistance to many. Priscilla and Aquilla laid down their own necks for Paul and for the churches. Mary bestowed much labour on others. Junia and others were Paul's "fellow prisoners" for the gospel, both literally and also metaphorically, as Jesus' servants. Urbane was their "helper." Many others Paul mentioned "laboured much in the Lord." This loving service, in the likeness of Jesus Christ, is the consistent quality in Paul's mind of a true servant of the Lord.

The ministry is not for self-advancement, just as Jesus himself showed. A minister is like a house-servant. They all had many different gifts with which to serve, but one motive: to give their lives for others, as Christ had done for them.

### Global Community

Paul's final appeal in Romans is for the unity of the church. To "mark those who cause divisions" means not to join them. This doesn't mean people can't have opinions and express them. It means that members of these churches shouldn't use diverse opinions to form divisions within the church. People shouldn't use opinions to serve themselves, but our mind must be for the welfare of the church as a whole. Opinions are fine, but when we use

them to form sects within the church, or breakaways from the church, then our mind is on our own purposes, which Paul calls serving “our own belly.”

Marking those “contrary to our doctrine” doesn’t mean forming separate churches around our view of doctrine and rejecting others in the body of Christ who have a different view. This is what our “statements of faith” have often achieved. This is the practice Paul is actually warning us against.

Paul’s “form of doctrine” means the unity of faith that he has been expressing in his letter. The opposite practice is forming divisions within the wider body of Christ based on our “purist” form of doctrine. There is such a thing as orthodoxy, which is important, but we should seek orthodoxy in the wider church community, rather than in a narrow sectarian or denominational definition of it.

Narrow forms of orthodoxy lack the hospitality that the wider body of Christ requires, and which Paul appeals for through the letter to the Romans. Learning the difference is important. One seeks the welfare of the church, one seeks to serve as Christ served, the other seeks our own personal ends, or the ends of our group, in isolation and self-focus. Paul calls us to serve in love, in care for the body for which Christ died.