

Course Outline

Romans: The Most Systematic Exposition of Paul's Gospel, Part 1

Romans 2:1–8:27

I. Among Jews (2:1–3:20)

- a. The Jews in Paul's audience were probably mentally applauding all he had said thus far. "Yes, that's the way Gentiles are," they would have agreed. Suddenly he turns the tables on them.
 - i. The main point: Despite having the Law, they are no better off if they disobey the Law
 1. In 2:1 (or perhaps 2:17) through 3:20, Paul establishes that *Jews are equally guilty* of breaking the law God had given them, and hence are equally sinful and accountable to God. The main point he makes throughout this section is that despite having unique access to the Law, they are no better off if they disobey it.
 - ii. The climax: Romans 3:10-18—six supporting Old Testament quotations
 1. The climax of this section drives this point home with six quotations from the Old Testament to demonstrate that all in fact do disobey the Law (3:10-18).
 - iii. The qualifications: Romans 2:6-11, 13-16, 25-29
 1. Three passages in this section, however, seem to conflict with this main thrust: 2:6-11, 13-16, and 25-29. Here some seem to be judged and saved according to good works. These, however, are never said to be "the works of the Law," and it is those works to which Paul objects—i.e., attempts at self-justification (cf. 3:20). Rather these are acts of "doing good" (2:7, 10) as a result of a proper inward attitude created by the Spirit (2:19), in short, the obedience that comes from faith (1:5), irrespective of whether one is Jew or Gentile (2:10, 14-15, 26-27). Obviously Christians fall into this category. But 1:18–3:20 is primarily discussing pre-Christian times. So we must think first of all of Jews who used the Law rightly as an outworking of their faith. Verses 14-15, however,

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may leave the door open for Gentiles in pre-Christian times to respond similarly. This may provide a clue to the hotly debated fate of the unevangelized; if they trust entirely in the mercy of God to the extent that they know Him and not in any merits of their own, perhaps God will be gracious to them.⁵² But we have no way of knowing who, if anyone, falls into this category, so the evangelistic mandate remains crucial.

- b. Justification by faith (3:21–5:21)
 - i. The principle stated (3:21–31, especially v. 23)
 - 1. With the coming of Christ, however, God has provided a decisive solution to the problem of the universal sinfulness of humanity. As in Galatians, Paul sums up the concept as justification by faith. Chapter 3:21–31 enunciates *the core principle* in tightly-packed prose (see especially v. 23). God’s righteousness is conferred on believers (v. 22), apart from the Mosaic commands (v. 21), but fulfilling the true purpose of the whole Old Testament (v. 31). This also demonstrated God’s fairness in making provision for dealing with sins He had previously left unaddressed (vv.25–26). In this context, Paul uses not only the legal metaphor of justification but also a metaphor from the slave market (“redemption”—the price paid for a slave’s freedom—v. 24) and one from the temple cult (“propitiation”—appeasing God’s wrath⁵³—v. 25).
 - ii. The major objection considered: What of Abraham? (4:1–25)
 - 1. Chapter 4 considers a *major objection* many Jews would have had to Paul’s line of argument thus far (recall Galatians 3): but what about Abraham? Wasn’t he saved by his good works, especially his willingness to offer his son Isaac on the altar (see Genesis 22:15–18)? Paul’s reply is to point his audience further back in Abraham’s life when God declared him righteous because of his faith (Romans 4:3, quoting Genesis 15:6). In fact, Abraham was justified by faith even before his circumcision (vv. 1–12) so that the promises to Abraham are fulfilled only in those who are similar people of faith (v. 13–25).⁵⁴
 - iii. The results of justification (5:1–21)

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1. Chapter 5 then describes the *results of justification*, first for Christians (vv. 1-11) and then for humanity in general (vv. 12-21).
 - A. Results for Christians (vv. 1-11)
 - I. We who believe can have peace with God (vv. 1-2, 6-8)—not just subjective good will but the objective cancellation of our enmity with him—and rejoice even in difficult circumstances, knowing that they produce character (vv. 3-5) and that we have already been reconciled to God (vv. 9-11).
 - B. Results for all humanity (vv. 12-21)
 - I. This salvation is available for all humanity, for just as Adam’s sin led to the threat of spiritual death for all people, so *Christ’s* death makes spiritual life available for all people (vv. 12-21). Verse 12 contains key teaching on original sin--all humans begin life with a sinful nature, but this is balanced with the sober realization that all practice sinful behavior as well, freely choosing to yield to the temptations of their nature, and this is that for which they are condemned.
- c. Sanctification through the Spirit (6:1–8:39)
 - i. As a result of our right legal standing before God (justification), we are to grow in holiness throughout our Christian life (sanctification). Paul unpacks this thought in three stages—one per chapter—which we may label *freedom from sin (6)*, *freedom from the law (7)* and, *freedom from death (8)*.⁵⁵
 1. Freedom from sin (6:1-23)
 - A. Chapter 6 begins with a transition from what has come before via a potential objection and its answer (v. 1). Increased sin may magnify God’s grace, but that does not mean His grace is a license to sin. We have been freed from sin, first through union with Christ as symbolized by baptism (vv. 2-11) and second through allegiance to a new lord (vv. 12-23). Verses 2-11 do not teach baptismal regeneration (salvation through baptism), since I Corinthians 10:1-

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12 shows that a “baptism” doesn’t guarantee a right relationship with God. But this passage does remind us of the close link (a “metonymy”) between a profession of belief and baptism in New Testament times. Verse 6 introduces the concept of our old self or nature being crucified with Christ. But vv. 11-21 will clarify that this is not an absolute as the metaphor might suggest. Precisely because our sinful nature is never eradicated even as Christians, we must continually “become what we are” already in God’s eyes. The Pauline indicative consistently leads to an imperative. So too, since we have a new master, we must keep on making Him our master (vv. 12-14, 17-18, 22).

2. Freedom from Law (7:1-25)
 - A. Chapter 7 describes the freedom from the Law, which, apart from its current role as fulfilled in Christ, works only to serve sin. It falls into three parts:
 - I. Being under Law like marriage bond—only for lifetime of spouse (vv. 1-6)
 1. Being under the law is like a marriage bond—it applies only until one party dies. But the lifetime of the Law has passed with the advent of Christ (vv. 1-6).
 - II. The time of sin’s ineffectiveness prior to Law is past (vv. 7-13)
 1. There was a time prior to the Law when there was no explicit knowledge of sin (as law-breaking), but that time is past (vv. 7-13). Whether Paul is thinking of a personal age of innocence, Israel before the Law, or Adam before the Fall, his emphasis is on the havoc wreaked by sin through the Law.
 - III. After Law the solution for sin is in Christ, but still there is constant warfare (vv. 14-25)
 1. After the age of the Law, there is substantial freedom available in Christ, but even then there

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- is frequent internal warfare between new and old natures—two “laws” at work in all people (v. 14-25).
- IV. This last paragraph is the most controversial; commentators are relatively evenly split between seeing this as Paul’s Christian reinterpretation of life under the Law or his ongoing Christian experience. On the one hand 7:14, 25b seem too harsh for believers—are we still slaves to sin and death? On the other hand, the shift from vv. 7-13 to vv. 14-25 moves from past to present tense, and v. 25a suggests that deliverance has come in Jesus. Perhaps 8:10-11 offers the solution: “If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.” And the honest testimony of mature Christians highlights their growing awareness of how far short of God’s moral perfection they still fall. In fact, one could argue that only in Christ could such a tension be experienced to this degree, because the non-Christian is less concerned about measuring up to God’s standards.⁵⁶
 3. Freedom from death (8:1-39)
 - A. Chapter 8 concludes the first half of the letter by elaborating the freedom from condemnation and therefore from spiritual death which the believer enjoys. Paul makes five main points.
 - I. Substantial victory over sin possible (vv. 1-11)
 1. Although there is warfare between sin and righteousness in a Christian, through the Spirit substantial victory over sin can be attained (8:1-11). Just as we dare not overestimate our progress in sanctification, neither may we rest content with lack of continual, visible growth in holiness.
 - II. Spirit makes us adopted sons (vv. 12-17)
 1. The Spirit not only works righteousness but makes us adopted sons of God with all the accompanying

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- inheritance right (vv. 12-17). We may also call God “Abba,” the Jewish child’s intimate term of endearment for his “Papa” (v. 15).
- III. Unity with Christ produces “insignificant” sufferings (vv. 18-25)
1. Unity with Christ produces sufferings, but these are insignificant in light of the coming glorification of all of creation—which itself is personified as longing for this day (vv. 18-25).
- IV. Spirit’s ministry in prayer (vv. 26-27)
1. The Spirit helps us in our weakness, including when we are unable to pray cognitively (vv. 26-27).

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