



Romans 9–16

Prepared by Allen Browne

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**RIVERVIEW
CHURCH**

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1 The people of God (Romans 9)

Welcome to the second half of the book of Romans. Thanks for joining us as we invite God to shape us within his story, the restoration of the world in Christ.

Romans might be the best explanation of the gospel ever written. Paul says that even though the nations and God's nation were unfaithful to God, God remained faithful (Romans 1–3). Out of his faithfulness, God did right by the world—raising up his Anointed (the Christ) to rescue us and lead us. God now calls us to respond with faithfulness towards Messiah Jesus. As we do, God sets us right (justifies) so we do right by him. That's how God saves the world (summarized in Romans 3:21-26).

Israel's story in the Old Testament is an important framework for understanding the gospel. Some Christians read Genesis 3 (there's a fall), and then jump straight to the New Testament (there's a Saviour), leaving out Israel's story completely. Paul doesn't. He starts Israel's story with Abraham (Romans 4), and then backtracks to include the rest of humanity in Adam (Romans 5). Then Paul tracks our story in Christ along the lines of Israel's story in the Old Testament: passing through the waters (as Israel did at the Red Sea) so we're no longer "slaves" (Romans 6). Then Israel received the Torah (Law) at Mount Sinai, so Paul addresses the issue of the Law (Romans 7) before leading us into life under Christ's leadership (Romans 8).

There are notes and podcasts available if you'd like to pursue these earlier chapters:

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2025/05/05/invitation-to-romans/>

In Romans 9–16, Paul then sets out the practical implications of gospel, what it looks like to live as God's people in the world today. The biggest pastoral issue in the house churches in Rome was conflict between Jewish Christians and gentile Christians. The emperor had expelled Jews from Rome for a time (Acts 18:2). As they returned, they did not find gentiles living the way Jews had always lived—following the regulations of the Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy). The gentile Christians were demeaning the Jewish Christians with their irrelevant traditions, while the Jewish Christians were unwilling to eat with gentile Christians who were eating non-kosher food.



Israel in relation to the nations of the ancient world (in black), and the nations today (in red).

Source: *Rose Then and Now Bible Map Atlas with Biblical Background and Culture* (Rose Publishing, 2012), 17.

This rejection-of-the-other is the main issue in Romans 9–16. Paul argues that we cannot divide ourselves up like this if God has called us together in the Messiah.

This issue still divides the church today:

- Some Christians view the nation of Israel as the barometer for everything God is doing in the world. Supporting the nation of Israel and ensuring Israel has a future is crucial for the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy and the return of Christ.
- Other Christians view the nation of Israel as irrelevant. The new covenant in Christ means that the church has replaced Israel as the people of God, so a preoccupation with Zionism and Israel as a nation misunderstands the gospel.

Somewhere between those two extremes is the truth. Paul argues that God never rejected the Jewish people: he remained faithful to them by sending them the Messiah. A hardness of heart means that God's people rejected the Messiah God sent them, but what God has done has expanded (not replaced) the people of God. The people of God in Christ includes all who respond to him with faithfulness: Jew and gentile (Romans 1:16; 2:9-10; 3:9, 22, 29; 9:24; 10:12; 15:27).

Paul spends three chapters explaining the significance of Israel in the story of God, with the goal of drawing Jews and gentiles together around Christ. We'll spend the next three weeks listening to what Paul says in Romans 9–11. Then we'll discuss how these chapters shape our view of national Israel today and how the promises of God are fulfilled in Christ.

In Romans 12–16, we'll see what Paul thinks it looks like for us all (Jews and gentiles) to function as the community of the Messiah (Romans 12). We'll hear Paul explain how we who recognize Christ as king are to live in relation to the governments of this world (Romans 13). We'll listen to Paul's pleas for us to share a table and eat together as a unified community in Christ, even while we still have our different convictions about how to please God (Romans 14), because it's the gospel that unifies the world in Christ (Romans 15–16).

So, this is where we're going together over the next six weeks:

Week	Chapters	Theme
1	Romans 9	The people of God
2	Romans 10	Paths to being set right with God
3	Romans 11	God's faithfulness to his people
4	Romans 12	Living as God's people
5	Romans 13–14	Living in the world
6	Romans 15–16	The gospel transforms the world

Any thoughts or questions as we embark on this journey together?

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For reference, here's an overview of the story of Israel so far:

Date	Event
1280 BC	Israel established as a nation: the exodus and Sinai covenant.
1000 BC	David anointed to represent God's kingship on earth.
920 BC	Israel split into two nations (Israel and Judah) at the death of Solomon.
722 BC	Assyria captured Israel (the northern nation), leaving only Judah.
586 BC	Babylon captured Jerusalem, taking the Jews into exile.
AD 30	God's Messiah is raised up as the Son of God in power (Romans 1:1-5).
AD 56	Paul wrote this letter to God's people in Rome.

1.1 Attitudes to the Jewish people (9:1-5)

Paul doesn't begin by telling us how to think. He tells us how he feels. This is personal. Paul is Jewish, and he wants the gentile Christians in Rome to feel what he feels for his people. He may have been role-playing back in Romans 7, but not here. These emotions are real and raw:

Romans 9:1-5 (NIV)

¹ I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit—² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.

⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Paul has been on both sides of this fence. As a zealous young man, he tried to protect Judaism from those who presented Jesus as the Messiah. *Going from house to house he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison, ... breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples* (Acts 8:3; 9:1). Then he met the resurrected Messiah (Acts 9:5).

Aligned with Messiah Jesus, Paul faced rejection from his people. He was run out of town, handed over to gentile rulers, physically abused: flogged with lashes, exposed to death, beaten with rods, and pelted with stones (1 Corinthians 11:22-25).

But Paul is no longer *breathing out murderous threats* against his own people. He's following the Messiah who suffered and died for his people. Paul now feels the same rejection, hearing his own people cry out, *"Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"* (Acts 22:22) Paul's Lord prayed, *"Father, forgiven them, for they do not know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34). Paul follows the Messiah: turning his personal grief into a grief for his people. Paul's sufferings coalesce into anguished prayer for his people, like the groans of the Spirit in the previous chapter (8:26).

Instead of retaliating by cursing and rejecting them, Paul prays, “God, let me bear your curse for them. Reject me and include them. Cut me off from the Messiah, so they can be the Messiah’s people” (verse 3).

This is still the gospel. It’s what Jesus did to save the world. He suffered and died for his people, sacrificing his life for their atonement, revealing the righteousness of God in contrast to human views of justice that expect retribution (Romans 3:21-26). Paul is now following the way of the Messiah, for the salvation of his people. It’s what he’ll call us to do too (Romans 12:17-21). It’s how God saves the world.

Over 2000 years, Christians have not always followed the attitudes of Paul and Jesus towards the Jewish people. By the second century, the rift between Judaism and Christianity was sometimes expressed with animosity. By the Middle Ages, some “Christian” cities refused to allow Jews to own property. At one point, Jews were safer under Islam than under Christianity. Antisemitism is hypocritical in a faith based on the Jewish Messiah, contradicting the gospel, preventing Jewish people from knowing the Messiah who gave his life for them.

1.2 The cross redefines the people of God (9:6-13)

The problem most Jews have with Jesus is that he failed to deliver his people. The Sinai covenant established Israel as a nation under the LORD’S reign. In reality, they struggled without a human king (Judges) so God anointed David to lead them (1–2 Samuel). But after Solomon, the nation split into two parts. Israel (the north) fell to Assyria. Judah (the south) fell to Babylon. After that they remained under gentile rule.

The prophets promised that God would restore his reign through a son of David. Their apocalyptic stories wrestled with how God might deal with their gentile oppressors so he could restore his people. But centuries went by, and it never happened.

Eventually Jesus arrived, declaring that the time had come for the kingdom of God to be restored (Mark 1:1-14). But Jesus did not deliver his people as King David had done. Jesus died at the hands of their gentile oppressors.

Jesus failed to do what they were expecting of him. But God’s promises had not failed:

Romans 9:6-9 (NIV)

⁶ It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary,

“It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”

[Genesis 21:12]

⁸ In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. ⁹ For this was how the promise was stated:

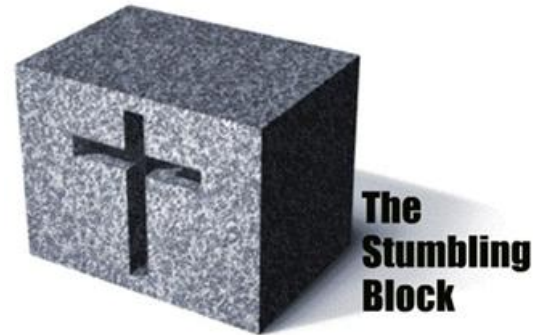
“At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”

[Genesis 18:10]

The trouble with the cross is that, in the short term, from the perspective of human power, it looks like God's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah failed. It can look like that as we take up our crosses too.

But Paul redefined the cross: not as the failure of God's faithfulness but as the expression of God's faithfulness. The cross was God-doing-right by a world that had been unfaithful to God (*the righteousness of God* in 3:21, 26). God has never been unfaithful to his people, even when they were unfaithful to him (3:3).

And the redefinition of the "cross" also redefines "Israel." The cross reshapes the people of God: *not all who are descended from Israel are Israel* (verse 6).



The prophets already said that not all the physical descendants of Jacob were people of the covenant. The Pharisees agreed: the wicked are not part of the kingdom of God. The Essenes agreed. Jewish Apocalyptic literature like the Book of Enoch also talked about God removing the wicked from among his people.

But Paul starts from the other end of Israel's story to argue that it's never been simply about who were physically descended from Abraham. Hagar's son was never part of the Sinai covenant (verse 7). That doesn't mean God wanted bad for Ishmael. God cared for Hagar and promised to bless her offspring (Genesis 16:9). God committed to blessing Ishmael, even though he would not be part of the nation in covenant with God (Genesis 17:20-21).

Paul's second example is Esau. Abraham was his grandfather, but he was not part of the covenant people:

Romans 9:10-13 (NIV)

¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told,

"The older will serve the younger" [Genesis 25:23].

¹³ Just as it is written:

"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" [Malachi 1:1-3].

Verse 13 sound worrisome. If God *loves* some people and *hates* others, we could be in trouble too? What are you doing, Paul?

What Paul is doing is quoting the final book of the Old Testament. The Hebrew words for *love* and *hate* have the sense of accepting and rejecting. We lose that in translation (from Hebrew to Greek to English). "*Jacob I chose, but Esau I turned down*" would carry the sense better. If you've ever been in a love triangle where you lost out, you get the picture.

The identity of God's covenant people is no longer cut and dried. Israel (the north) intermarried with people of other nations. The Jews who'd returned to Jerusalem after the exile felt like they'd been through a separation from God. When Malachi says that

God still loves them, they ask, “*How have you loved us?*” (Malachi 1:2). In effect, God replies, “I’ve loved you from the start. Esau was the firstborn, but I turned him down and chose you as my covenant people. You’ve been away in exile, but I’m not divorcing you.” God’s covenant love has never failed, so Malachi is God’s spokesman calling them back into covenant life with God.

For 20 years, Jacob lived in exile because Esau wanted to kill him to take back the blessing. Eventually, Jacob returned from exile and made peace with Esau. But Malachi also ends with a warning that the wicked among God’s people will not be included in the kingdom when the sun of righteousness rises to heal his people (Malachi 4). God must sort them out because **not all descendants of Jacob are the covenant people**.

1.3 Who God chooses is God’s choice (9:14-16)

Notice how verse 11 uses the word *election*. We’ll see this word again in 11:5, 7, 28. In some theological systems, “the elect” means the individuals God chooses to save, as opposed to those he chooses not to save (“the damned.”) Paul is not using the word that way. He’s talking about *God’s purpose in election*. It was never God’s purpose to elect some to save and others to damn. God’s purpose was to bring his salvation to the world through the people he chose to partner with him. *God’s purpose in election* was the rescue of the world, not its damnation.

Yet, when God chooses one people to partner (Israel), it may feel like the others are missing out. Even though the goal of election was always to restore God’s blessing to the nations (Genesis 12:1-3), the other nations who were not part of the covenant people might think they were not getting a fair go.

Please read this at the level of nations rather than individuals. Remember, it’s the Jew/gentile conflict Paul is concerned with in Romans.

Romans 9:14-16 (NIV)

¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” [Exodus 33:19]

¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

Israel discovered the astounding character of their heavenly sovereign a month after signing up to the Sinai covenant as his people. Feeling impatient, they constructed a golden calf to worship. God was rovable. Moses interceded, asking for a guarantee that God would still lead them to the Promised Land. Moses asked to see the LORD in all his glory:

Exodus 33:18-19; 34:6-7 (NIV)

33 ¹⁹ And the LORD said,

“I will cause all my **goodness** to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have **mercy** on whom I will have mercy, and I will have **compassion** on whom I will have compassion. ...”

34 ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming,
“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God,
slow to anger, abounding in love and **faithfulness**, ⁷ maintaining
love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

God's *mercy* and *compassion* are the expression of his unfailing *love* and *faithfulness*, even when his covenant people have not been faithful to him. This becomes the definitive revelation of God (Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:18; Psalms 86:5, 15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Nahum 1:3; Jonah 4:2).

Remember the connection between *faith* and *righteousness*? Paul's gospel is that human unfaithfulness does not nullify God's *faithfulness*; God's *righteousness* is clearly displayed in providing the Messiah (Romans 3:3, 21). The gospel therefore calls us to *faith[fulness]* to the Messiah, so we're set right with God in him, because of God's goodness, not anything we've earned (verse 16).

1.4 Is God too gracious? (9:17-24)

But Romans 9 is discussing the Sinai covenant people who did not place their faith in the Messiah God sent them. In rejecting Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, God's nation is like Pharaoh who rejected Moses' proclamation that the Hebrews belong to the LORD.

Romans 9:17 (NIV)

¹⁷ 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.”
[Exodus 9:16]

The context of this message is the seventh plague. The LORD said, “Let *my* people go!” Pharaoh said: “Who is the LORD that I should obey him and let Israel go?” (Exodus 5:1-2). The LORD does not assert his authority by unseating Pharaoh; he sends events (plagues) that demonstrate who is the true ruler is:

Exodus 9:13-18 (ESV)

¹³ “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ¹⁴ For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth.

¹⁵ For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth.

¹⁶ But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. ¹⁷ You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go. ¹⁸ Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall ...”

Even Pharaoh's authority derives from God (as we'll see in Romans 13). So God is not trying to take him out the way human kings do. God is calling Pharaoh to bow to the LORD's authority, and when he does everyone will see the glory of earth's true sovereign: the Hebrews, the Egyptians and the rulers of the nations. They'll see God dealing with Pharaoh in a gentle way—showing him mercy and compassion.

So God showed *mercy* and *compassion* to his people (verse 14). And God shows mercy and compassion to the rulers of the world whom he installed for his purposes. That's God's response, even when they killed his Son!

That's the point:

Romans 9:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

Was God too gentle with Pharaoh? Did God's merciful and compassionate approach have the effect of hardening the tyrant's heart? That's how Exodus describes the impact of what God did (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12, 34; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8, 17). But Pharaoh is responsible for hardening his own heart also (Exodus 8:15, 32).

If God was too lenient with Pharaoh (hardening Pharaoh's heart), the same argument could apply to Israel. God's people betrayed the Messiah, handing him over to the "Pharaoh" of their day (Caesar's representative in Jerusalem). While some recognized their Messiah, *others were hardened*, i.e. *Israel has experienced a hardening in part* (Romans 11:7, 25).

But the hard-hearted want to blame God:

Romans 9:19 (NIV)

¹⁹ One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?"



Recall Romans 1–3? The nations didn't honour God (1:18-30), but who are *you who pass judgment* on them? (2:1) This judge is back, and now he's trying to blame God.

This disrespect for God's authority is not a new argument. The prophets faced it too:

Romans 9:20-24 (NIV)

²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?

"Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it,
'Why did you make me like this?' " [Isaiah 29:16; 45:9]

²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Now, please, this is not a story about God electing some individuals to be saved and others to be damned to hell. Hell is never mentioned in Romans, or in any of Paul's

letters. This is a story about the Jews being God's elect nation, and therefore treating gentiles as *objects of God's wrath, prepared for destruction* (verse 22):

The overwhelming attestation of, references to, and portrayals of Gentiles in Jewish apocalyptic literature is that of their ultimate judgment and final destruction.¹

Was God angry with Pharaoh for the suffering he caused for Jacob's family? Certainly, (Exodus 2:23-25). But God was also patient, calling Pharaoh to recognize God's authority again and again through the ten plagues with great patience (verse 22). In the same way, God was patient with Israel when every generation turned away from him (Judges), when the northern and southern kingdoms were unfaithful (1 Samuel – 2 Kings), when they went into exile and God brought them back (Isaiah), and even when they joined the gentiles in killing the Messiah.

1.5 The expansion of God's chosen people (9:25-29)

And now the resurrection of the Messiah has redefined who are God's elect:

Romans 9:25-29 (NIV)

²⁵ As he says in Hosea:

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"

²⁶ and,

"In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.' " [Hosea 2:23; 1:10]

²⁷ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

"Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. ²⁸ For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality." [Isaiah 10:22-23]

²⁹ It is just as Isaiah said previously:

"Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah." [Isaiah 1:9]



This is, of course, Paul's main message. God's gospel calls all the peoples of the earth to give their loyalty (faith) to his Messiah (Jesus Christ our Lord). And Paul sees in the Jewish Scriptures that God had always planned to include the gentiles.

Hosea lived in the time of the divided kingdom, before Assyria captured the territory of the ten tribes in 722 BC. Hosea's family life was disastrous. His wife was off with other men, so Hosea named the children, "Unloved" and "Not mine!" He never chose them, but they were part of his family now. God said that Israel would fall (Hosea 1:4),

¹ Michael P. Theophilus, "The Portrayal of Gentiles in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," in *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, (Bloomsbury, 2013), 91.

and that as a result the people who were not part of God's covenant family would be included in the family along with Israel and Judah (Hosea 1:10-11). As God restored his unfaithful "wife," the enemies who had tried to take her from God would become part of the covenant people (Hosea 2).

Jewish apocalyptic literature wrestled with the question of how God would save his people from the nations. They imagined God smashing the nations into submission. But the reality was that the distinction between the covenant nation and the other nations had broken down. That was especially true of the northern ten tribes who called themselves Israel after they broke away from Judah:

2 Kings 17:24 (NIV)

The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Kuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over Samaria and lived in its towns.

Since Israel (the northern kingdom) had been mixed in with people of other nations, God would have to save the nations too if he wanted to save his people.

So God has incorporated gentiles into his people. God has broken down the dividing wall, creating one new humanity out of the two groups, so that gentiles are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people (Ephesians 2:11-21).²

All who are in Christ are now in God's chosen people.



"The Divided Kingdom 10th Century BCE" in *Understanding the Israelite-Samaritans: From Ancient to Modern*. (Carta Jerusalem, 2019), 5.

1.6 It's faith[fulness] that sets us right to do right (9:30-33)

God's grace has turned everything around:

Romans 9:30-32 (NIV)

³⁰ What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. ³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

As Paul said at the start of the letter, the nations weren't even trying to do right by God. They rejected God's divine authority and did whatever they pleased (Romans 1:18-32). But in raising up his Messiah as Lord of all, God calls the nations to give their

² Robert H. Suh shows how this passage fulfills the promises of Ezekiel 37. See "The Use of Ezekiel 37 in Ephesians 2" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:4 (2007): 714-733.

faith[fulness] to Christ. When they give their allegiance (faith) to his Son, God declares them to be in the right (justified). Out of faith[fulness], they do right[eousness]. In Paul's words: *the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith* (verse 30).

Unlike the nations that weren't even trying to do right by God, the nation that gave their allegiance to God at Sinai were attempting to do right by God by fulfilling the Law God gave them. But as Israel's history shows, they ended up back under the nations instead of under God because they were not obedient to the Torah (Law). They tried, but they were not successful (verse 31).

The reason they did not do right by God is that they were unfaithful to God. But their unfaithfulness did not nullify God's faithfulness (Romans 3:3). God remained faithful to them, so God did right by them by providing his Messiah to rescue them (Romans 3:21). Because they did not give him their allegiance (faith[fulness]), so they did wrong by him (betraying him to their oppressors to crucify). They were pursuing a status of doing right by God without the foundation of allegiance to God and his Anointed.

God laid the foundation stone for rebuilding his fallen people. But they tripped over the foundation stone that God laid for the restoration of his people because they were seeking to protect their own power instead of giving him their allegiance (faith).

That's exactly the mistake that Israel (the northern nation) made when they rejected the Davidic kingship God gave to his nation. Understandably, they felt Solomon wasn't doing right by them, so they withdrew their faithfulness to the kingship installed by God, installing a king of their own. That's what Isaiah was referring to:

Romans 9:33 (NIV)

³³ As it is written:

"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame." [Isaiah 28:16; 8:14]

Exactly like the Israel of the divided kingdom, the Israel of Jesus' day refused to give him their faith[fulness] because he did not fit their expectations. They tripped over the king God gave them.

In summary, we now have this ironic and tragic situation: The nations who weren't even trying to do right by God are giving their faith[fulness] to the Messiah, being reconciled to God (being set right, to do right), while the nation that was trying to do right by God did not give him their faith[fulness] when he sent them the Messiah, so they did wrong by him.

Consequently, it is faith[fulness] to the Messiah that sets people right and leads them to do right[eousness], not obedience to the laws that God gave to Israel at Sinai.

1.7 So What?

What are your thoughts on Romans 9?

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Micheal Gorman focuses us on the questions Paul is answering:

In these chapters [Romans 9–11], Paul addresses the problem of his fellow Jews' general unbelief in the gospel. He raises three key questions that all receive "By no means!" as their answer:

- "Is there injustice on God's part?" (9:14);
- "Has God rejected his people?" (11:1); and
- "Have they stumbled so as to fall?" (11:11).³

Michael Bird explains how Paul draws Jews and gentiles together as the people of the Messiah:

My wife likes watching a TV show called *Who Do You Think You Are?* In this program viewers get to watch a celebrity attempt to trace their family ancestry as far back as they can, noting the heroes and villains who inhabit their lineage, and learn about themselves in the process. It can be highly entertaining, shocking, and even quite moving. I want to suggest that Romans 9 is much like *Who Do You Think You Are?* for Christians. In reading over the text, Christians are forced to look at the lineage of the family of faith from whom they came. ... The story of the Old Testament is about a gradual narrowing down of "Israel" until it reaches the postexilic remnant, while the story of the New Testament is about the broadening of "Israel" to include Jews, Samaritans, Greeks, Romans, Scythians, and barbarians. ...

While God's electing purposes were cocooned around Israel, they were so only until the Messiah came, and in the chosen Son is a chosen people, drawn from every tribe, tongue, and nation, who are made partakers of God's glorious grace. ... Who should the church think they are? Well, a scan over Romans 8–9 shows that they are Abraham's multiethnic offspring, united in the Messiah, bonded by the Spirit, bestowed with the rights of children and heirs, and brought together to work for the kingdom and to worship the Lord in peace and joy. The task for us, wherever it is possible, is to deliberately plant and cultivate the sorts of multiethnic churches that look like the new creation people of Paul's letter to the Romans.⁴

For next week, read Romans 10.

³ Michael J. Gorman, *Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2022), 241.

⁴ Michael F. Bird, *Romans, The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 2016), 342–343.

2 Paths to being set right with God (Romans 10)

God's gift of the Messiah revealed his faithfulness to the Jewish people. The problem is that God has been far too generous. *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,"* God said. That included Israel with their golden calf and Pharaoh with his hard heart. *"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people,"* said God. That includes the nations that conquered Israel as well as the Jewish people. God has raised up his Messiah over Israel and the nations, so he calls everyone—Jew and gentile—to faithfulness to the Messiah.

Since God's grace doesn't match our sense of justice, many in Israel kept relying on the Torah to make them right with God. They tripped over the gift God gave them, the Messiah as the foundation stone for the restoration of God's reign. All that God calls for is faithfulness to his Messiah, but many in Israel kept relying on observance of the Torah's regulations to make them right with God. Paul shared the grief on God's heart.

That's a quick overview of Romans 9. Any questions before we proceed to Romans 10?

2.1 The Messiah was always the goal (10:1-4)

Romans 10:1-4 (NIV)

¹ Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.



The goal of the Law always was the Messiah.

Words like “saved” (verse 1) have taken on a religious meaning that wasn't there when Paul dictated these words to Tertius (16:22). “Saved” did not mean getting converted to Christianity or getting a ticket to heaven. Paul envisaged God **rescuing** his people from oppression to the powers of sin and death, restoring them to God's reign in the Messiah. It was something like a new exodus, like when God saved Jacob's family from Pharaoh and established them as a nation under God's reign at Sinai. Paul yearns to see his people rescued from their seemingly interminable oppression, to be a people under God's governance in Christ.

Many of his people are just like Paul before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul was strongly committed to living by the Law God gave Israel at Sinai. He was zealous to chase down anyone who saw Jesus as the centre of God's activity in the world rather than the Jerusalem temple. They believe they are set right with God by obeying the Law God gave them. What they don't know is that God gives them right-standing with himself through allegiance (faith[fulness]) to his Messiah (verses 2-3).

The NIV is right to translate verse 4 as, *Christ is the **culmination** of the law*. Many translations read, *Christ is the **end** of the law* since the word *telos* means end or goal. But Paul is not saying, “Now that Christ has come let’s get rid of the Torah.” He’s saying, “The goal of the Torah always was the Messiah.” In establishing Israel as a nation under God’s reign through the Sinai covenant, the end God had in mind was to bring the nations back under this reign through the Messiah. Moses spoke of the one who was to come: “*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.*” (Deuteronomy 18:15)

The Law was not a bad thing. It was an important step towards the greater goal: the blessing of God’s reign restored to the nations through a descendant of Abraham. But now that Christ has come, people are no longer treated as right with God through obedience to the Torah. People are treated as right with God through placing their *trust* in God’s Anointed. And this right-standing with God isn’t just for the nation that received the Torah; it’s for everyone who trusts the Messiah’s leadership (verse 4).

2.2 What you rely on to be right with God (10:5-7)

Laws are designed to save lives and to give us a quality of life that’s fair and just. For example, the laws about speed limits save lives.

Imagine a blue flashing light in your mirrors. You pull over and say, “Officer, I don’t think I was speeding.” “You weren’t,” she says, “but you don’t have your seatbelt on, and was that a mobile phone in your hand?” Those laws are also designed to save lives, but you have to be obeying **all** the laws or the court will find you guilty.

That’s what it was like for Israel under the Sinai covenant:

Romans 10:5 (NIV)

Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law:

“The person who does these things will live by them.” [Leviticus 18:5]

The Torah was for their good, promising life to those who obeyed God. But right standing with God was conditional on obeying all the laws. It called Israel to live differently to the nations. Jewish Christians in Rome therefore called gentile Christians to obey the Torah too, for it included sanctions for disobedience:

Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15, 36 (NIV)

¹ If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today ... ² all these blessings will come on you ...

¹⁵ However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: ...

³⁶ The LORD will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your ancestors.



The ultimate sanction for persistent disobedience was that the nation would fall. But the exile was not the end. If they returned to the LORD, he would gather them and reign over them again:

Deuteronomy 30:1-3, 11-15 (NIV)

¹ When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, ² and when you and your children **return to the LORD your God** and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, ³ then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and **gather you again** from all the nations where he scattered you. ...

¹¹ Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “**Who will ascend into heaven** to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “**Who will cross the sea to get it** and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?”

¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. ¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.

Six centuries after the exile to Babylon (586 BC), the Torah's requirements did seem impossible to many Jews. They were still under foreign rule. It felt like no one could ascend into heaven to bring God's reign back to earth. Ruled from across the seas (Rome), it felt like an uncrossable chasm was separating from God's reign.

But Paul sees that God has fulfilled his promises to his people by doing for them what they could not do for themselves. That's what Paul has been saying:

Romans 3:21-24 (my translation)

²¹ Now, separate from Torah, God's righteousness has become manifest, having received the witness of the Torah and the Prophets,

²² God's righteousness [made visible] through the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus into all the faithful. For there is no distinction, ²³ for all who offended and lack God's splendour ²⁴ are being set right as a gift by his generosity, through the emancipation in Messiah Jesus.

While they, in their unfaithfulness, were doing wrong by God, God in his faithfulness has done right by them by sending the Messiah to do for them what they could not do for themselves:

- God doesn't expect them to **climb up into heaven** to bring his reign back to earth. God has sent his Messiah from heaven.
- God doesn't expect them to **cross the depths**. The Messiah entered the abyss, the death of the nation, to reconcile them to God.

In the Messiah, God has fulfilled for his people the promises of restoration from exile:

Romans 10:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down)

⁷ “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [Deuteronomy 30:12-13]

God's people are restored to his reign not through obedience to all the Torah's laws, but by declaring their *faith[fulness]* to his Messiah.

2.3 How we respond (10:8-13)

The next verse in Deuteronomy 30 presents God as listening for his people to respond to what he has done. Paul understands this response to be a declaration of loyalty (faith) to God's Anointed, the ruler God has raised up for them:

Romans 10:8-11 (NIV)

⁸ But what does it say?

“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” [Dt 30:14] that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

¹¹ As Scripture says,

“Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” [Isaiah 28:16]

In response to the unfaithful world crucifying his Messiah, God proclaimed Jesus to be *the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 1:4).

Our response must be to recognize the one God has installed to lead us:
*to declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.*

This is how the world is *saved* from its oppression under Sin and Death, restored as a kingdom of God in the authority of his Christ (verses 9-10).

Isaiah 28 called for **faith** in the Messiah whom God would send to set things right (*justice, righteousness*), i.e. to restore God's reign over them:

Isaiah 28:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ So this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;
the one who **relies on** it will never be stricken with panic.

¹⁷ I will make justice the measuring line
and righteousness the plumb line; ...

¹⁸ Your **covenant with death** will be annulled;
your agreement with the realm of the dead will not stand.”

Isaiah saw God's people relying on the rulers of the kingdoms of the world instead of relying on God. Their covenant with Assyria saw them paying tribute to Assyria that lead to their demise (2 Kings 17:3-5). Later Judah also paid tribute to Babylon, leading to its downfall (2 Kings 24:20–25:12). But Isaiah's term seems most apt for the treach-

ery of handing the Messiah over to their Roman overlords to be crucified (compare Acts 4:27), *the covenant with death* God annulled by raising up his Son to reign as Lord of all, the *sure foundation* of heaven's reign over all the peoples of the earth.

That means everyone—Jew or gentile can be set right with God through Messiah rather than through the Law:

Romans 10:12-13 (NIV)

¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

¹³ for,

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” [Joel 2:32]



“We All Are One in Jesus” by Soichi Watanabe

The prophet Joel lived at a time when locusts were invading Judah. Locusts were one of the plagues that covenant disobedience could bring on Israel, and Deuteronomy 28:41 explicitly associates them with captivity. The “locusts” in Joel could therefore be a symbol for the Babylonian army destroying Jerusalem: *They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers* (Joel 2:7). Joel’s point is that, after Jerusalem had been captured and exiled, the LORD would return to rescue them and reign over them in *the great and terrifying day of the LORD* (Joel 2:31). “The day of the LORD” means the time when YHWH reigns over his people again, just as “the day of Solomon” means the time when Solmon reigned.

So Joel describes the day of YHWH’s reign like this:

Joel 2:32 (NIV)

Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved;

for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance,

as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

For the LORD to *save* his people, he must have dealt with the nations who had oppressed them. To deliver *Mount Zion (Jerusalem)*, God must have brought the nations under control. So Paul sees the **everyone** of Joel 2:32 as all earth-dwellers: *the survivors whom the Lord calls* are not just Jews.

This is Paul’s gospel. To *call on the name of the LORD* is to recognize his authority and therefore to live under his leadership. The LORD’s authority is restored to the earth in his Messiah, his anointed ruler. Therefore *everyone* (Jew and gentile) *who calls on the name of the LORD* (in the person of Jesus the Messiah) *will be saved* (rescued from the powers of Sin and Death), to live *in the day of the LORD* (God’s reign in his Son).

That’s how Paul understands Joel’s good news (verse 13).

But in the first century, most gentiles had never heard of Jesus of Nazareth. *Ruler, saviour* and *Lord* were titles Caesar used. When Rome captured a city and asked the people, “Who is your Lord?” they all knew they needed to give allegiance to Caesar and not to the king Caesar had just killed.

2.4 Proclaiming the good news (10:14-21)

But if the peoples of the world had never heard of Jesus, how could they be rescued from the reign of Sin and Death, into the reign of the Lord?

Romans 10:14-17 (NIV)

- ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?
And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?
And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written:
“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” [Isaiah 52:7]
¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says,
“Lord, who has believed our message?” [Isaiah 53:1]
¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message,
and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Ever since meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul has lived to proclaim *the gospel (euangelion)*. This word has its roots in the Greek translation of Isaiah. After announcing the exile to Babylon (39:7), Isaiah announces the *good news* that YHWH will return to reign over his people (40:9-11).

Then Isaiah 40–52 explains how Israel was unable to fulfil their role as *the servant of the LORD*, called to demonstrate God's salvation to the nations (e.g. 49:6). So, God himself took the role of *servant* to save them—a servant of his fallen servant!

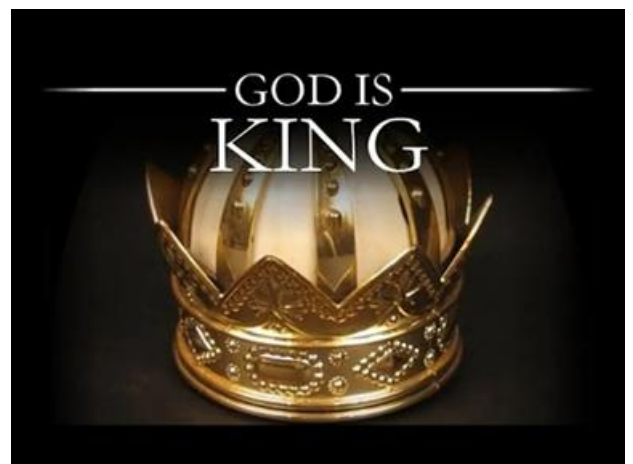
So, even though Israel brought God's name into disrepute among the nations, the *gospel* is that God comes to save his people. In doing so, God brings the kings of the earth under his authority, reigning over his people and the nations:

Isaiah 52:5-10 (NIV)

- ⁵ “And now what do I have here?” declares the LORD. “For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock,” declares the LORD. “And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed.
⁶ Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I.”
⁷ How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring **good news**, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “**Your God reigns!**” ...
¹⁰ The LORD will lay bare **his holy arm** in the sight of all the nations, and **all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.**

When the LORD rolls up his sleeves (*bare his holy arm*) to do what Israel could not do for herself, *the nations ... see the salvation of our God*. This is how

God saves the whole earth from its oppression under the kingdoms that serve Sin and Death: by confronting the power of Sin at the cross, raising up his Messiah out of Death to reign with heaven's authority on earth. That is *God's gospel* (Romans 1:1-5).



But God's reign is re-established not by force but by the servant of the LORD bearing in his own body the evil people do as they serve sin:

Isaiah 52:11–53:1 (NIV)

¹³ See, my servant will act wisely;
he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.
¹⁴ Just as there were many who were appalled at him—
his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
and his form marred beyond human likeness—
¹⁵ so he will sprinkle many nations,
and kings will shut their mouths because of him.
For what they were not told, they will see,
and what they have not heard, they will understand.
53 ¹ Who has believed our message
and to whom has **the arm of the LORD** been revealed?

As Isaiah sees, the way God restores his people is so counter-intuitive that God's people will struggle to believe it. They weren't expecting a Messiah who would take up the pain of his people and suffer for them (53:4), crushed for their iniquities, wounded for their healing (53:5), assigned a grave with the wicked (53:9) before he sees the light of life (53:11), given an inheritance with the great (53:12).

Because that's not the Messiah they expected, most Israelites don't recognize him:

Romans 10:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says,
“Lord, who has believed our message?” [Isaiah 53:1]
¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message,
and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

They need to hear of the message about the Messiah who is the expression of God's faithfulness to them. As Paul put it: *Now, apart from the Torah, God-doing-right has become manifest in the faith[fulness] of Messiah Jesus for all who give him their faith[fulness], so there is no difference between Jew and gentile* (Romans 3:22-23).

Israel's failure to recognize their Messiah is Paul's grief (9:1-5). Non-Jews have been more responsive to God bringing his Messiah to Zion as the foundation stone of heaven's reign over the earth (9:30-32). Paul constantly prays for his people to recognize the salvation God has provided in the Messiah who fulfils everything God began in the Torah (10:1-4).

Actually, it's not true that they haven't heard Jesus being proclaimed as the Messiah. Everywhere Paul went, he took the message to Jews first (Romans 1:16; 2:9-10; Acts 13:46; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4 etc).

In any case, the whole creation speaks of how God governs the world:

Romans 10:18-19 (NIV)

¹⁸ But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did:
“Their voice has gone out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.” [Psalm 19:4]

¹⁹ Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,
“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” [Deut 32:21]

Deuteronomy 32 is the song of Moses, calling the covenant people to remain faithful to their heavenly sovereign:

Deuteronomy 32:15-16, 20-21 (NIV)

¹⁵ They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their Saviour. ¹⁶ They made him jealous with their foreign gods ...

²⁰ “I will hide my face from them,” he said, “and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful.

²¹ **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 by a nation that has no understanding.”

God was not rejecting Israel when he extended the Messiah's rule to gentiles. Just as Israel had been called to be the light of God's presence to the gentiles (Isaiah 49:6), God saving the gentiles was intended to show Israel what they were missing, *to make Israel envious* (Romans 11:11, 14).

Romans 10 concludes by describing the world as Isaiah anticipated it would be:

Romans 10:20-21 (NIV)

²⁰ And Isaiah boldly says,
“I was found by those who did not seek me;
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” [Isaiah 65:1]

²¹ But concerning Israel he says,
“All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people.” [Isaiah 65:2]

The final chapters of Isaiah see the complete restoration of the earth under heaven's reign, *the new heavens and a new earth* (Isaiah 65:7–66:24). This all happens through the servant of the LORD bearing the sin of the world in his own body, and being raised out of death to reign (Isaiah 53).

And yet:

Isaiah 65:1-2 (NIV)

¹ “I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me;
I was found by those who did not seek me.
To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’

² All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people,
who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.

It's a beautiful picture of God revealing himself in Christ, “Here I am! Here I am!” Ironically, the violent nations that oppressed Israel seem more responsive to the good news of the restoration of God's reign on earth than the nation that had already experienced something of God's reign through the Sinai covenant. That's Paul's grief.

2.5 So What?

Imagine Volodymyr Zelenskyy finding a Russian in Ukraine. There'd be an interrogation to discover, "Whose side are you on? Are you working for Russia or Ukraine? Where is your allegiance?" In any war-torn region, that's what matters.

In a world where the nations have suppressed God's sovereignty and substituted it with their own (Romans 1:18-23) and the Jewish people have also been unfaithful to their heavenly sovereign (Romans 2:1–3:20), God has one question for Jews and gentiles: "Where does your faithfulness lie? Do you give your allegiance to the Son I placed in power by raising him from the dead? Who do you call on as your Lord?"

Anyone who genuinely trusts Jesus leadership from the heart is declared to be right with God (justified), saved from the dominion of Sin and Death, into the reign of the Son who defeated Sin by giving his life and overturned Death when he was raised up to reign. The rescue God provided in the Messiah is for everyone—Jew and gentile. There's no difference. Since the same Lord is Lord of all, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:8-13).

There are some who imagine that God must yet fulfil his promises to restore Israel and set his king over them. That's not how Paul sees it. In text after text, Paul makes the point that all God's promises to Israel are fulfilled in the Messiah. When God gave Israel his Law at Sinai, his purpose was always to bring the Messiah into the world, for *Christ is the culmination of the Law* (10:4). Everything the Prophets said about God restoring the kingship are also fulfilled in Christ—for Israel and the nations. *For no matter how many promises God made, they are "Yes" in Christ* (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Don't look at national Israel or current events to see the Scriptures fulfilled. Look at the Messiah. The gospel God promised beforehand through his prophets were about his Son, the physical descendant of King David who was named "Son of the divine ruler with power" by the cleansing Spirit when he raised up King Jesus from the dead. Jesus is therefore our ruler, and we've received his favour—appointing us to call all the nations into trusting obedience under his authority (Romans 1:2-5).

The gospel is the good news that God's king is Lord of all. The gospel calls for faith[fulness] to the Messiah. That's what sets us right with God (justifies), so we do right[eousness]. That's how the gospel sets the world right.

Your thoughts?

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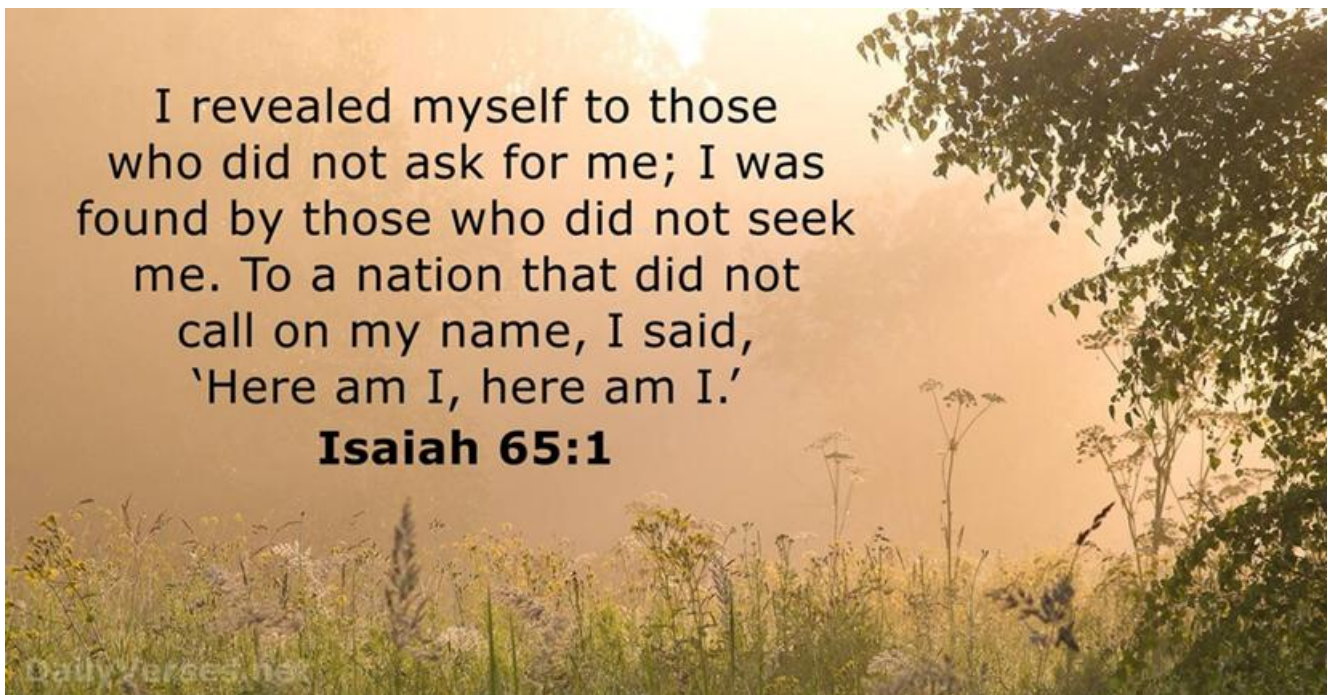
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Tom Wright summarizes these chapters of Romans:

What Paul is doing in 9:6–10:13 is *telling the Torah's own story of Israel*, from the call of Abraham through to the ... *telos*, the 'goal', the 'end' in the sense of 'the moment when, with the covenant renewed, Israel would finally be established as God's people'. *Telos gar nomou Christos*, writes Paul (10:4): the Messiah is the end, the goal, the final destination of Torah. This is where the narrative had been heading all along. Through the Messiah the prophecies have come true, the covenant has been re-established, exile is over, God himself has acted to unveil his faithfulness to his promises, and God's people are now able ... to keep Torah from the heart.⁵



For next week, read Romans 11.

⁵ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1172.

3 God's faithfulness to his people (Romans 11)

All letter long, Paul has been asserting the faithfulness of God. God never gave up on the nation he chose to be his people when he called Abraham. But God never gave up on the rest of the world either. God's choice is God's choice, so in the Messiah's leadership all nations are called to be God's people, as faith[fulness] to him sets the whole world right (Romans 9).

The Messiah was the goal of the Torah (10:1-4). Rather than relying on Torah-compliance to put us right, it's the Messiah who bridges the gap and puts us right with God. Now there is no difference between Jew and gentile: everyone who calls on his name will be saved (10:5-13). Everyone needs to hear so we can all call on him (10:14-21).

Any questions on Romans 9–10 before we proceed to Chapter 11?

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3.1 Israel as a nation today

How does the nation of Israel fit into the purposes of God now that the Messiah has come? That's a huge question today.

For 1800 years, Jews had no homeland. For 2500 years, they had no government of their own. They wandered among the nations, suffering rejection and hostility. Hitler used hatred of the Jews to weaponize support for his Nazi party. After World War II, the nations agreed Palestine should be divided and shared between Palestinians and Jews. Some Jews saw their return as fulfilling the promises God had given the prophets (e.g. Ezekiel 37).

Some Christians saw it that way too, especially Dispensationalists. In this view, history is divided into dispensations (eras), with the current era belonging to the gentiles, before the final era when Christ returns to sit on a throne in Jerusalem to reign over Israel and the nations for 1000 years (a millennium). Combining a literal reading Revelation 20:1-7 with other passages, Dispensationalists expect a rapture, tribulation and war (Armageddon), followed by Christ's return and millennial reign, ending with a great white throne judgment as we go off to heaven. For decades current events were read as all heading towards this conclusion, with some proponents expecting Jesus' return by 1988 (within 40 years of Israel becoming a nation again).⁶

In this view, the return of the Jews to Israel opens the door for Jesus to come back. Consequently, Christians should provide every possible support for Israel so this can happen. This view has been particularly influential in the United States.

There are, of course, many other views of eschatology (study of the end). There are other ways to understand Revelation—as visions God gave John to help the seven churches, rather than as a chart of events that are still future for us and meant little to them. There other ways to understand the Old Testament prophets: as fulfilled in Christ, rather than in national Israel today.

⁶ For example, Hal Lindsay's *The Late Great Planet Earth* sold more than a million copies.

So, what are we to say about national Israel today?

Should we be horrified at how Israel's government mistreats the Palestinians with whom they were supposed to share the land, at how Israel wants to conduct what looks like an ethnic cleansing in Gaza, at its acts as aggression against neighbouring nations, bombing sites in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iran?

Should we support Israel no matter what because they are God's chosen people and Christ's return depends on it? Or should we speak truth to power and call out evil in Israel the way the Old Testament prophets so often did? Or should we get on with promoting Messiah Jesus as the only Saviour for the world, Jew and gentile, the way Paul did? What has God called us to do?

Let's see what Paul has to say.

3.2 Missing the Messiah (11:1-6)

Paul's grief is that his people rejected the Messiah God sent them (Romans 9). But God does not respond by rejecting them. Like Hosea, God is still wooing his unfaithful partner, revealing himself to them in his Anointed. And Paul himself is an example:

Romans 11:1-6 (NIV)

¹ I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

² God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel:

³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? [1 Kings 19:10]

⁴ And what was God's answer to him?

"I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." [1 Kings 19:14]

⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

⁶ And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Elijah lived at the time of the divided kingdom, when Israel (the northern nation). David's descendants still reigned over Judah, but Israel refused the LORD's anointed, appointing their own kings. In Elijah's time, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were replacing the LORD's prophets with ones that promoted the Canaanite god Baal. They'd rejected *the LORD and his Anointed* (Psalm 2:2).

The Israel of Paul's time had also rejected *the LORD and his Anointed*, handing Christ over to be crucified. Paul can relate to Elijah: a lone voice proclaiming the LORD's reign, while his people want to kill him (compare Acts 22:22). Paul takes comfort in God's response to Elijah: a significant minority in Israel had not pledged allegiance to Baal, and a significant minority of Jews had given their allegiance (faith[fulness]) to the Christ in the first century.

That continues to be the case today. Some recognize Jesus as Messiah (Messianic Jews). Others treat Jesus as an ancient teacher or a troublemaker. Many follow the way of life defined in the Talmud (Rabbinic tradition on fulfilling the requirements of the Torah). There are various “denominations” within Judaism (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, etc.).⁷ Perhaps the majority of Jews (like most Australians) do not actively practice a faith.

So, how are we, as Christians, to relate to them?

Romans 11:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened,

⁸ as it is written:

“God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day.” [Deuteronomy 29:4]

Deuteronomy 29 was Moses’ call for the second generation of the nation of Israel to commit to the covenant with the LORD. The first generation saw God delivering them from Pharaoh, providing for them in the wilderness, preserving them when attacked. Yet they did not inherit the land God had promised his chosen people, because their hearts were hard, i.e. they would not trust the LORD to lead them in.

Now they’ve done it again: refusing to trust the Messiah God provided to save them. Jesus often compared his generation to the unfaithful generation that refused God’s leadership (e.g. Matthew 11:16; 12:39-45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36).

King David had the same frustration. In Psalm 69, David complains to the LORD as he tried to lead God’s people. He felt engulfed (v. 2), abused (v. 4), shamed (v. 7), insulted (v. 9), sinking to the depths (v. 15). He called on God to take his side (vv. 13-18), to give his unfaithful people what they deserved (vv. 21-28). Specifically:

Romans 11:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ And David says:

“May their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

¹⁰ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,
and their backs be bent forever.” [Psalm 69:22-23]

David’s prayer is a curse on his people, calling on God to give his people what they deserve. That’s justice as we expect it. That’s how justice operated under the Torah. The connection with Deuteronomy 29:4 is *eyes that are darkened/cannot see*. The result is *their backs were bent* in service to other nations instead of participating in God’s reign through his Anointed.

It’s no surprise, therefore, that Israel refused the son of David God sent to save his people. As their king, Jesus bore the insults of his people on their behalf (Psalm 69:9, quoted in Romans 13:3). But as Jesus suffered at the hands of his people, he did not call down a curse on this injustice. He called on the heavenly court to forgive them, to release them from their enslavement to evil (Luke 23:34).

⁷ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-jewish-denominations/> accessed 2025-07-15.

Even though most of Israel remained unfaithful, King Jesus' prayer stands before the throne, calling for their release and the release of the nations they colluded with:

Romans 11:11 (NIV)

¹¹ Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

Even today, 2000 years later, the Jewish people are not beyond God's salvation. The name *Jesus* (*Yeshua* or *Joshua* in Hebrew) means "the LORD saves." He was born to *save his people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21).

The unfaithfulness of God's chosen people does not mean that God's project to save the world through them has failed. But some of the tribes barely exist at all in the census of 1 Chronicles 2–9. They were intermingled with the nations when Assyria settled other nations in the region of Samaria (2 Kings 17:24). Consequently, if God wants to save all the tribes of Israel, he'll need to save gentiles as well. That's the history behind Paul's assertion that *because of their transgression, salvation has come to the gentiles* as God raised him up to reign over all the peoples of the earth.

Moses' song in Deuteronomy 32 lamented Israel's unfaithfulness, with God saying in verse 21, "I will make them **envious** by those who are not a people." Paul quoted that statement in the previous chapter (Romans 10:19). Paul's prayer for his people is that, as they see the nations coming under the authority of the Jewish Messiah, it will move them to recognize the one whom God sent to save them.

The salvation of God's people is what Paul expects:

Romans 11:12 (NIV)

¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!

The inclusion of the Jewish people into the reign of the Messiah is what God intends. Paul expects every knee will bow, and every tongue will acknowledge that Messiah Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:11). If God raised his Messiah out of death to reign over his people, God is able resurrect *the twelve tribes*, even the ones that effectively died out (Acts 26:7-8). We anticipate God saving the whole world in Christ—Jew and gentile.

As Phoebe reads Paul's letter to the house churches in Rome, she turns her eyes to the gentiles. Paul calls them to treat the Jewish believers with value and hope:

Romans 11:13-16 (NIV)

¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Israel as a nation died 500+ years before Jesus. “Dry bones” was how Ezekiel saw them. “*Can these dry bones live?*” God asked him after Assyria had destroyed Israel and Babylon had captured Judah (Ezekiel 37:3). God promised to resurrect both parts of the divided kingdom: “*There will be one king over them and they will never again be two nations or divided into two kingdoms... My servant David will be king over them, and they will have one shepherd*” (Ezekiel 37:22, 24).

It was when God resurrected the Messiah that the dead nation of Israel/Judah was raised to life. God's Messiah gave his life for and to his people, the unified kingdom that comes to life in him. Some see the rebirth of Israel as a nation in 1948 as the fulfilment of Ezekiel 37, but modern Israel is not a kingdom with a Davidic king; it's a democracy with a Knesset (parliament). The kingdom of God was reborn in the resurrection of the Messiah.

Jesus is *the descendant of David* promised in the Scriptures, now enthroned as *the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead*. The nations are now called to give him *the obedience that comes through faith[fulness]*, so that all believers together are God's *loved and holy people, in the Lord Jesus the Messiah* (Romans 1:1-6).

Paul's gospel gives a very different answer to the question raised by the Jewish apocalyptic literature regarding how God would deal with the gentiles in order to restore his people. Paul's answer is that Israel's transgression resulted in God including the gentiles in the Messiah's leadership. God never rejected his people: he included them—and the nations—in the reborn kingdom of God that exists in the authority of the resurrected Messiah.

3.3 Grafting the nations into what God planted (11:17-24)

The pastoral application for the gentile believers is to honour the Jewish people God's planting to bring salvation to the world:

Romans 11:17-18 (NIV)

¹⁷ If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,
¹⁸ do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.



Grafted fruit tree

This is a beautiful image of the relationship between Jews and gentiles. We started out as separate family trees, but God has grafted us all into the Messiah as a single tree under God's cultivation. Since we share his life, we can't disparage each other without hurting ourselves and damaging what God is growing in Christ.

The image of Israel as the planting of the LORD begins at the Red Sea. God freed them from Pharaoh and Moses declared, “*You will bring them in and **plant** them on the mountain of your inheritance*” (Exodus 15:17).

But the vine God transplanted from Egypt was torn down when Assyria destroyed Israel (Psalm 80:8-19) and Babylon captured Judah (Isaiah 5:1-7). Although they were unfaithful, God remained faithful, promising to plant his people again with a new covenant:

Jeremiah 31:27-28, 31 (NIV)

²⁷ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will **plant** the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with the offspring of people and of animals. ²⁸ Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to **plant**,” declares the LORD. ...

³¹ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a **new covenant** with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.”

The New Testament sees Christ as the one who established the new covenant that restored his Father's kingdom (Mark 14:24; Hebrews 7:22–9:28). This new covenant gives the Messiah kingship over the whole earth. So now, gentiles who *were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise ... are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household* (Ephesians 2:12, 19).

Israel was God's vine, but who was the *root* of the kingdom? After the kingdom fell, God gave this promise:

Isaiah 11:1-2, 5 (NIV) (compare Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16)

¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his **roots** a Branch will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him ... ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The kingdom exists in the king. Jesse (David's father) was the root of the kingship God appointed, but that kingdom was cut down. God promised that another king would sprout from David's family line, the **anointed** of the LORD who would set things *right* through his *faithfulness*.

Paul says God's *righteousness* has been revealed in the *faithfulness* of the Messiah (Romans 3:21-26). That is astoundingly good news, for when God sent the Messiah to his people, they were *unfaithful* to him (betraying him). The city would fall with its unfaithful leaders (Luke 21:6, 20) as those who attempted to cut the Messiah from God's vine would find they were cut out of his vine (John 15:1-4).

The Messiah is not only the *Branch* from David's line, he's the **Root** of the kingdom God planted when he established the heavens and the earth (Revelation 5:5; 22:16).

That's the point Paul makes in verse 17-18. It's the Messiah whose life supports the vine—both the natural and grafted branches—so no branch should consider itself superior to the others who share in his life.

Paul explains the analogy further:

Romans 11:19-24 (NIV)

¹⁹ You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.”

²⁰ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

²² Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

The natural branches are the physical descendants of the twelve tribes. The wild branches are people of other nations who have been grafted into the Messiah by giving him their allegiance (faith). The point is that God has not rejected his people; he is more than willing to graft the Jewish people back into the Messiah where they belong if they will give him their loyalty (faith) instead of persisting in unbelief (unfaithfulness to the Messiah).

3.4 How “all Israel” will be rescued (11:25-32)

Romans 11:25-27 (NIV)

²⁵ I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, ²⁶ and in this way **all Israel** will be saved. As it is written:

“The deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.” [Isaiah 59:20-21]

²⁷ And

“This is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”
[Jeremiah 31:33-34]

What did Paul mean by saying, *In this way all Israel will be saved?* (verse 26)

- Some believe that all Jews will be converted to Christianity at some point that is still future for us. If this era is *the times of the gentiles* (Luke 21:24), one day God will say, “The full number of Gentiles has now come in,” and remove the hardness of heart from the Jews so they can all recognize Jesus as Messiah.
- Others believe that “Israel” is redefined as the kingdom that now exists in the Messiah. Paul said, *Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel* (9:6). Unfaithful branches are pruned, and wild branches grafted in. God’s “Israel” (kingdom, nation, people, vine) now consists of all who give allegiance to the Messiah and are therefore the kingdom of God rescued in him.

The quotations from Isaiah and Jeremiah help us understand what Paul means.

Isaiah promised a *deliverer* who would rescue his people from the exile. God would put on his armour and come to them to save them (Isaiah 59:16-17), and the nations would see the light of his reign (Isaiah 60:1-3).

Jeremiah promised that God's reign would be re-established by a new covenant characterized by heart-faithfulness rather than Torah-obedience. As discussed above, the New Testament understands Jeremiah 31 as fulfilled in Christ.

It's in the Messiah that the people-of-God are now defined. As Paul said elsewhere, *Those who have faith are the children of Abraham*. It's in the Messiah that the seed of Abraham is named, so *there is neither Jew nor gentile ... for you are all one in Messiah Jesus* (Galatians 3:7, 15-19, 28).

This is what Paul has been saying from the start (Romans 1–3): our heavenly sovereign has remained faithful to his people even when Israel and the nations proved unfaithful.

Romans 11:28-32 (NIV)

²⁸ As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, ²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³² For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

The goal is therefore to function as one unified people in the Messiah, regardless of whether we were Jewish or gentile when we came to faith in the Messiah.

3.5 Theology leads to doxology (11:33-36)

Studying God (theology) leads to praising God (doxology):

Romans 11:33-36 (NIV)

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counsellor?" [Isaiah 40:13]

³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?" [Job 41:11]

³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

God's wisdom is off the scale. As ruler over a world that rebelled against his authority, our heavenly sovereign has found a path for the restoration of his people into his reign through the cross of the Messiah. What God did is astounding, unheard of!

The prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow (1 Peter 1:10-11). **Isaiah** may have provided counsel to

earthly kings, but even he could not understand all God had in mind, let alone offer wisdom on how God might resolve the human condition.

Job did try to take God to court over how he was running the world. Job wasn't from the Israel's tribes, but from another land (Job 1:1). He believed people should get what they deserve, but that wasn't his experience. His friends believed the same thing, but could make no sense of Job's case. When God finally meets with him, God overturned Job's understanding of justice: "Who says I owe you anything? Why do you think I must repay you for what you do?"

Now, there's a radical thought. In the beginning, God protected Cain from the family who thought Cain should die for killing his brother (Genesis 4:15-16). Later, God conceded a justice system based on retribution (Genesis 9:5). God gave the same concession to Israel (Exodus 21:24). But when the Messiah came, he insisted that this is not how God wants us to live because it's not what God does (Matthew 5:38-48). As Paul is about to tell us, justice belongs to God, and he wants us to give restoration, not retribution (Romans 12:17).

This is really significant. We may need to rethink some of our theologies of atonement if we based them on retribution, as if God demanded that someone had to die.

3.6 So What?

What other questions do you have in response to Romans 9–11?

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After listening to Romans 9–11, what's your understanding of the relationship God wants Jews and gentiles to have? How do we who believe Jesus is the Messiah represent his leadership to all his people?

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How do we represent our Lord to people who do not share his ethnicity? Palestinians for example? Bethlehem is in Palestinian territory, and—like many in Gaza today—Jesus' family had to flee to save his life (Matthew 2:13). How do we embody his teaching on how his people should treat their neighbours? (Luke 10:29-37)



Bethlehem Bible College entrance.
Photo: Allen Browne, 2017.

For next week, read Romans 12.

4 Living as God's people (Romans 12)

What does it look like to live the gospel? If the gospel is the good news that God has raised up his Son as Lord of all, what kind of community lives under his leadership? Romans 12–16 answers that question.

Romans 1–8 explained the faithfulness of God: God-doing-right by providing his Christ to lead Israel and the nations back into his leadership. This good news calls us to give him our faithfulness, and out of faithfulness to him the world is set right in the Messiah and does right by God. God's solution to evil is: faith[fulness] => right[eousness].

Romans 9–11 then began describing this new community in the Messiah. It's no longer the people of God versus the nations of the world. Although many in Israel rejected God's Messiah, God never rejected them. What he did was to expand the definition of "the people of God" to include the nations who give their allegiance to God's Anointed. So "the people of God" are now defined by being in the Messiah rather than in Jacob's family tree. The nations need to hear this good news, and that's what Paul is doing.

Any questions on Romans 9–11 before we proceed to Chapter 12?

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4.1 A new kind of community (12:1-2)

Since God has redefined the world in Christ, Jews and gentiles live together as one people in the Messiah. That's the essence of Romans 12–16. The *therefore* at the start of Chapter 12 indicates this is a consequence of everything in the first book so far:

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

These verses are favourites. We hear them quoted, preached, and taught in so many settings. God's mercy. Our bodies. Living sacrifices. Pleasing God. Worship. Renewed minds. God's will. What stand outs for you?

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Much of the teaching on this text is individual: my relationship with God, my worship, my mind, God's will for me. That's part of the story for every believer. But this way of thinking follows the pattern of the world where everything revolves around me.

The *you* is plural, like *brothers and sisters* and *bodies*. **God's mercy** is not just saving me; the astounding response of our heavenly sovereign to the world that killed his Son is rescuing the world in his Anointed, raising him out of death to reign over us. We who have faith in his leadership are called to do what Jesus did: offering our bodies as a gift to God also.

For the Jewish believers in Rome, this was a shocking thought. The Torah defined who could offer sacrifices and what gifts would be *holy and pleasing to God*. Eleven of Israel's twelve tribes could not offer sacrifices, and gentiles were not allowed anywhere near the holy altar because they would defile it. That would be invalid and improper worship.

But Paul's gospel says that what God has done in Christ has completely reframed the people of God. It's no longer Jacob's physical descendants who are the holy family (9:6-8). God has grafted the peoples of other nations into his holy people (11:17-24), so all the recipients of Paul's letter are *loved by God and called his holy people* (1:7).

Everyone who calls Jesus Lord (because God raised him from the dead) is rescued from the defiled world (10:9-13), children reborn into God's holy family by the Spirit, and therefore heirs of God's promises that are fulfilled in the Messiah (8:14-17).

That makes us *brothers and sisters* in Father's family, priests who respond to our Lord by doing as he did: *offering our bodies* as sacrificial gifts to God, for the rescue of the world. Whether we're Jewish or gentile, such gifts are *holy and pleasing to God*.

Offering ourselves to God is our *true and appropriate worship*. Churches often think of *worship* as singing songs. A "worship" team leads the worship (i.e. the singing), and that's a big part of what we do when we gather. Singing in church is rarely mentioned in the New Testament.

In fact, the word *worship* here could just as well be translated as *service*. (NASB, KJV, ASV, AMP, CEB, GNB). Offering our bodies to God each day is how we *serve* God as our heavenly sovereign. When Israel was enslaved to Pharaoh, they served him by showing up for work each day—offering their bodies to him in service. In the same way, the world was enslaved to Sin, but in Christ we have been set free to serve our true sovereign. So we don't show up to work for Sin anymore; we offer ourselves as a gift to God in his service because we've given our allegiance to his Messiah (6:16-22). What we do for God is *our true and appropriate service* because he's earth's true and appropriate sovereign.

Your thoughts on verse 1?

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This way of thinking reshapes us as humans. Instead of being *moulded to the culture this present age* expects of us, we'll have *a new way of thinking*, one that leads us to *experiment with and enjoy* what God has always intended the world to be: *his good, pleasing, perfect will* for his earthly realm (verse 2).

That needs unpacking. What aspects of the present era are still shaping us? What new ways of thinking will shape us as God intends, rebuilding us as a family doing what our Father approves? Everything in this chapter addresses that question: living for community rather than self (verses 3-8), and giving love instead of getting even (verses 9-21). That's what God in Christ is doing to restore the world.

4.2 Organic life in Christ (12:3-8)

Romans 12:3-5 (NIV)

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less. It's not comparing yourself to everyone; it's discovering the God-gifting in everyone.

The pattern of this age is self-promotion, living my best life, being my best self.

The renewed mind values the contribution each person makes to the community that exists in the Messiah's leadership. God is weaving us into a living tapestry that's so much richer than the beauty of any individual thread. The vibrancy of God's handiwork is the love each thread shows for the others, since we're in Christ together.

That doesn't mean suppressing your strengths; it means offering what God has given you to enhance how the community functions in Christ:

Romans 12:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.
If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;
⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach;
⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement;
if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently;
if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

The New Testament has three lists of gifts: gifts from God (here), gifts from Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13), and gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). You can flatten them into a single list, but it's better to read each list as part of the story in its context. In Romans 12, the point is that God has not cut us out so we're all the same. Each of us has a natural bent that represents part of the creativity of God. None of us has it all, but in contributing our bit to the whole we hear the richness of God's music among us.

Everyone in the Christ-community has the Messiah's Spirit (8:9), so everyone can **prophesy**. But some are especially gifted to hear what God is saying (the word of the LORD) or to see what God is doing (visionary insight/dream) and to declare it so the people of God recognize what God is calling us to do in this moment.

In the same way, we all **serve** each other, but for some this is a calling.

We all **teach** each other, but some empower people to do as God instructs.

We all **encourage**, but some are gifted to lift people up and cheer them on.

We all **contribute**, but some embody God's generosity.

We all **lead**, but some are gifted to see how each person contributes and diligently use that skill so we work well together.

We all reflect God's heart of **mercy**, but some are gifted with empathy.

One way to look at these gifts is to see how we naturally respond when something happens that we didn't expect. Imagine I asked for a glass of water, and the person who brought it dropped the glass, so we have broken glass and water everywhere. How do you react?

- a) The *prophet* is calling for another glass of water.
- b) The *server* has found a broom and mop, before anyone gets glass in their feet or slips on the wet floor.
- c) The *teacher* is figuring out how this happened, so we can all learn from it.
- d) The *encourager* is lifting the person up, so they won't feel useless in front of everyone.
- e) The *giver* has found another glass of water to replace the one that was lost.
- f) The *leader* sees what everyone is doing, helping everyone fulfil their gifting.
- g) The *mercy* person is giving the person a hug, so they feel included instead of embarrassed.

It's the same event, but we all reacted differently. We're so much richer together than any one of us is on our own.

How do you know what your gifting is? It's what you do naturally, what brings you joy, where you find fulfilment. It's also the feedback you get from the community.

The reason I'm teaching is not only that I love doing so; it's that the feedback from the community over years is that this is what I do best.

What about you? What has helped you discover your giftings? And what has hindered you from using them?

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4.3 Doing right by each other (12:9-16)

Through faith in the Messiah, God sets us right with himself and with each other. So, out of faithfulness to him, we do right by God and by each other. But that's a process: we're still discovering how to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God each day. We're still renewing our minds, so as not to follow the pattern of the age that centres everything around me. We're still learning how to honour God by using the gifts he has given us to benefit everyone.

Because we're all still learning to live as the community of the Christ, there will be times when we're not treated right. What do we do then?

Romans 12:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.

Sincere love doesn't pretend things are fine. Sincere love hates how evil seeks to control people, since serving Christ not like serving the old tyrant called Sin (6:11-14). We've learned to preserve ourselves through fight-or-flight responses, but sincere love doesn't react by trying to control the person (fight) or by rejecting the person as toxic (flight). Without pretending the evil is okay, love seeks for the good we have in common with the person so we can hold on to that.

Do you find that challenging? How do we do what verse 9 asks us to do in practice?

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Living in a family calls us to remain lovingly devoted to people who sometimes hurt us with their selfishness or uncaring ways. That's what *be devoted* (in verse 10) means:

philostorgoi ... expresses familial affection, an attachment sealed by nature and blood ties, uniting spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters.⁸

Can you remain lovingly affectionate to people who may hurt us?

Can we honour them above ourselves (compare Philippians 2:4)?

Romans 12:11-13 (NIV)

¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

How do we sustain this kind of loving community without running out of steam? What stops you from becoming cynical and withdrawing to save yourself from being hurt? What keeps your spirit on the boil? How do you keep the focus on who you're serving?

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Who are *the Lord's people in need* in your life? What can you do about it?

How do you decide which needs to respond to when there are so many?

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In our world, *hospitality* is an industry: pubs, clubs, cafés, hotels, B&Bs, etc.

How do we *practice hospitality*? What's the significance of eating together?

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⁸ Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 3:462.

Romans 12:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

Persecute sounds like a religious word to us, but in Paul's language it meant simply to pursue, to hunt down. He just used this word to say, *Pursue hospitality*. (12:13). He used it previously to say *the nations did not pursue righteousness, but the people of Israel pursued the law as the path to righteousness but did not attain their goal* (9:30-31). Later he says, *Pursue peace* (14:19).

People may be hunting you down for many reasons. It could be religious (Acts 8:1-3), or scoundrels may be hunting you down to get some payment out of you even if they're not entitled to it. Justice is not always done.

So how do you respond if someone is pursuing you to take advantage of you? What might it mean to *bless* them rather than *cursing* them? How do you feel about that?

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At the heart of Paul's teaching is always what Jesus did. Sometimes Jesus withdrew when people were hunting him down (e.g. Matthew 2:22; 4:12; 12:14-15; 14:13). But ultimately he had come to face the trouble and oppression humanity had brought on itself by disregarding God as sovereign over the world. Instead of reacting to violence with violence, he shouldered it in his own body for our sake, to rescue us from the tyranny of Sin and Death.

That's the example we follow. That's the call to *offer your bodies as a living sacrifice* also (12:1), to break the mindset of climbing on top of others for personal advantage, replacing it with the mindset of loving and serving people just as Jesus fulfilled God's will by loving and serving us (12:2). That's the *sincere love* that hates how evil crushes people, but never lets go of the good work God is doing by restoring us in Christ (12:9).

So just as Jesus came to shoulder our joys and our pains to make peace, that's how we live under his leadership:

Romans 12:15-16 (NIV)

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Your thoughts?

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4.4 Doing right by those who do wrong (12:17-21)

Instead of giving us what we deserved when the world killed his Son, God remained faithful to his earthly realm, doing right and calling us to give our loyalty (faith) to him. The community under Jesus' leadership is therefore called to stop doing harm to each other. We're to treat each other the way God treated us in Christ, and leave justice for God to sort out:

Romans 12:17-21 (NIV)

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written:

"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. [Deuteronomy 32:35]

²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

[Proverbs 25:21-22]

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This text challenges my understanding of how justice should be implemented. Our goals are different to God's: we want people to get what they deserve, where God wants people to be restored to him.

The contrast between God's concept of justice and ours begins in Genesis 4. When Cain murdered Abel, the family thought Cain should die for his crime. God blocked their idea of justice: *The LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him* (Genesis 4:15). Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, founding a city where people enforce their own justice (4:23-24). In worshipping warriors, our humanness is corrupted, and everything is destroyed (6:4-13).

After the flood, violence was the one theme God confronted. He permitted killing animals, but insisted we give him an account for every human life. God authorized the community to take a killer's life (Genesis 9:1-6). This is a concession, to limit violence. It's not what God himself did in the beginning. The nations then misuse this God-given authority to take lives, introducing war as the means to build their kingdoms (10:8-12). In the world Paul wrote to, Rome was the ultimate war machine.

So that was the nature of nations when the LORD established Israel through the Sinai covenant. God had authorized the nations to take a life for a life, so that's what he did for Israel also. Retribution is foundational to justice throughout the Torah:

Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:18-20; Deuteronomy 19:21 (NIV)

Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Consequently, this view of justice pervades the Old Testament. Prophets declare that God would give Jerusalem and the nations what they deserve (e.g. Jeremiah 21:13; 51:6). Psalms call down violent retribution (e.g. 137:8-9). Wisdom books see God giving retribution (Proverbs 22:23). But the Wisdom books also acknowledge that life doesn't

always work like this (Job; Ecclesiastes 8:14). The Psalms hint at God *stilling the avenger* (8:2). And the Prophets speak of another covenant when God reforms relationship with this people by renewing their minds and transforming their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).

So, what's the same and what's different in the new covenant in Christ?

Jesus did not come to scrap the Torah, but to fulfil it for his people (Matthew 5:17-20). He interpreted the Torah's prohibition of murder as God calling us to love people rather than seeking justice through human means (5:21-26). He interpreted the Torah's prohibition of adultery as a call to faithfulness to each other in deeds and words (5:27-37). Then Jesus challenged the basis of justice in the Torah:

Matthew 5:38-40 (NIV)

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, '*Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.*'

³⁹ "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well."

Jesus just challenged the entire basis of justice in the Torah's legal system. It's hard to overestimate how radical this was for Jesus' audience on the mountainside, and how radical this is for us today.

Although God authorized Israel to use retribution as the basis of justice in their nation—as he had done for the nations before them—this was never God's view of justice. It's not how justice is to function in the kingdom of God under the Messiah's leadership.

The King orders his people not to give evil people what we think they deserve. Specifically, do not return violence with violence. And if the legal systems of this world sue you to take the shirt off your back, give them the coat that will leave you vulnerable to the cold and threaten your very survival rather than give them what you think they deserve.

Jesus anchors this view of justice in what God does, how God treats people:

Matthew 5:44-48 (paraphrased)

⁴⁴ "I'm telling you to love your enemies, and respond by praying when they hunt you down. ⁴⁵ Then you'll be children with your Father's view of justice—the Father who makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and who sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

⁴⁶ "If you only love those who love you, what reward do you expect? Even the Mafia treat their family that way! ... ⁴⁸ I'm calling you to love completely, the way your heavenly Father does."

The human view of justice is based on carrots and sticks (rewards and punishment) to get people to do right and not to do wrong. God's view of justice is to set right everything that been wrong, restoring all the broken pieces in the Messiah. That's *the mercies of God* Paul spoke of in verse 1. God's goal is not counting people's failures so as to give them retribution; God's goal is to redeem creation from enslavement to Sin and Death, undoing the mess we were born into by faith (i.e. calling us to faith[fulness] to the Messiah). It's in him that God restores justice to the earth.

And that's exactly how Paul expects justice to work in the community of the Messiah: not retribution (evil-for-evil) but a community doing good to baddies:

Romans 12:17 (NIV)

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil.

Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

Retribution is a cycle: you hurt me, so I hurt you, so you hurt me, so ... As Ghandi put it, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" ends up with everyone blind and toothless.

The real challenge is to respond like this when others don't. God doesn't hold you responsible for the other person's actions or reactions:

Romans 12:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

That's so freeing! God doesn't force them to do right, so don't take that on yourself to try to make them behave right either. Trust God's peace-making process, and leave enforcing justice to God:

Romans 12:19-20 (NIV)

¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends,
but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written:

"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. [Deuteronomy 32:35]

²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." [Proverbs 25:21-22]

It's not clear how blessing an enemy with hospitality could be *heaping burning coals on their head*. Perhaps our very generosity presses the issue of whether there's any genuineness in them (as in 1 Corinthians 3:15), or it may bring them to shame.

Either way, the issue of rewards and punishments belongs to God alone. We have no business in giving people what we think they deserve. We're agents of God's grace, not agents of retribution.

Instead, we're overturning evil by reacting with the opposite spirit:

Romans 12:21 (NIV)

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Your thoughts? How practical is it to live like this? Will this vision of justice work? Will it change the world?

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4.5 So What?

Could Mechelle Turvey serve an example of living this sense of justice rather than revenge in Western Australia? See: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-06-28/cassius-turvey-murder-sentencing-mechelle-turvey-analysis/105469684>

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Many justice warriors use the kingdom of God as the basis for calling the rulers of this world to change their stance, to give justice to the poor and oppressed. Is that what we're called to do? Are we—like the prophets of the Old Testament—called to speak truth to power, demanding the present rulers to give us justice? Or does the kingdom of God in Christ call us to embody a different kind of justice, one that's not based on people getting what they deserve? How does the application of the gospel in Romans 12–16 shape what we're called to do as the people who live under Jesus' reign?

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There are many ways to describe how Christ made atonement between God and humans, heaven and earth. But we may need to rethink any theories of atonement that rely on human views of retribution. We think, "someone had to pay" or "someone had to die" but does these phrases represent how God thinks about justice? Do some of our ideas about atonement need to be replaced with views that accord with God's view of justice and his restoration of the world?

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For next week, read Romans 13–14.

5 Living in the world (Romans 13–14)

So how do we live the gospel reality that Jesus Christ is Lord? Romans 13 guides us to live in the present world where authorities and neighbours do not yet recognize Christ as Lord. Then Romans 14 guides us to live well with those who do recognize Christ as Lord but have different beliefs and practices.

Paul's gospel application started in Romans 12. In chapters 1–8, Paul explained God's faithfulness in providing the Messiah. God calls us to respond with faithfulness to his Messiah. That faith that sets us right, so we do right. In chapters 9–11, Paul explained how the nations have been incorporated into the people of God in the Messiah, while many from Israel have not believed the message of the Messiah.

Any questions on previous chapters before we begin?

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5.1 In the world that doesn't recognize Christ (Romans 13)

How are Christians to relate to the rulers and governments of this world? God raised up Messiah Jesus as our Lord, *appointing him the Son of God in power by raising him from the dead* (Romans 1:4). So if Jesus is Lord, does that mean Caesar is not? ⁹

Or are Christians dual citizens? Do we serve Jesus in our spiritual lives, and the government in our physical lives? Christians take different sides on these questions.

Shall we see what Romans says?

Romans 13:1-5 (NIV)

¹ Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.



⁹ For a discussion of this issue, see Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica. *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (IVP Academic, 2013).

Many practical questions arise from this text:

- If *there is no authority except what God established* (verse 1), does God put tyrants like Hitler, Nero, or Nebuchadnezzar in power?
- If *rebellious against the authority is rebellious against God* (verse 2), should we obey orders even when they're evil (such as genocide)?
- If God has authorized rulers to *bear the sword* (verse 4), is it okay for Christians to join the armed forces and fight in war?

What do you think this text means for us?

Let's put the text in context. So far in Romans, we've heard a great deal about the Torah, the Law God gave to the nation of Israel in the Sinai covenant. But Romans 13 is the first time we've considered Roman law, gentile law.

Rome was proud of her legal system. *Iustitia* (or *Justitia*) was the goddess who guided justice. We get the word "justice" from her name. She was depicted with scales (weighing judicial matters), a blindfold (showing no partiality), and sometimes a sword (punishing evildoers).

When Rome conquered people, they told them they were lucky to have the Roman peace and justice (*Pax Romana* and *Iustitia*) ruling over them. This was Rome's "gospel"—the good news she proclaimed that Caesar was Lord of all because the gods had raised him up to rule the world.

Caesar's blasphemous "gospel" and his claim to be a god were offensive to Jews. They yearned for a different gospel: the good news that YHWH would save them from the nations and restore his reign over them (Isaiah 52:7). But they also believed that YHWH was the source of every authority. If Nebuchadnezzar was ruling Jerusalem, they'd say, "*The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory*" (Daniel 2:37).



When God made humans in his image, he authorized us to represent heaven's government on earth, but not to rule each other (Genesis 1:26-28). After the flood, God authorized the community to execute justice (Genesis 9:6).¹⁰ Nations then formed on the basis of the communal authority God had given (Genesis 10). That's the basis for Paul's statement *that there is no authority except that which God has established*.¹¹

So, what does this mean for us as Christians? God's gospel ("Jesus is Lord") will bring the world under his authority in the end. But right now we're living in the awkward space where not everyone recognizes him as Lord. We still need human governments handling matters of justice. When no one is in power, it's anarchy and the bullies take over. That's not our message. We're called to recognize the authorities established by God to prevent violence taking over his world.

But Scripture also shows that people can't handle the authority God gives them. It was true in the time of the Judges. It was true of Israel's kings: Saul, David, Solomon, and

¹⁰ <https://www.yaeshahar.com/noah-law-stability-lessons-cataclysm/> accessed 2025-08-02.

¹¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Zondervan, 2004), 661.

the kings of the divided kingdom (Israel and Judah). It was true of the nations as they banded together to try to take over God's world (Genesis 11). Power corrupts. The kingdoms are ruled by beasts (Daniel 7). From Pharaoh to Pilate to the wars of our time, humans take power by crushing their enemies. The world needs a Saviour.

God has authorized human government, but we're not saying that God puts individuals in power. Verse 4 is better understood as referring to the office of government rather than the individual in government. Tom Wright translates:

Romans 13:4 (The Bible for Everyone)

It is God's servant, you see, for you and your good. But if you do evil, be afraid; the sword it carries is no empty gesture. It is God's servant, you see: an agent of justice to bring his anger on evildoers.

Nero was Emperor when Paul wrote these words. Within ten years, Nero turned against Christians, killing Paul, Peter and many others. While God authorized government, the text is not saying that God chose Nero, or Hitler, or any other brute.

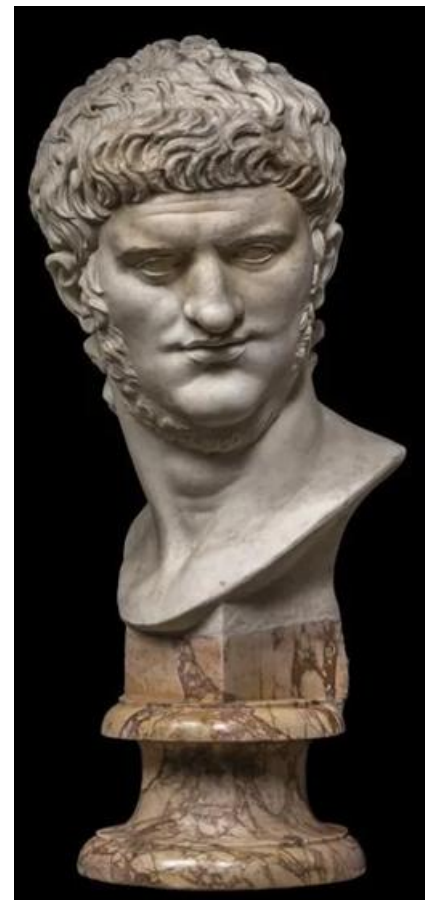
What does *bearing the sword* mean? Some have used it to justify war,¹² but verse 4 is about *bringing punishment on the wrongdoer*. God authorized taking a murderer's life (Genesis 9:6), but that's not war. War began as warriors misused the authority to kill, turning it into a means to build their kingdoms (Genesis 10:8-12).

Scripture has a conflicted view of human governments. They're necessary to limit evil, though rulers do evil like the rest of us. Heaven has appointed only one leader to save the world (Acts 4:12). All others are transitional: authorized by God for our good until every knee bows to Messiah Jesus.

Our calling is therefore to promote God's Christ, not to bring down the flawed governments that currently rule us. We're not rebels rising up to overthrow our leaders (verse 2); that only creates another flawed government. We fear their authority and obey their laws whenever we can—not only to avoid their punishment but as a matter of maintaining a good conscience before God (verse 5).

There may be times when our allegiance to God and our allegiance to government clash. If King Jesus commands us to love our enemies and the government conscripts me to kill those it defines as enemies, there's no question where my primary loyalty lies. As Peter said to the authorities in Jerusalem, "*Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to listen to him? You be the judges!*" (Acts 4:19). Yes, I'll be subject to the judgement of the earthly authority, rather than do wrong by God.

Does this approach make sense of our responsibility to the rulers of this world while maintaining our trust in Jesus as Lord of all? Your thoughts?



Sculpture of Nero (British Museum)

¹² See "Just-war tradition and the theologian" in Daryl J. Charles and Timothy J. Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity: Questions and Answers from a Just-War Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

If the authorities are God's servants, then helping them fund the services they provide is a privilege, not an imposition:¹³

Romans 13:6-7 (NIV)

⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.

Tax collectors in Palestine were regarded as traitors: financing the Roman occupation, preventing Israel being restored as a kingdom of God. But Paul believes the kingdom of God arrived when God raised up Jesus Christ as our Lord, appointing him as the Son of God in power, so God is calling the nations to the obedience that comes from trusting his leadership (1:4-5). While that's happening, we recognize existing governments as God-appointed, and we help them finance the services they provide to the community. We might disagree with some of their funding decisions, but we're to pay our taxes and give them the honour due to the office they hold.

Are you glad to pay taxes and honour politicians? Or does that bother you?

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As gospel people, our primary mode of life is to love people:

Romans 13:8-10 (NIV)

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," [Exodus 20:13-17] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." [Leviticus 19:18]

¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbour.

Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Debt is a big deal in our culture. Economics is at the heart of our sense of value—personal and political. To keep growing the economy, we need to keep spending more, so growing debt feeds the economy. We borrow money to make money, because making money is the point of life in our culture.

In the honour/shame culture of the ancient world, life was more about relationships. The Torah said, "Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight" (Leviticus 19:13). It went on to call them to take care of their neighbours the same way they take care of themselves (19:18).

That's the *debt of love* we always have, the obligation we can never fully discharge. If you love your partner, you won't be unfaithful. If you love your enemies, you won't kill them. If you love your neighbour, you'll provide for them rather than steal from them. If you value people rather than property, you won't covet their things. Loving neighbours creates the community God always intended us to be.

¹³ For a humorous comparison: <https://allenbrowne.blog/2020/08/19/jesus-did-refer-to-himself-as-a-king/>

Love turns prohibitions into possibilities. All the “*Thou shalt not ...*” laws boil down to “do no harm to your neighbour.” Therefore, *love is the fulfilment of the law* (verse 10).

The Messiah’s self-giving love permeates the community under his leadership. As people recognize him as Lord, earth is transformed into what God intended it to be. This is how we’re called to live in the present, in anticipation of that day:

Romans 13:11-14 (NIV)

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time:

The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

A new day dawned for the earth when God raised his Messiah out of death, calling the world to recognize his Christ as our Lord, *the Son of God in power* (1:4). In baptism we were *buried with Christ into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the death through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life* (6:4).

The dark reign of Sin and Death is almost over. Heaven’s reign dawns over the earth. So, it makes no sense to offer ourselves in the service of Sin and Death anymore; *rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness* (6:13).

That’s how God saves the world: we do right (*righteousness*) because we’re set right (*justified*) through *faith[fulness]* to the Messiah. Salvation is not just about me; the Messiah is saving the world, and his vision is drawing closer every day (verse 11).

So, wake up! Get dressed for the new day. His life is already being born in us. As his community we participate in his glorious life, *clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ* who lives among us. In living to express his love, we no longer seek the prohibited things our old nature desires.

What are your thoughts about governments and political activism? How do we live in the world as the present expression of how things will be when Jesus is recognized as Lord and restores all things?

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5.2 In the world that does recognize Christ (Romans 14)

From how we relate to the community around us, Paul turns back to the crucial question of how we do life together as the community that recognizes Christ together:

Romans 14:1-4 (NIV)

¹ Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

What would these words have meant to the people in the first-century house-churches in Rome? All letter long, Paul identified two groups (1:16; 2:9-10; 3:9, 22, 29; 9:24; 10:12). Based on those verses, the conflict was between and

One group *eats only vegetables* (v. 2). It's not because vegetarianism was popular but because the meat in the markets was ritually unclean. It may have been offered to idols, and it certainly would not be "kosher" by the standards of Leviticus 11. Living in Rome, they were doing what Daniel did in Babylon (Daniel 1:8-12). Which group is this? Jew or gentile?

The other group *eats anything* (v. 3), with no concern for the food laws in Leviticus. Which group is this?

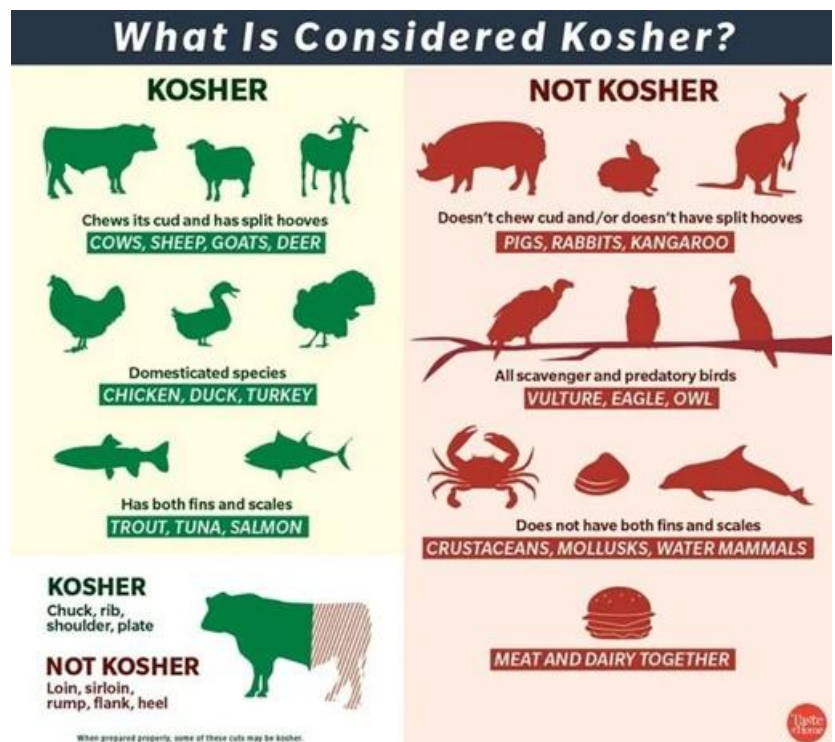
Paul's concern is that this difference is preventing them from being one community together. If they won't eat together, Jewish families will gather in one group, and gentiles in another.

This does not present Rome with a picture of the world where all people are united as one kingdom in the Messiah.

Don't underestimate how difficult this issue was for them. Years after the resurrection, God had to confront the apostle Peter's attitude to gentiles. Then Peter confronted the community in Jerusalem: "*You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean*" (Acts 10:28).

So which group does Paul label as *the weak* (14:1, 2)?

And which group does he call *the strong* (15:1)?



Does this surprise you? The Jewish Christians were trying harder, wanting to be faithful to the stronger requirements of the Torah for the Jewish people. Why does Paul see them as those *whose faith is weak* (verse 2)?

For Paul, *faith* means loyalty to the Messiah. Whether Jew or gentile, faith[fulness] to Christ forms us into one people of God in the Messiah. We express our unity as children of one Father by sharing meals with each other. Gentiles cannot demean Jewish culture as meaningless, and Jews cannot reject gentiles as unclean. As God told Peter, “*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*” (Acts 10:15; 11:9).

The gentiles are in the stronger position since they simply trust the Messiah without trying to perform all the works of the law. The Jewish believers who refuse to associate with gentiles in order to comply with the Torah's purity laws have the weaker faith because the gentiles are completely trusting the Messiah who fulfilled the Law for us.

This is exactly the opposite of the power claims the returning Jews in Rome were making. Paul is turning power on its head. As the Common English Bible puts it in Romans 15:1: “*We who are powerful need to be patient with the weakness of those who don't have power*”. More important than who is right and who is wrong is how the weak and the strong treat each other.

We don't have to agree; we have to relate to each other the way God relates to us:

Romans 14:5-9 (NIV)

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

Some considered the **Sabbath** to be more sacred than other days (verse 5). Can you guess which group that would be? The Sinai Covenant required Israel to observe the Sabbath, so this became part of Jewish culture. The covenant that God established in the Messiah has no such requirement. Jewish people may want to practice the Sabbath as part of their culture, but they cannot expect gentiles to keep the Sabbath or observe the other feast days that were important in the Jewish calendar.

Conversely, gentiles cannot demean Jewish believers who choose to devote a day to God. They're not doing something wrong; they're offering God a beautiful gift by devoting a day to him each week.

In the same way, Jewish believers cannot project the Levitical food laws on gentiles, because God never required those laws of gentiles. At the same time, gentiles cannot treat their Jewish brothers and sisters as inferior when the families they grew up in restrict themselves to only foods they consider clean.

Neither group is wrong. Both groups are offering themselves to the Lord, rather than living for themselves. That's exactly what God calls us to do (verses 7-8). Isn't that what Jesus did (verse 9)?

What do you think about this? Keeping the Sabbath was one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). Do you think Christians should keep the Ten Commandments? What about the food laws? What about circumcision? How much of the Old Testament laws should Christians be required to keep?

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Each of us should develop our own understanding of what pleases God, but we don't have authority to impose our perspective on each other:

Romans 14:10-12 (NIV)

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister?

Or why do you treat them with contempt?

For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

¹¹ It is written:

'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me;
every tongue will acknowledge God.' [Isaiah 45:23]

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

As much as we love to condemn people for what we think they should be doing, it's an act of rebellion for a human to climb up onto God's judgment throne and pronounce judgment on another servant of God. As Paul explained back in 2:1-4, our impatience with each other does not reflect God's patient judgements.

Romans 14:13 (NIV)

¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

If I do wrong to you, the natural human response is to do wrong in return. That's the *stumbling block* I've put in your path to trip you up. The judgement I pass on you is a trap, pulling you into responding by judging me too. We drag each other down with our judgements.

Truth is, caring for each other as brothers and sisters in Father's family is more important than our opinions:

Romans 14:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.

Nothing is unclean in itself is a very radical redefinition of the purity laws that occupy many chapters in the Torah (e.g. Leviticus 11–15). Pork and rodents. Shellfish and catfish. Birds of prey. None of these things are unclean in themselves? They're only unclean if people believe they're unclean? Oh, my! I wonder if some of Paul's Jewish friends got up and walked out as Phoebe read them this paragraph.

Remember how hard this was for Peter to grasp? God gave him a vision:

Acts 10:11-15 (NIV)

¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds.

¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Who defines what's clean and what's unclean? Not Peter. Not Israel. God declared certain things unclean for Israel. God never declared those things unclean for the nations. Jewish believers have no authority to label things unclean for gentiles, or to treat gentiles as "unclean" when God cleanses Jews and gentiles in Christ.

God has authority to cleanse the foods. *Jesus declared all foods clean* (Mark 7:19).

God has authority to cleanse gentiles. Jesus is cleansing the nations (Luke 24:47).

When God cleanses us, we cannot treat each other as unclean. God calls us to model his acceptance of each other, as Jesus did in a culture where *Jews do not associate with Samaritans* (John 4:9). As he did, they saw *the Saviour of the world* (John 4:42).

Each of us is welcome to our own views, but we're not welcome to reject others who see things differently:

Romans 14:15-18 (NIV)

¹⁵ If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.

Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.

¹⁶ Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil.

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

Verse 17 would have been controversial. In Old Testament times, *the kingdom of God* was established by the Sinai covenant, so it did have laws about eating and drinking. When the kingdom fell to the nations, there was a ruler around 168 BC who tried to force them to abandon their unique identity and meld in with the nations.

This quotation is from the history of the time (not part of our Bible):

4 Maccabees 5:1-3 (NRSV)

¹ The tyrant Antiochus ... ² ordered the guards to seize each and every Hebrew and to compel them to eat pork and food sacrificed to idols.

³ If any were not willing to eat defiling food, they were to be broken on the wheel and killed.

Under such pressure, four boundary markers became the identifying characteristics of the people of God: avoiding defiling foods, observing the Sabbath, maintaining ethnic

purity, and male circumcision. This is why it was so difficult for the Jewish believers to sit at table with gentiles and their unclean food.

But Paul insists that Christ has restored God's reign (the kingdom of God) to the earth. A physical descendant of David, Jesus was raised up out of death and appointed *the Son of God in power*. As the Lord of all people, he *calls all the nations to the obedience that comes from allegiance to his name*. Jews and gentiles who trust his leadership are his kingdom, *loved by God and called his holy people* (Romans 1:1-7).

Food laws, Sabbath observance, ethnic purity, and circumcision are no longer the boundary markers of God's people. The new kingdom of God in Christ is not defined by laws about eating and drinking. It is defined by:

- being set right with God (*righteousness*),
- being at *peace* with God (and therefore each other),
- the *joy* of being Spirit-birthed children of God (rather than slaves to evil).

The Father then calls us to treat each other as he has treated us: treating each other right (*righteousness*), living at *peace* with each other, sharing our lives and our daily bread with each other with *joy*.

Here's Paul's conclusion about how we're to live with each other as God's people:

Romans 14:19-23 (NIV)

¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

²² So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

How does this work out in practice? How does this approach apply to us today?

Other than food laws, what divides Christians today? How are we to treat each other? Are there some issues where we can't just agree to disagree, issues like the one Paul raised in 1 Corinthians 5:2? What do you think?

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5.3 So What?

When a group of us visited Israel in 2017, we saw how the Torah has shaped Jewish culture. “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk,” the Torah said (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:22). To ensure people kept this threefold rule, the Rabbis advised people to use different dishes for meat and dairy to avoid cross-contamination. So, if the hotel buffet breakfast included milk for cereal, there would be no meat and only margarine for the toast. And after a dinner that included roast lamb, the buffet may have sorbet but not ice cream.

“This man must die,” Numbers 15:35 said. he had violated the Sabbath by gathering wood to make a fire. The Rabbis concluded that starting a fire on Shabat was a serious offence, so they warned people to avoid creating a spark of any kind. Flicking a switch to complete an electrical circuit could make a spark, so the Rabbis advised people to never do that on Shabat. The hotels therefore provide Shabat lifts that stop at every floor on Shabat so no one needs to press a button.

Even Jews who don’t have a faith share in this culture. They stop work mid-afternoon on Friday, and head home to share time with family as Shabat begins at sundown. Much of Jewish culture is shaped by Torah.

As some Jews in the first century recognized Jesus as the Messiah sent by God for his people, they were already steeped in Torah culture. They thought in terms of how far they could travel on the Sabbath (Acts 1:12). They still went to the temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:20; 21:26-30; 22:17) or attended a synagogue on the Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). They still ate only what the Torah classified as clean (Acts 9:14), and stayed away from the unclean houses of gentiles (Acts 10:28; 11:3).

What are your thoughts about Jewish culture?

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What divides Christians today? Are there some things we can’t compromise, such as recognizing Jesus Christ as our Lord? Who decides which issues are non-negotiable, and which issues we can agree to disagree about? How do we live the good news of Jesus Christ in a way that’s credible to the world around us?

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Jewish and Arab youth sing together for peace: the Jerusalem Youth Chorus

For next week, read the final two chapters of Romans.

6 The gospel transforms the world (Romans 15–16)

This is our final night in Romans. We're focusing on Romans 15, since we looked at Romans 16 at the very start of the course, as a way to to get to know the audience.

Romans has been all about the gospel of the Christ. The gospel is God's good-news proclamation that his Messiah is our Lord. We respond to the gospel by placing our faith in our God-appointed leader. As we do, God sets us right (justifies) so we do right. This is how God saves the world from its bondage to Sin and Death, restoring earth as a kingdom of heaven. In practical terms, then, the gospel calls us to live humanity unified in the Messiah's leadership.

6.1 The people of God in the Messiah (Romans 15)

Romans 15:1 (NIV)

¹ We who are **strong** ought to bear with the failings of the **weak** and not to please ourselves.

Last week we discussed *the weak* and *the strong* in the context of the first-century church in Rome. What were *the failings of the weak*? And what would it look like for the strong *not to please themselves*?

How would this apply to us today? What would it look like for the strong to bear the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves?

This is how we express the life of Christ as the community under his leadership. The Holy Spirit regenerates us with Christ's life, making us children of God in the Son, forming us into the living presence of the king in his world.

So, each day we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice in God's service. As we grow in him, our minds are renewed so our relationships no longer conform to the pattern of this world. We're learning to embody the life of the God-anointed king as his kingdom.

What still divides us today? It may not be the Jew/gentile distinction, but what other allegiances prevent us from being faithful to our God-appointed king? Scot McKnight comments on the situation in his country. Does this apply in Australia as well?

Romans, like no other book in the entire Bible except for perhaps Philemon, is more relevant for the churches of the United States than any book in the Bible. The message is a lived theology of Christoformity manifested in peace among siblings—all siblings, not just siblings like me. The message shouts to the American church that its classism, its racism, its sexism, and its materialism are like the Strong's social-status claims and the Weak's boundaried behaviours. They divide and conquer. The message of Romans is that the Weak and the Strong of our day—and I say now what I have not said, that everyone thinks that they are the Strong and that the other is the Weak—must surrender their claims to privilege and hand them over to Christoformity.¹⁴

¹⁴ Scot McKnight, *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 180–181.

Christoformity means being conformed to Christ. The Messiah *did not please himself but bore the failings of the weak* (verse 1). We follow his way of life:

Romans 15:2-3 (NIV)

² Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. ³ For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written:

“The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” [Psalm 69:9]

As his kingdom, we follow the way of life that our King practiced.

What is Paul saying with this quotation? We talk about Jesus dying for my sins rather than bearing the insults of those who insult God. How does that save the world? And why is Paul treating Psalm 69 as if it's about Jesus? Is he just proof-texting, or are the Psalms really about Jesus?

The quote from Psalm 69

The title at the top of Psalm 69 indicates we're hearing the voice of the Davidic king. He was attacked by enemies who wanted to take God's people into their grasp. He cried to God about *those who hate me without reason ... who seek to destroy me* (69:4).

David realized that those who attacked him were actually fighting God, since it was God who gave him the throne:

Psalm 69:7-9 (NIV)

⁷ I endure scorn for your sake,
and shame covers my face.

⁸ I am a foreigner to my own family,
a stranger to my own mother's children;

⁹ for zeal for your house consumes me,
and **the insults of those who insult you fall on me.**

In quoting from Psalm 69: 9, Paul is identifying Jesus as the Davidic king. Well before Jesus' time, the enemies had taken David's throne. There was no longer a kingdom representing heaven's reign on earth. That's why Jesus proclaimed the good news that the time had come for the kingdom of God to be restored (Mark 1:1-15).

In time, people began to recognize *the Messiah* (Mark 8:29), calling him the *son of David* (Mark 8:47-48; 11:10; 12:35-37). Yet, his own people condemned their Messiah (Mark 14:61-64). They handed their king over to be executed (Mark 15:2, 9, 12, 18, 24, 32). In his death, Jesus was literally entering into the fallen kingship.

A people have an obligation to provide for their king, but David's people gave him bitterness as his food:

Psalm 69:19-21 (NIV)

¹⁹ You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed;
all my enemies are before you.

²⁰ Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless;
I looked for sympathy, but there was none,
for comforters, but I found none.

²¹ **They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.**

All four Gospel writers connect Psalm 69:21 with Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23, 36; Luke 23:36; John 19:28-29). David used figurative language to describe his treatment at the hands of God's people. It was literally what Jesus was given.

The temple in Jerusalem was constructed by David's son because David was zealous to honour God's authority (2 Samuel 7). But the temple leaders turned on Jesus, rejecting his authority as king. Jesus saw this confrontation coming, enacting a drama in which the temple was overthrown. *His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'* (John 2:17). Recognize the quotation? It's Psalm 69:9, the other half of the verse Paul quotes here in Romans 15:3.

In John 15:25, Jesus quoted the Davidic king's words to describe his own suffering:

Psalm 69:4 (NIV)

Those who **hate me without reason** outnumber the hairs of my head;
many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me.
I am forced to restore what I did not steal.

In Acts 1:20, Peter quoted Psalm 69:25 to describe the outcome you'd expect for a traitor (Judas) who betrayed his king.

So, **Psalm 69 is quoted by Jesus, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and Paul.** They all understand Jesus to be the Davidic king, the Messiah anointed by God to restore heaven's reign to the earth, the king who suffered and died at the hands of those in power because they were enemies of God's authority.

That's the point Paul was making. The good news is that God overturned this injustice, raising Jesus up to reign: *the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus, Anointed, Lord of us* (Romans 1:4).

It's in Christ that all the promises God made in the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled:

Romans 15:4 (NIV)

⁴ For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us,
so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the
encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Anything you'd like to discuss regarding how the New Testament uses the Old, or Jesus' authority as the anointed king (Messiah/Christ)?

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Living the fulfilment in Christ

How Jesus handled his enemies sets the pattern for how we respond to ours:

Romans 15:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you
the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had,
⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The community in Rome needed to see the Jewish and gentile Christians sitting down together around a table, sharing their lives as they share their food. In doing so they embody the life of the Messiah who takes all the divided and warring factions of humanity and builds us together into one people, united in him. The gospel of Christ's leadership is credible when people can see he is already forming a new creation in us.

What does it look like to live the gospel like this? For Paul's Jewish audience, the big issue was accepting gentiles who did not comply with the Torah's purity laws as *loved by God and called his holy people* (1:7). The gentiles were the nations that showed no regard for what God was doing through the Jewish people. The nations were the enemies who had brought down the Davidic kingship and destroyed the kingdom of God. How could they now sit down and share life with these Godless, unclean gentiles?

To make that point, Paul draws repeatedly from the Jewish Scriptures to say that God had always planned to include the nations (gentiles):

Romans 15:7-13 (NIV)

⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ⁸ For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed ⁹ and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;
I will sing the praises of your name." [Psalm 18:49]

¹⁰ Again, it says,

"Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people." [Deuteronomy 32:43]

¹¹ And again,

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;
let all the peoples extol him." [Psalm 117:1]

¹² And again, Isaiah says,

"The Root of Jesse will spring up,
one who will arise to rule over the nations;
in him the Gentiles will hope." [Isaiah 11:10]

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul sees this message in every part of the Hebrew Scriptures—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (the post-exile collection including Psalms):

- **Psalm 18** is the Davidic king's voice declaring God's praise among *the nations*.
- **Deut. 32** is Moses' song, ending with *the nations* rejoicing with God's people.
- **Psalm 117** calls *the nations* to praise the LORD for his faithfulness.
- **Isaiah 11** sees David's son extending God's reign to *the nations*.

God had always planned to include the nations under his reign. That's what he has done in Christ.

So, what does this mean for us? If Christ is Lord over all the nations that have been divided up under different leaders, and the Spirit is remaking the world into one community under his leadership, making us one family with one Father, how do we embody that message?

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Australia is “girt by sea” as the national anthem says. Like other wealthy nations, we have hard borders to keep people of other nations out. We don’t want them taking our land, our wealth, our jobs. But how do you think Jesus sees our national borders? Sure, each nation has its own government (as in 13:1-5), but God calls us to live as his kingdom rather than as divided nations keeping each other out. How do we do that?

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Here's the example Paul sets:

Romans 15:14-16 (NIV)

¹⁴ I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. ¹⁵ Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Do you see the church the way Paul did in verse 14, as *full of goodness*?

Paul really does believe the gospel sets us right. 😊

Do you see each other as *brothers and sisters*, living in Father’s family, participating in the life of the Son?

Do you see us as *filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another*?

Do we also need a *bold* voice like Paul’s (verse 15)? What struck you as bold? Anything about how we do life together as the expression of the gospel?

What difference has it made that Paul’s gospel presented gentiles as an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit? Would we merely be another offshoot of Judaism if Paul had not proclaimed this so boldly?

How do we balance these things: boldly proclaiming the world-changing impact the gospel has, while also trusting the Spirit to fill us with goodness?

Romans 15:17-22 (NIV)

¹⁷ Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸ I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—
¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of

God. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.²⁰ It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.²¹ Rather, as it is written:

“Those who were not told about him will see,
and those who have not heard will understand.” [Isaiah 52:15]

²² This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

Acts 28 tells us Paul eventually did make it to Rome. At the time he wrote Romans, he'd proclaimed the gospel of the Messiah *from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum* (verse 19). **Illyricum** is northwest of Macedonia, the region from Albania to Croatia today—almost 3000 km from Jerusalem.



“Map 25: Paul's journey to Rome” in *Standard Bible Atlas* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 2006), 38.

Paul's missionary strategy was always to announce the Messiah where people had not heard of him. “*How are they to believe if they don't hear? And how will they hear without someone announcing it to them?*” (10:14)

Isaiah 52 is one of the passages where Isaiah used the word *gospel*. The good news is, “Your God reigns!” (52:7). Isaiah described the servant of the LORD being crushed, yet bringing the nations under God's authority:

Isaiah 52:14-15 (NIV)

¹⁴ ... his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
and his form marred beyond human likeness—

¹⁵ so he will sprinkle many nations,
and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

**For what they were not told, they will see,
and what they have not heard, they will understand.**

Having proclaimed the good news of Jesus' kingship through Syria, Türkiye, and Greece as far as the Adriatic coast, Paul wants to go through Rome as he takes the gospel all the way to Spain:

Romans 15:23-29 (NIV)

²³ But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, ²⁴ I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. ²⁸ So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

From the start of his missionary journeys, Paul said, "*The Lord has commanded us, '... that you bring salvation to the ends of the earth,'*" (Acts 13:47, quoting Isaiah 49:6). Spain was the edge of the world as they knew it.

But in the meantime, Paul was collecting a gift from the gentiles to take back to the Jews in Jerusalem. It's a gift Paul hopes will help heal the rift between Jews and gentiles. We gentiles have received so much from the Jewish people (most notably the Messiah!) that Paul said they *owe it to the Jews to share with them our material blessings* (verse 27). The practice started back in Emperor Claudius' time (Acts 11:28-30), with more detail in 2 Corinthians 8–9.

Jesus taught us to rely on our Father's provision each day: "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11 || Luke 11:3). But this is an "us" prayer, not a "me" prayer. Father gives us our daily bread, so of course we share it with the brothers and sisters.

Romans 15:30-33 (NIV)

³⁰ I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. ³¹ Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favourably received by the Lord's people there, ³² so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. ³³ The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Acts 21–28 tells us how things worked out when Paul went back to Jerusalem. His prayer request here makes vivid sense in light of that account.

This is effectively the end of the instruction Paul wanted to deliver. His personal greetings follow in Chapter 16.

6.2 The people of God in Rome (Romans 16)

We went through these names at the beginning of our study in Romans, so tonight we'll just scan the list to see the make-up of the church.

The people (16:1-16)

Verse	People
1-2	Phoebe: Female. Gentile. Servant of the church in Cenchreae (near Corinth). Paul trusted her to carry this letter to Rome, to read it to the house churches, and to respond to any questions about what Paul was saying.
3-5	Priscilla and her husband Aquila: Jews. Shared in Paul's ministry at Corinth and Ephesus while exiled from Rome by Claudius (Acts 18:2, 18-19, 26). Their house church probably included Paul's long-time friend Epenetus .
6	Mary: Jewish. Female. A good worker for the church in Rome.
7	Andronicus and Junia: <i>Outstanding apostles</i> . Junia is a Jewish female apostle, ¹⁵ with more than 20 years' experience following Christ.
8-10	Ampliatius and Urbanus: Latin names. Stachys and Apelles: Greek names.
10-11	Aristobulus and Herodion: Jews leading a house church (<i>the household of Aristobulus</i>), as does Narcissus (<i>the household of Narcissus</i>).
12	Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis: Greek women. Described as key workers in the Lord's business.
13	Rufus and his mother: Jewish. (Mark 15:21 mentions a Rufus.) Rufus' mother has been supportive of Paul.
14	Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas: Greek names. <i>The brothers and sisters with them</i> indicates another (gentile) house church.
15	Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and Olympas: Greek names. Julia is Latin. Another gentile house church.

What did you notice? Are the house churches mostly segregated (Jew/gentile) or integrated? How does that relate to the instruction Paul has given?

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Who were the leaders? Were they mostly Jewish, or mostly gentile? Mostly women, or mostly men? Your thoughts?

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¹⁵ Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Fortress Press, 2005).

What about Phoebe? She was the first person to carry, read, and explain Paul's letter to the Romans. Are you surprised Paul trusted this task to a wealthy businesswoman with a track record of being *a benefactor to many people* including Paul (verse 2)?

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What does Paul mean by, *Greet one another with a holy kiss* (verse 16)?

What did that look like? Is it culturally appropriate for us today?

To help answer that last question, here's some background from a commentary:

Having conveyed greetings to perhaps every individual believer and house church that Paul knew about in Rome, he now adds a final catch-all: "Greet one another with a holy kiss." Such requests are standard at the end of Paul's letters (cf. 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; cf. 1 Pet. 5:14). The kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient world generally and in Judaism especially. Evidence from the second century indicates that the "kiss of peace" had by that time entered into the typical Christian liturgy as a standard feature. Whether this was true as early as Paul's day is hard to say; but many commentators think that Paul may here be envisaging a worship gathering in which his letter is being read aloud and which is concluded with such a kiss.¹⁶

Satan's demise (16:17-20)

The thing Paul is concerned about is that we embody God's gospel, this good-news announcement that he is bringing all the peoples of the earth together in his Messiah:

Romans 16:17-20 (NIV)

¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. ¹⁹ Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.

²⁰ The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

Paul rarely focuses on *Satan* (verse 20). This is the only mention in Romans. *Šā-tān* is a Hebrew word meaning enemy. The *satan* referred to the enemy that opposed God's nation, holding them captive after the exile so they could not be a people of God. As the Son appointed by God, Jesus refused to receive power by compromising with the *satan* (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus cast out demons as a demonstration that the Enemy was losing its power and God's reign was being restored (Matthew 12:22-28).

¹⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 926.

The cross was where the confrontation between these two powers was ultimately resolved, where the false ruler—the *prince of this world*—would be deposed (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

Throughout Scripture, the *satan* is more a power than a person. In Romans, Paul has used the terms sin and death to refer to this evil power. Note the verbs: *Death reigned* (5:14). *Sin reigned in death* (5:21). But *death no longer has mastery over him* (6:9), so *do not let sin reign in your mortal body* (6:12) for *sin shall no longer be your master* (6:14). *Though you used to be slaves to sin* (6:16) *you have now been set free from sin* (6:18). *You have been set free from sin and become slaves of God* (6:22).

The power of evil (the *satan*) is already defeated in Christ. The resurrected Messiah is already restoring God's reign in all who place their faith in the One who sets us right with him. The power of evil that caused the nations to fight and kill each other is being overturned, as the reign of the God of peace is restored to the world in his people.

Some Christians focus too much on the *satan*, fearing we will be defeated if we don't defeat it in prayer. We're better to focus on giving ourselves to the Messiah, for Jesus has already defeated the *satan* and set his people free to serve the living God.

Final benediction (16:21-17)

Paul's companions include their greetings to the church in Rome (verses 21-23).

Then Paul gives one concluding expression of what this letter was all about:

Romans 16:25-27 (my translation)

²⁵ To the one who has the power to establish you
according to my gospel (that is, the proclamation of Messiah Jesus),
according to the unveiling of the mystery kept under wraps in ages past
²⁶ and now disclosed as having been made known
through the prophetic writings by order of the God of the ages,
to bring all nations into the obedience that comes from faith[fulness]—
²⁷ to the only wise God through Messiah Jesus
be the splendour of the ages. May it be so!

This blessing reinforces the opening statement of the letter (1:1-5):

- The good news Paul proclaims is that God is able to overturn the reign of evil, restoring his reign to his people.
- *Paul's gospel* (16:25) echoes *God's gospel* (1:1-2)—God's proclamation of Jesus as his Messiah (anointed ruler).
- The *mystery* regarding how God would finally set his people free to be a kingdom of God again was the subject many Jewish apocalyptic writers wrote to reveal, but they never guessed how God would do it (16:25).
- That *mystery* has now been revealed in Christ. The nations have been included in the Messiah's reign, grafted into the people of God through faith. Looking back, we see in the prophetic writings that this was what the God of all ages had always planned (16:26). This is *the gospel he announced beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son* (1:2-3).

- *To bring all nations into the obedience that comes from faithfulness to the Messiah was always God's goal (16:26). That's what Paul has been sent to do: to call all the nations to the obedience that comes from faith[fulness] (1:5).*
- So, the wisdom and majesty of our heavenly sovereign's character is revealed on earth through the king he has anointed to reign (16:27). The grace and peace of our heavenly Lord and our restoration as children in his family arrive on earth from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7).

Is this how you understand the gospel?

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6.3 So what?

After 24 hours studying Romans (2 hours x 6 weeks x 2 terms), what have you learned? What is the message of the book? How does this understanding shape what we believe and how we practice our faith?

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