

Paul's Letter to the Romans
A Study by Father John F. Gagnier

Background

The context of this letter recognizes the existence of "Judaizers" whom Paul had encountered in his ministry in various places. These were Jews people who had been baptized. However, they claimed that those who accepted Christ as Messiah, even Gentiles, were still bound by the 613 Laws of Moses in the Old Testament. This issue lurks in the background due to Paul's experience with it, as shown in the Acts of the Apostles. See: [www.the613commandments.com]

About 45 A.D., Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome. He made no distinction between Jews who had become Christian and those who had not. He ruled from 41 until 54 A.D. This expulsion was ordered because of disputes between the Jews on the question of whether Jesus was the Messiah promised by God through the prophets. These disputes could even become violent.

While he was at Corinth, Paul was brought by Jews to trial before Gallio, the Roman proconsul in Achaia, a Roman province in Greece. The issue of "separation of church and state" as we call it today, existed even then. Gallio said: *"I refuse to judge such matters." With that, he dismissed them from the court. Then they all pounced on Sosthenes, a leading man of the synagogue, and beat him in full view of the bench; but Gallio paid no attention to it.*

(Acts 18:17)

In the Acts of the Apostles, we find a discourse given by Saint Peter to Jewish Christians who objected to his fraternizing with Gentiles. They scolded him: *"You entered the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."* (Acts 11:3)

Saint Peter told them of a vision he had which taught him that God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile. This overcame their objection. They said: *"Then God has granted life-giving repentance even to the Gentiles."* (Acts 11:18)

Paul desired to go to Rome eventually. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke describes Paul as a Roman citizen. He was also a trained Pharisee having studied under Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrin or Jewish high council, in Jerusalem.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we find this Gamaliel trying to persuade the Sanhedrin that the Apostles should not be killed but rather ignored, in hopes that their cause might simply disappear as had many others of that time. He said:

"My advice is that you have nothing to do with these men. Let them alone. If their purpose or activity is human in its origins, it will destroy itself. If, on the other hand, it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them without fighting God himself." (Acts 5:38-39)

As Paul was held in custody by the Roman governor Felix, a new governor, Festus, took office. Jewish leaders wanted to kill Paul as he was taken from Caesarea to Jerusalem to stand trial there. Instead, Festus kept Paul for trial. Paul appeals to Festus: *"If there is nothing to the charges these men bring against me, no one has a right to hand me over to them. I appeal to the emperor!" Thereupon Festus conferred with his council and finally declared: 'You have appealed to the Emperor. To the Emperor you shall go.'*" (Acts 25:11-12)

The result was that Paul did go to Rome, but as a prisoner of the very Empire in which he held citizenship. Paul says: *"I have completed preaching the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyria. It has been a point of honor with me never to preach in places where Christ's name was already known."* (Romans 15:19)

Having preached the Gospel in the Eastern end of the Roman Empire, Paul wanted to go to Spain with a brief visit to Rome on the way. Paul had taken a collection from the Christians at Macedonia and Achaia and went to deliver it to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. However, while there, he was arrested at the Temple and brought by the Jews before Roman authorities as described above.

The Letter to the Romans was written earlier by Paul to a church he knew only by reputation. This letter was his way of introducing himself to the Christian community at Rome. Because of the expulsion of the Jews by Emperor Claudius, the Church at Rome was largely Gentile by the time he wrote this.

In this letter, Paul wants to share his understanding of the Gospel:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, for Jew first, and then Greek. For in it is revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous by faith will live.'" (Romans 1:16-17)

He calls himself Apostle to Gentiles: *"I say this now to you Gentiles: Inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I glory in my ministry, trying to rouse my fellow Jews to envy and save some of them."* (Romans 11:13-14)

Paul wants to explain his "gospel," that is, his understanding of the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Paul understands that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. As a learned Pharisee, Paul understands the Old Testament well. He also understands the reluctance of some Jews to see the Old Testament with "Christ-colored glasses," as he does. He understands that the Gospel is meant for all, not just the Jews. Paul thus has two questions to deal with: proving that Jesus is the Messiah and that His message extends beyond Judaism to the whole world.

The crisis of the Judaizers leads Paul to realize that salvation comes not from the works of the Law of Moses but on faith in Christ Jesus, the Son whom the Father's love did not spare. The Father's "Plan of Salvation" is brought to realization in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

In Jerusalem, Paul is still viewed with suspicion by Christians, since he had been a Pharisee. He is concerned about his reputation there. The question is: will the Church in Jerusalem validate his mission before he goes West?

A close examination of the letter shows that Paul is not aware of the actual situation in Rome and is not concerned with their issues. In other letters to the churches he had founded, he was very concerned with their local issues.

Since he is not known to his readers, Paul writes to introduce himself in the first chapter. He speaks about the call to holiness. He also calls himself an Apostle. Though he was not one of the Twelve, his credentials are impeccable.

He has traveled far to preach the Name of Jesus and he has brought to bear his extensive Old Testament knowledge and his skills as speaker and writer.

He ingratiates himself with his readers by complimenting their faith. He is acquainted with some members of the Church at Rome, having met them in his travels. In the last chapter of Romans, he greets many of them by name.

As a Pharisee, he considered himself "set apart," which is the meaning of the word. Pharisees considered themselves as separate from irreligious Jews.

Paul, as a Christian, had taken this theme much further. *"But when God, who from my mother's womb had set me apart and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; rather, I went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Cephas and remained with him for fifteen days."* (Galatians 1:15-18)

Paul longs to visit Rome: *"I remember you constantly, always asking in my prayers that somehow by God's will, I may at last find my way clear to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may share with you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened, that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by one another's faith, yours, and mine."* (Romans 1:9-12)

This letter gives us some insight into the mind of Paul. In I Corinthians, we see his humility as one called by God to a specific task: *"When I came among you, it was in weakness and fear, and with much trepidation."* (I Cor. 2:3)

“The message of the cross is complete absurdity to those who are headed for ruin, but to us who are experiencing salvation, it is the power of God”

(I Cor. 1:18)

Circumstances have prevented his coming to Rome thus far, but this letter will serve to introduce Paul to a Church he did not establish. After this lengthy introduction, we can now get into the actual content of the letter.

Chapter 1

God’s power affects the course of human history. God used Paul to convince the Jewish Christians (including Saint Peter himself) that salvation is promised to all people in Jesus Christ. The Messiah is promised to the Jews. He came as a Jew to the Jews, but there are many hints in the Old Testament that God’s blessings will be given to all nations through this promised Messiah.

During His public ministry, Jesus met Gentiles and ministered to them, like the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) and Roman Centurion. (Matthew 8: 5-13)

This part of the Letter to the Roman concerns itself with Soteriology or the study of salvation. Salvation is defined as the deliverance or preservation from sickness, danger, or death.

Christianity fosters the conditions that lead us to salvation. The Gospel of Jesus now manifests, as never before, God’s basic attitude toward humanity. Salvation is the reason for God’s activity in reconciling us to Himself in Christ.

“For in it is revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous by faith will live.’” (Romans 1:17)

What does the expression “from faith to faith” mean?

From faith in the Law of Moses to faith in the Gospel

From God’s faithfulness to human faith

From a beginning faith to a more perfect faith.

Any of these meanings could apply. There is an expression called “the economy of salvation” which is shared more and more by us as our faith grows.

All civilizations and cultures have some kind of economy, however primitive it may be. In order for a society to function, it must have some sort of an economy. The word “economy” itself is taken from the Greek word *okonomiyaki*, meaning, the “management of a household.” It describes how someone conducts their affairs; how they manage their life.

The Fathers of the Church, however, tell us that there is an economy in God Himself! They call it the "economy of salvation." It does not mean that God has a credit card, or that He invests on the New York Stock Exchange.

"Economy of Salvation: referring to God's revelation and communication of Himself to the world in time for the sake of the salvation of all humanity. The Fathers of the Church distinguished *oikonomia* from *theologia* ; the latter term refers to the mystery of the internal life of the Trinity. The economy of salvation, on the other hand, refers to God's activity in creating and governing the world, particularly with regard to his plan for the salvation of the world in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a plan which is being accomplished through his Body, the Church, in its life and sacraments." *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Glossary*

As we move into the next section, we find it a bit negative. However, we must remember that Gentile Christians came from a secular and hedonistic background. Christians in Rome still lived in the midst of this very culture.

What Paul is saying in this section is that left to themselves, the pagan Gentiles did not come to a knowledge of God, thus lapsing into moral depravity. Without the Gospel, Jews never succeeded in achieving uprightness before God, even though they had the 613 Laws of Moses. No one could ever follow them all perfectly. The result is estrangement from God and divine wrath is displayed.

Chapter 2

Romans 2:1-16 - Paul is setting up a "straw man" against an imaginary opponent. Politicians do this in our time; they speak of *those* Liberals, *those* Conservatives, *those* Democrats, *those* Republicans, *those* Trumpers, and so on.

Paul is saying those who pass judgement had better look at themselves. God will judge all in the end. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.*" (I Corinthians 5:10) It does not matter whether you have Moses as your guide or not. God has written his Law in the hearts of all.

In the second chapter comes this indictment of the Jews: "*Now if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of God and know his will and are able to discern what is important since you are instructed from the law, and if you are confident that you are a guide for the blind and a light for those in darkness, that you are a trainer of the foolish and teacher of the simple, because in the law you have the formulation of knowledge and truth—then you who teach another, are you failing to teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who forbid adultery, do you commit adultery?* [continued]

You who detest idols, do you rob temples? You who boast of the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? For, as it is written, 'Because of you the name of God is reviled among the Gentiles.'" (Romans 2:21b-24)

What Paul is saying here is: Do you think you know everything because you have Moses? Jesus said: *"Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones."* (Matthew 3:9)

Do not think of yourselves as special. Jews are just as capable of sin as any Gentile. Jews cannot presume to condemn the sins of Gentiles without also condemning themselves.

"Spiritually, we are Semites." said Pope Pius XI (September 6, 1938: Address to Belgian Pilgrims) In this address, Pope Pius XI unequivocally stated the Church's opposition to antisemitism. While Jews are born into the people of God, we are reborn into the people of God because of our Baptism.

Chapter 3

Remember that Paul is not addressing a community that he knows. This letter gives us a chance to see into the very heart of Paul, to see what makes him tick, to understand his perspective which is borne out of his experience first as a learned Pharisee and then as one who came to know Jesus as the only source of salvation. Paul had encountered the risen Jesus, who appeared to him on the road to Damascus. He did not meet Jesus during the years of Jesus' earthly life.

So, in this chapter Paul continues to dwell on the relationship of God to all humanity. While God chose the Jewish people, God desires the whole of humanity to know Him in Christ.

Though we are not Jews, we can relate to the idea that God's ways are not our ways. God chose a people as His own only to have them taken into slavery in Egypt. God led His people to the Promised Land only to have them taken into exile in Babylon.

Jews have remained the vehicle of God's revelation despite their sins, though this depends on the fidelity of God.

Psalm 51:6 translates from Hebrew into English as this:

"That you are just in your sentence, blameless when you condemn."

Psalm 51 is the classic psalm of repentance by King David when he had sinned with the beautiful Bathsheba. He later had her husband Uriah abandoned at the front of the battle to be killed. David was guilty of adultery and murder.

In verses Roman 3: 10-18, Paul quotes from various psalms 14:1-3, 5:10, 14:4, 10:7, 36:2 and also Isaiah 59:7-8. What links these Scriptures together? The words: "throat, tongue, lips, mouths, feet, eyes," i.e., all of humanity is sinful.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks in hyperbole or exaggerated terms about the importance of avoiding sin:

"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna." (Matthew 5:29-30)

If this were meant to be taken literally, there would be a lot of one-eyed, one-handed Christians. Jesus actually means purifying the inner person.

Through the Law comes consciousness of sin. How do we know that something is wrong except the Law tells us? All fall short of the glory of God. We all stand in need of redemption and that is why we need Christ.

In Romans 3:21-31, we have a clear understanding of Paul's "Gospel." We can sum up this Gospel in one expression, the principle of justification by faith in Jesus. God has found a means of rescuing humanity from its plight. This initiative of God is called "the righteousness of God" by Paul.

God is perfectly capable of doing this without reference to the Law of Moses, a radical concept for a Pharisee like Paul. Peter had a vision at Joppa:

"The next day, while they were on their way and nearing the city, Peter went up to the roof terrace to pray at about noontime. He was hungry and wished to eat, and while they were making preparations he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something resembling a large sheet coming down, lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all the earth's four-legged animals and reptiles and the birds of the sky. A voice said to him, "Get up, Peter. Slaughter and eat." But Peter said, "Certainly not, sir. For never have I eaten anything profane and unclean." The voice spoke to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you are not to call profane." This happened three times, and then the object was taken up into the sky." (Acts 10:9-16)

This vision at Joppa convinced Peter that the Gospel was intended to be preached to the Gentiles to call them also to repentance.

This is shown also in the discourse of Peter to the assembled apostles and presbyters in Acts:

"After much debate had taken place, Peter got up and said to them, 'My brothers, you are well aware that from early days God made his choice among you that through my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness by granting them the holy Spirit just as he did us. He made no distinction between us and them, for by faith he purified their hearts. Why, then, are you now putting God to the test by placing on the shoulders of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?

On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they.' The whole assembly fell silent, and they listened while Paul and Barnabas described the signs and wonders God had worked among the Gentiles through them." (Acts 15:7-12)

There is one God for everyone. God does not need the 613 Laws of Moses to save us from our sins. God needed only to send His Son, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, known after his conception and birth as Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4

Paul uses accounting terms in Romans 4:3 about Abraham's works. He uses the term "*credited to him*" or to put it another way, "made an entry." It means that Abraham received a virtual "receipt" for the forgiveness of sin. All believers benefit from this. The First Eucharistic Prayer refers to Abraham as "our father in Faith." Abraham lived long before the Law of Moses existed.

Abraham's faith is a scriptural "type," or a foreshadowing of the Christian faith. Belief in God makes the dead live. Abraham took God at His Word.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, the faith of Abraham is described even more dramatically than in this fourth chapter of Romans:

"By faith he received power to generate, even though he was past the normal age—and Sarah herself was sterile—for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy. So it was that there came forth from one man, himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore."

(Hebrews 11:11-12)

"Abram put his faith in the Lord, who attributed it to him as an act of righteousness." (Genesis 15:6)

Abraham's faith was credited to him as justice. Paul's theology is that Jesus justifies us by His dying for our sins and being "raised up." Because of what Jesus did, we can confidently approach the Father in faith. We have a place in our own work of salvation if we only co-operate with God's plan for us. This is what Abraham did when he believed God could give him a son in his old age. Later, the faith of Abraham was tested when God asked him to sacrifice his only son.

Isaac, the only son of Abraham, like Jesus much later, carried the wood of his own sacrifice up the mountain. He was tied up and ready to be killed by Abraham when the angel of God intervened and stayed the hand of Abraham. Abraham passed the test and God fulfilled His promise to make Abraham "the father of many nations."

Chapter 5

Our justification is by faith. The rabbinical viewpoint is "All that is recorded of Abraham is repeated in the history of his children." We are all the spiritual descendants of Abraham and Sarah who put their faith in the one God.

This chapter contains a section often heard at Funeral Masses:
"Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us. For Christ, while we were still helpless, yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more then, since we are now justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath. Indeed, if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by his life. Not only that, but we also boast of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (Romans 5:5-11)

Through our justification by Jesus, we come to be at peace with God. In the verses quoted above, we see that the hope in which we stand is a free gift of a loving Father. By His death on the Cross, Jesus justifies us before the Father who wishes to have mercy on us. On the Cross, the vertical plane of heaven is contradicted by the horizontal plane of the earth. On the Cross, Jesus overcomes this contradiction and reconciles humanity and divinity in His Flesh and Blood. This is a free gift from God which humanity did not earn or deserve.

The "other side of the coin" is that in Matthew 25, we have the scene of the Final Judgement in the very words of Jesus. In this chapter, we see that our salvation does depend on the works that we have done in life: Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, etc. In the Letter of James, which Martin Luther once called "an epistle of straw," we read about this theme:

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also, faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed, someone may say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works."

(James 2: 14-18)

Chapter 6

Paul asks a rhetorical question about the reign of grace mentioned at in the previous chapter: *"What, then, are we to say? Let us continue in sin, so that grace may abound?"* (Romans 6:1) In different words, this idea had come up earlier: *"Or why may we not do evil that good may come of it?"* (Romans 3:8)

This section is often used at funerals: *Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin.*

(Romans 6:3-6)

We share in Christ's victory over sin and death. The effect of this victory is that we have power over temptation. We are not under the Law but under grace and grace is a free gift of God.

"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Of course not!" (Romans 6:15) Once again, this question comes up: Do we purposely commit sins so that we may receive God's grace?

Paul writes using human metaphors. *"I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your nature."* (Romans 6:19) In the United States, slavery was ended after the Civil War by the 13th Amendment, ratified on December 6, 1865.

Unfortunately, human trafficking still occurs as a form of slavery in the world today. The image is still valid, considering the fact that slavery was common in Paul's time. Prisoners of war became slaves and did not go home.

If we did own a slave, that person would be totally dependent on us. Slavery does not give a slave a wage. If we become slaves of sin, there is no wage! In the end, Paul makes clear *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*(Romans 6:23) Sin is no bargain!

In order to defend the Gospel against the charge that it promotes moral laxity, Paul expresses himself in the typical style of spirited diatribe. God's display of generosity or grace is not evoked by sin. Rather, it is an expression of God's love shown in the saving work of Jesus on the cross. *"God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."*(Romans 5:8)

This love pledges eternal life to all believers. Paul is speaking with irony here: *"For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness."* (Romans 6:20) We are justified through the resurrection: *"The law entered in so that transgression might increase but, where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 5:20-21)

Paul views the present conduct of the believers from the perspective of God's completed salvation when the body is resurrected and directed totally by the Holy Spirit. Through baptism, believers share in the death of Christ and thereby escape from the grip of sin. Through the resurrection of Christ, the power to live anew becomes a reality for them, but the fullness of participation in Christ's resurrection still lies in the future. Life that is lived in dedication to God now is part and parcel of that future. Therefore, anyone who claims to be interested in that future can scarcely be able to say: *"Shall we persist in sin that grace may abound?"* (Romans 6:1)

Christ was not raised from death merely to publicize the Good News or to confirm His Messiahship, but to introduce people to a new mode of life thus giving them a new principle of vital activity, the Holy Spirit. Paul expressed it thus:

"For through the law, I died to the law, that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the Law, then Christ died for nothing."(Gal. 2:19-21)

Christians are freed from the Law of Moses because they have died with Christ in Baptism. We belong to Christ in newness of life and need no kosher law.

Chapter 7

As he begins this chapter, Paul uses marriage law as an example of the truth he is trying to convey. A woman whose husband has died is now free from her obligations to him.

Through the death and resurrection of Christ, we are freed from any obligations to observe the Law of Moses. Like the wife who no longer belongs to her deceased husband, we no longer belong to that Law.

We serve God now *"in the newness of the Spirit,"* (Romans 7:6)

Next Paul goes into a kind of diatribe, asking a question that he has asked before in this letter in different ways. *"What then can we say, that the Law is sin? Of course not."* (Romans 7:7)

Paul now speaks against re-introducing the Law of Moses into the hearts of Christians. Sin does not exist in the Law but in human beings. Far from improving the sinner's life, law encourages sin to expose itself in transgressions or violations of specific commandments. This theme is seen earlier in Romans: *"The law entered in so that transgression might increase but, where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 5:20-21)

Thus, persons who do not experience the justifying grace of God, and Christians who revert to dependance on law as the criterion for their relationship to God, will recognize a rift between their reasoned desire for the goodness of the law and their actual performance that is contrary to the law. Unable to free themselves from the slavery of sin and the power of death, they can only be rescued from defeat in the conflict by the power of God's grace working through Jesus Christ.

The Third Eucharistic Prayer expresses it in this way: *"through your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit, you give life to all things and make them holy."*

The gift of this new life brings acquittal since Jesus pays the price of sin by His death on the Cross. Jesus puts the enmity between God and humanity to death through His own death.

Death came to reign through one man's disobedience. Forgiveness and eternal life come through one man's obedience. This is what Paul means in referring to Adam *as "the type of the one who was to come."* (Romans 5:14)

Sin entered the world through Adam. but grace and forgiveness come through Jesus who is the "Second Adam." Jesus is the "New Man" who in His perfection as the divine Son of God brings about this new life. Adam here is a "type," a symbol of something future and distant, an example prepared by God.

Paul seems to become autobiographical in this section of Romans 7. He uses the word "I" 25 times in verses 14 to 25. Is he only speaking of himself? Or rather, is this the dilemma that is the same for anyone who has become dependent on the Law of Moses as the measure of their relationship to God? In the end he gives thanks *"to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 7:25)

Chapter 8

The new Christian mode of life is due above all to the love of God. In Romans 5, Paul expressed that we are justified before God through the saving act of Jesus Christ. Now in this chapter, he carries this theme further. What God has done for us is to free us from condemnation. Paul states it in this way: *"this God has done by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for the sake of sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."*(Romans 8:3)

The word "spirit" is found twenty-nine times in this chapter. Christ came in human likeness. He experienced the effects of sin without having sinned Himself. He coped with the power of sin and conquered it in His own flesh. He shares that victory with us. It is through the power of the Spirit, which is the divine principle of humanity's new life, that the uprightness the Law demanded of people is finally obtained.

"And those who are in the flesh cannot please God." (Romans 8:8)
The Law of Moses was unable to put humanity in a state of rectitude before God and free us from sin and death. God sent His own Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. It is a divine task that Jesus accomplished for us in being sent to Earth, involving His conception, birth, death, resurrection, and ascension.

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption." (Galatians 4:4)

"For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." (II Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus took upon Himself our human condition and our sins without sinning Himself. God condemned sin in the flesh. He makes us God's children by adoption. We get to call Jesus' Father "Our Father." The term "Abba" means "Daddy." As heirs, we inherit eternal life which Jesus and Mary already have.

Hope is waiting with patient endurance for what one does not see. The spirit of God prays with us. After the Flood, God made a covenant with Noah involving *"Myself and you and every living creature"* (Genesis 9:12)

Paul sees creation itself as abnormal and frustrated. It shares in our destiny. yet creation itself is redeemed through Christ. God cursed the ground itself due to Adam's sin: *"Cursed be the ground because of you."* (Genesis 3:17)

In contrast to this, redeemed humanity will live in peace:

"Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall graze, together their young shall lie down; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the viper's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. They shall not harm or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea." (Isaiah 11: 6-9)

Predestination: God knows in advance whether we shall be saved. God desires the salvation of all. We need to desire it also if we want to have it.

Look at God's word to the Pharaoh through Moses: *"But this is why I have let you survive: to show you my power and to make my name resound throughout the earth! Will you continue to exalt yourself over my people and not let them go?"* (Genesis 9:16-17) God is the judge of all, not just those who believe in Jesus, the Son of God. The idea of a Universal Salvation is a heresy. We cannot assume that all will be saved.

Chapter 9

Paul had a great love for his fellow Jews. He wanted to bring them all to know Jesus Christ. He knew that they were the instrument by which God spoke to the world, first through the patriarchs and prophets, and in the final age, through Jesus Christ. Paul refers to them as Israelites, the name given by God. *"You shall no longer be spoken of Jacob, but as Israel."* (Genesis 32:28)

Paul quotes from Genesis in this way: *"This is why I have raised you up, to show my power through you that my name may be proclaimed throughout the earth."* (Genesis 9:16) God has mercy on those He wills to.

Paul concludes that God's will is paramount in that He is the One who shows mercy. We have only to receive it. Paul goes on to quote Hosea: *"Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'*" (Hosea 2:25)

Hosea was told by God to marry Gomer, a prostitute. He was to make her illegitimate children his own. So also, God would forgive and restore Israel.

Paul also quotes Isaiah who refers to the faithful remnant of Israel. Paul's shows only a few of God's chosen are saved through Christ while many Gentiles are saved through Christ. The Gentiles have achieved righteousness through Christ. They did it by faith not by the works of the Law. Paul conflates two verses found in Isaiah: *"Therefore, thus says the Lord God: 'See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a stone that has been tested, A precious cornerstone as a sure foundation; whoever puts faith in it will not waver.'"* (Isaiah 28:16) and *"He shall be a snare, a stone for injury, A rock for stumbling to both the houses of Israel, A trap and a snare to those who dwell in Jerusalem; And many among them shall stumble; fallen and broken; snared and captured.*" (Isaiah 8:14-15.)

In these two verses, Paul shows that the Jews who had stumbled over these words were in some cases rescued by coming to faith in Jesus. Paul's own call to follow the Gospel rather than continue as a Pharisee is a great gift to him that he longs to share with others, especially his fellow Jews. But he finds that for many of them, Jesus is a stumbling block rather than a rock of faith.

The old way to righteousness is difficult, adherence to the 613 Laws of Moses. The new way is easy because Jesus leads us directly to the Father.

Chapter 10

Paul testifies that the Jewish people are zealous for God, yet they do not discern His ways. They try to establish their own righteousness and ignore the opportunity that Christ offers. Christ is the end of the law in that we no longer need the law for justification if we have faith in Christ.

The time when the Law of Moses dominated people's lives with its demand of legal uprightness is terminated, superseded by Christ. The prized status of uprightness before God is now available to everyone.

We do not need to go up into heaven to get this righteousness. Christ has already come down from there to bring it to us. We do not need to go down into the abyss to get this righteousness.

Christ has descended to the dead after his death and has conquered death for us by his resurrection. He shared this victory with all of us.

The Lord is the same Lord for Jew as well as Gentile. The word has gone out from Christ to the apostles and disciples and to all of us.

Paul alludes to the words of the prophet Isaiah who expressed the frustration of God trying to communicate His love to His people:

"I was ready to respond to those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said: Here I am! Here I am! to a nation that did not invoke my name. I have stretched out my hands all day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own designs." (Isaiah 65:1-2)

Chapter 11

Paul begins this chapter with a poignant question: *"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Of course not!"* (Romans 11:1) Paul numbers himself among those who have heard the message. He alludes to the great prophet Elijah, left alone when the wicked Queen Jezebel had killed all the other prophets.

God responded to Elijah's plea: *"I have left for myself seven thousand men who have not knelt to Baal."* (I Kings 19:17) In the same way, Paul shows that God still has a faithful remnant of His people who have found in Jesus the salvation that they seek.

Again, a poignant question comes from the pen of Paul: *"Hence I ask, did they stumble so as to fall? Of course not!"* (Romans 11:11) In other words: Has God rejected His people? No. The rejection of God's plan by the Jews is their own fault. The blessing that results from this transgression is that salvation has come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. Paul holds that the Jews will become jealous of this and will enrich the world by accepting Christ.

Though Israel has been unfaithful to the prophetic message of the Gospel, God remains faithful to Israel. Proof of this divine fidelity is the existence of Judeo-Christians like Paul himself. In his view, the unbelieving Jews have been blinded by the Christian teaching concerning the promised Messiah.

Paul turns his attention to the Gentiles in this next section. They are not to become smug about the blessing they have received. Rather, they are to *stand in awe* (Romans 11:20) of God's mercy toward them.

Paul uses the image of a branch grafted on to an olive tree as his analogy, like Jesus uses natural images, a mustard seed, a grain of wheat.

"God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." (Romans 11:29) It is Paul's position that when all the Gentiles have come into the new covenant, the Jews will be saved. Paul praises God for His great wisdom in this divine plan.

Chapter 12

In this final section, Paul reverts to his usual practice of moralizing as he ends this letter in a rather rambling way. Returning to the ideas found in the first chapter, he is aware that his readers at Rome are living in a pagan culture that is hedonistic and contrary to the Gospel. *"Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."* (Romans 12:2)

While the law of Moses is no longer the standard of conduct, Christians is above all called to charity. All of the gifts the God gives to each are for the good of the whole community. Paul deals in generalities here. There is no evidence that Paul knew of any issue in the Church at Rome that he needed to address. As mentioned earlier, he writes in Romans to a church that he had not founded and knew only by reputation. He speaks here of seven gifts: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, contributing, supervision of others, acts of mercy that are done cheerfully. The principal call is to overcome evil with good, not vengeance.

Chapter 13

"Owe nothing to anyone." (Romans 13:8) This is misinterpreted as meaning that Christians should not borrow money. But it is placed in the context of obedience to authority and paying due taxes.

Obedience to authority is important as it will mean that Christians will have a good reputation even in a pagan society. Authorities, whether they know it or not, are ministers of God. All authority comes from God. Doing good in response to authority overcomes fear. The commandments of God are all based on love. *"Love is the fulfillment of the law."* (Romans 13:10)

Paul believed that he himself would witness the Second Coming of Christ, as would many of his readers. Therefore, he encourages his readers to be awake and vigilant as our salvation draws ever nearer.

Chapter 14

Continuing moral advice, Paul dwells on the different attitudes concerning diet since they impacted upon relationships in the Christian Community. Certain people avoided meat for religious reasons even if this was not required of them.

We should not be judgmental of them, nor they of us. We all live and die in the Lord. Paul himself was "*convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.*" (Romans 14:14)

This is in keeping with the Gospel itself which tells us that Jesus "*declared all foods clean.*" (Mark 7:19) "*The Kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.* (Romans 14:17)

Chapter 15

Paul quotes Psalm 69:10 - "*The insults of those who insult you fall upon me.*" (Romans 15:3) The current translation is: "*I am scorned by those who scorn you.*" Paul applies these words directly to Christ as inspiration to us.

Scripture is for our instruction. Paul calls for harmony in the community in Christ Jesus. He calls for hospitality and reminds us that the ministry of Jesus was to the Jews primarily. It reaches out now to the Gentiles to show God's mercy to all. The Gentiles are mentioned repeatedly in the Old Testament.

The Gentiles have been welcomed into the Kingdom of God which began with the call of Abraham and the other patriarchs. God is the God of hope for all Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul has fearlessly proclaimed this throughout the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. Once again, Paul hopes to go to Spain and to visit the Church at Rome on his way there. He stops at Jerusalem to turn over the collection that was taken for the Church there. Unfortunately, he was arrested there. Because of his appeal to the Emperor, he ends up in Rome anyway but as a prisoner.

Chapter 16

The final chapter brings greetings to many at Rome with whom Paul has become acquainted in his travels. He tells his readers to avoid factions: "*to be wise as to what is good and simple as to what is evil.* (Romans 16:19)

This reflects a saying of Jesus to His apostles as He sent them out: "*Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves.*" (Matthew 10:16) As Paul writes this letter from Corinth, he ends with greetings from his relatives and friends there.

The concluding doxology, or word of praise, is a liturgical formula of praise to God. It mentions the mystery hidden for long ages but now revealed in and through Christ. There is some doubt as to the authenticity of this ending, since it does not appear in all manuscripts.

Postscript

The following is from notes about the Letter to the Romans on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. www.usccb.org

In summary, Romans is the longest and doctrinally most significant of Paul's writings. It was probably composed at Corinth about 57 A.D.

The epistle was addressed to the Christian church at Rome, whose congregation Paul hoped to visit for the first time on his way to Spain.

The letter has been intensely studied since early Christian times and was the basis of Martin Luther's teaching on justification by faith alone.

Paul's lengthy presentation is more a treatise than a letter but falls far short of a complete survey of his theology; there is no discussion, for example, of the Eucharist, the Resurrection, or eschatology (the doctrine of the end times).

Paul declares that God's righteousness has always been manifest in God's dealings with humanity. Though the Apostle notes with pride the unique religious heritage of the Jewish people: the Covenant, the Law, the patriarchs, and Christ, he declares that righteousness no longer comes through observance of the Mosaic Law, not even for Jews, because God now manifests his righteousness through Christ, whose righteousness is the source of righteousness for all people. Paul, however, cautions his readers that righteousness is not a license to sin. The letter also contains several specific exhortations, such as to repay evil with good, to support and love one another, and to be obedient to civil rulers.

Of all the letters of Paul, that to the Christians at Rome has long held pride of place. It is the longest and most systematic unfolding of the apostle's thought, expounding the gospel of God's righteousness that saves all who believe. It reflects a universal outlook, with special implications for Israel's relation to the church. Yet, like all Paul's letters, Romans too arose out of a specific situation, when the apostle wrote from Greece, likely Corinth, between A.D. 56 and 58. Paul at that time was about to leave for Jerusalem with a collection of funds for the impoverished Jewish Christian believers there, taken up from his predominantly Gentile congregations. He planned then to travel on to Rome and to enlist support there for a mission to Spain. Such a journey had long been on his mind.

Now, with his missionary preaching successfully accomplished in the East, he sought new opportunities in the West, in order to complete the divine plan of evangelization in the Roman world. Yet he recognized that the visit to Jerusalem would be hazardous, and we know from Acts that Paul was arrested there and came to Rome only as a prisoner.

Existence of a Christian community in Rome precedes Paul's letter. When and how it arose within the sizable Jewish population at Rome, we do not know.

The Roman historian Suetonius mentions an edict of the Emperor Claudius about A.D. 49 ordering the expulsion of Jews from Rome in connection with a certain "Chrestus," probably involving a dispute in the Jewish community over Jesus as the Messiah ("Christus"). Aquila and Priscilla were among those driven out. Paul may have learned from them about conditions in Rome.

Opinions vary as to whether Jewish or Gentile Christians predominated in the house churches in the capital city of the empire at the time Paul wrote. Perhaps already by then Gentile Christians were in the majority. Paul speaks in Romans of both Jews and Gentiles.

The letter also refers to those "weak in faith" those "who are strong;" this terminology may reflect not so much differences between believers of Jewish and of Gentile background, respectively, as an ascetic tendency in some converts combined with Jewish laws about clean and unclean foods. The issues were similar to problems that Paul had faced in Corinth. If is part of the letter to Rome, then Paul had considerable information about conditions in Rome through all these people there whom he knew, and our letter does not just reflect a generalized picture of an earlier situation in Corinth.

In any case, Paul writes to introduce himself and his message to the Christians at Rome, seeking to enlist their support for a proposed mission to Spain. He employs formulations likely familiar to the Christians at Rome. He cites the Old Testament frequently. The gospel Paul presents is meant to be a familiar one to those in Rome, even though they had heard it first from other preachers. This gospel of Paul finds its center in salvation and justification through faith in Christ. While God's wrath is revealed against all sin and wickedness of Gentile and Jew alike. God's power to save by divine righteous or justifying action in Christ is also revealed. The consequences and implications for those who believe are set forth, as are results for those in Israel who, to Paul's great sorrow, disbelieve.

The apostle's hope is that, just as rejection of the gospel by some in Israel has led to a ministry of salvation for non-Jews, so one day, in God's mercy, "all Israel" will be saved.

The fuller ethical response of believers is also drawn out, both with reference to life in Christ's body and with regard to the world, on the basis of the eschatological situation and conditions in the community.

Others have viewed Romans more in the light of Paul's earlier, quite polemical Letter to the Galatians and so see the theme as the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, a topic judged to be much in the minds of the Roman Christians.

Each of these itself as the prophetic development and fulfillment of the faith of the Old Testament, declaring that the preparatory Mosaic covenant must now give way to the new and more perfect covenant in Jesus Christ.

Paul himself had been the implacable advocate of freedom of Gentiles from the laws of the Mosaic covenant and, especially in Galatia, had refused to allow attempts to impose them on Gentile converts to the gospel. He had witnessed the personal hostilities that developed between the adherents of the two faiths and had written his strongly worded Letter to the Galatians against those Jewish Christians who were seeking to persuade Gentile Christians to adopt the religious practices of Judaism.

For Paul, the purity of the religious understanding of Jesus as the source of salvation would be seriously impaired if Gentile Christians were obligated to amalgamate the two religious faiths.

Others find the theme of Israel and the church as expressed in chapters 9 to 11 to be the heart of Romans. Then the implication of Paul's exposition of justification by faith rather than by means of law is that the divine plan of salvation works itself out on a broad theological plane to include the whole of humanity, despite the differences in the content of the given religious system to which a human culture is heir. Romans presents a plan of salvation stretching from Adam through Abraham and Moses to Christ and on to the future revelation at Christ's return in glory. Its outlook is universal.

Paul's Letter to the Romans is a powerful exposition of the doctrine of the supremacy of Christ and of faith in Christ as the source of salvation. It is an implicit plea to the Christians at Rome, and to all Christians, to hold fast to that faith. They are to resist any pressure put on them to accept a doctrine of salvation through works of the law. At the same time, they are not to exaggerate Christian freedom as an abdication of responsibility for others or as a repudiation of God's law and will.