

A Review of the Book of Romans for the Purpose of Orientation to the Text

Paul, the seasoned apostle, having planted churches for decades among Gentile people groups, and having endured prison for his faith, now sets out to show just how it is that God, who showed special, privileged status to his chosen people, Israel, the Jews, the entire Jewry, now embraces Gentile, pagan, heathens *en masse*. He utilizes the theme of faith and obedience continuously woven throughout the narrative as the primary motif.

Paul uses brilliantly the most cherished forms of rhetoric to demonstrate that all humanity is engulfed in sin. He first states the obvious, naming sins that are predominate among human sexuality. But then, with the force of a roundhouse curveball, catches his reading audience off guard by showing that even the most righteous among us are not really righteous. But actually we are all lawbreakers and, as such, sinful. All humanity, the whole lot of us, is tainted by sin (3:23). To get out of this horrible mess, ironically, Paul, a Hebrew, chooses not the name sake of Israel, Jacob; but rather, decides to begin with Israel's grandfather, Abraham, the father of all faith. He even throws accolades in the direction of the middle generation, Isaac, and in so doing models high value for familial relations and generational blessing. This simulates for us aspects of holy trinity. It must have been groundbreaking and shocking to the first readers to understand Paul's philosophy of faith. Their patriarchal leader extraordinaire, Abraham, predecessor to the Hebrew nation, found favor with God not through observance of law but by faith, belief and obedience. God is not impressed by our deeds but by our hope. If we believe, he credits righteousness to us. There is a spiritual dividend to our choices. Death is the pay day of our sinful choices; but the gift of eternal life is our payment if we believe (6:23).

Paul demonstrates that the orientation of our outlook will determine our destined ending. The book could be titled *Hopeful Destiny in Advance*. We hope in Jesus Christ and all of our deeds are graciously enacted out of our love for him, not a sense of duty. A treadmill of performance does not impress God. (2:29; 3:30).

In the middle chapters, Paul demonstrates the hopelessness of the human condition outside of Christ. Because of the sin of one man, Adam, death entered into the world. Paul bemoans the horrible repetitious sin cycle. What I *don't* want to do, I do. What I *do* want to do I cannot do. It is immortalized in the famous words, "Oh wretched man that I am, who will free me from this body of death?" (7:24). It is a vicious, horrible cycle. But thankfully, Paul gives us the solution in the very next section. The Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death" (8:1-2). In fact, Jesus has canceled the law. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (10:4). It is not a canceling as in *doing away with*, but more to be thought of as the *equaling out of*, such as that found in mathematics. This is an *all things being equal*, so that in Christ we find the perfect balance that does not make the law void, but rather establishes it (3:31). He is the undoing of the ill effect of the law. We are not divorced from Sin; rather, we died to sin. Now we are married to Christ. Sin no longer has mastery over us. All who believe in their hearts, and confess with their mouths that God raised Jesus from the dead, are saved (10:9, 10).

There is very difficult language in the book of Romans. I believe I have something noteworthy to add to the conversation regarding the statement, "Jacob I have loved, and Esau I have hated" (9:13). It will be elaborated upon in my personal notes and exegesis. However, I will state here my view. God is speaking of the two nations that Jacob and Esau will become, the two nations that wrestled inside Rebecca's womb. Paul also tackles the difficult concept of predestination and foreknowledge. It is my view that "the elect" speaks of the ones chosen out of

Israel. Always, the “elect” passages relate to Israel in context, either it is Israel’s beginnings, or dealing with her Messiah, or *false* Messiahs compared to the *true* Messiah. This is Israel, ironically, who “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” (Rom 11:28). This definitely does not describe the view of covenant, Reformed theology. Careful delineation must take place that honors the exact and precise wording of scripture. Clearly, God chooses to model some individuals as instruments of destruction to advance his Kingdom’s cause. However, I believe it will be borne out that these are individuals, who as a result of their poor choices, have rejected God and are beyond help. God, by definition, simply knows all. In this sense, he is able to utilize them for his purposes. This would devastate any human, but God is able to understand it clearly. Further, I think it is important to emphasize, from the context, his act of pre-determination, is that he predetermined “all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved” (10:13). This is repeated for emphasis in numerous references throughout the letter, and will be cited in the notes. The same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay. What God has predetermined is that each human must make a choice. It is by faith that we have the peace of salvation (5:1). And while Israel opened the door to initiate salvation for Gentiles, in the end “all Israel” will be saved. Whatever interpretations may be applied here, massive numbers of Jews will acknowledge *Yeshua Hamashiach*, Jesus Christ, as Lord.

In most practical terms, Paul closes out his letter with a very sincere application for living the Christian life in a faith-filled community. The exercising of spiritual gifts is called for and admonished in the strongest way. Team unity is a high priority. True faith will be brought to bear upon our convictions. Our personal thoughts will be sequestered as the highest preference is given to the value of each individual being successful in their walk with Christ. True faith is not boastful. True faith is a preserving agent placing high value on those around us in the journey.