

Romans: Comment and Commentary

“Therefore, accept one another,
just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God (15:7).”

Parenthesis: This verse seems to summarize the book.

“Accept one another:” the purpose of the book (12-15)

“Just as Christ accepted us:” the foundation of the exhortation (1-11)

- I. Prologue, 1:1-17
- II. The Universality of Human Sinfulness, 1:18-3:20
- III. The Universality of Divine Righteousness for the Jew and Gentile: Justification, 3:21-4:25
- IV. The Assurance of God’s Righteousness: Sanctification
(Deliverance from the Power of Sin), 5:1-8:39
 - A. The Fruit of God’s Righteousness: Surety, 5:1-11
 - B. The Basis of Surety: The Triumph of Christ, 5:12-21
 - C. The Surety of Surety: Our Union with Christ, 6:1-7:25
 - 1. Union with Christ: a new identity (Baptism), 6:1-14
 - 2. Union with Christ: a new obedience (enslavement), 6: 15-23
 - 3. Union with Christ: a new marriage, 7:1-6
 - 4. Parentheses: the Law and the believer’s struggle, 7:7-25
 - D. The Power of our Surety : The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit, 8:1-39

This is the great chapter on the Holy Spirit in Romans. At least one scholar indicates that it is the “inspirational highlight in the book.” Certainly, it ends with a magnificent crescendo of adoration to God. Mounce writes, “Here the apostle is swept along in a wave of spiritual exaltation that begins with God’s provision of the Spirit for victory over the old nature, breaks through the sufferings that mark our present existence, and crests with a doxology of praise to the unfathomable love of God revealed in Christ Jesus. Nowhere in the annals of sacred literature do we find anything to match the power and beauty of this remarkable paean of praise.”

In chapter 7 the word “law” occurs 27 times, here only four times. In this chapter there are twenty-one references to the Holy Spirit, five in verses 1-7, 8, 9-16. The indwelling Spirit is the key to victory over the power of the flesh! Jesus promised the Spirit in the Upper Room discourse (John 14:12-31, 16:7-16) as our comforter/companion/ guide.

- 1. Victory over sin’s power by the Spirit, vv. 1-17
- Scholars debate the referent of the “therefore” in 8:1. 7:7-25 is a parenthesis in Paul’s argument, the purpose being the clearing up of possible difficulties in the minds of his readers. It is stated that believers died to the law in 7:1-6. Here he continues the point by saying there is no condemnation from the sin the law

reveals because of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Believers' union with Christ is the end of condemnation.

The chapter begins with a statement of "no condemnation"; it ends with a statement of "no separation." This is the great chapter of the security of the believer, the one who embraces salvation as a gift apart from works. In chapter 5, salvation is through Christ, the superior "Adam." Here, victory over sin's power is through the Holy Spirit.

a. Deliverance from the law of sin by the Spirit, vv. 1-4

1) The fact of freedom from condemnation, v. 1

The "in Christ Jesus" union is the keystone of Pauline theology. He is the place of safety. Like Noah, who was safe in the ark because 'the Lord locked him in' (Gen. 7:16), so the believer is safe. "No" is the word that Paul emphasizes in the verse by putting it first in the Greek sentence.

The term "condemnation" indicates a divine curse for noncompliance; it means punishment following a judicial sentence.

The phrase "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" is not in the best ancient texts.

2) The ground of freedom from condemnation, two realities, vv. 2-3

The "for" (v.2) gives the first reason that there is no condemnation in Christ. There is a new operative principle, authority, or power (here called "law") in believers' lives. The Spirit's work is confirmation of the reality of v.1. This leading is not a matter of sporadic impulse, something that can be turned off and on like a water tap, but the believer's habitual experience. Sanctification is the fruit of justification because the proof of salvation is the indwelling Spirit (8:9), who is a purifying agent.

Freedom from sin is stated with a verb tense ("has made"); it is a past event. Believers are free from sin's condemning power. The real contrast in the verse is between the Spirit, on the one hand, and sin and death on the other. As sin and death are those authorities that ruled in the old life, the Spirit, who is life, rules in this new life.

The second reason ("for," v. 3) is the sacrificial death of Christ. Law-obedience (here he means the Mosaic code) is impotent to remove the penalty of sin. It can condemn, but not save. Christ came in human flesh (John 1:14, Phil. 2:7-8), but not in sinful flesh; He was the unblemished lamb! The "Lamb" came to make a sin offering (i.e., "for sin [II Cor 5:21, I Pet 2:24]").

“Condemned sin in the flesh” means that through the sacrifice of Christ, He fulfilled the condemning demands of the law. That is why “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (v. 1).

3) The purpose of freedom from condemnation, v. 4

“That” indicates a purpose. Believers were not redeemed by the law or from the law, but they are called to obey it. Holiness was the goal of the Mosaic code, but it could only condemn sinful people; it is a perfect standard. Augustine said it well. “Law was given that grace might be sought; grace was given that the law might be fulfilled.”

“Be fulfilled” is passive in voice indicating that it is the work that the Spirit performs in the believer, not something they are to do.

“Walk” is a metaphor for the bent of one’s life. The believer’s responsibility is not so much in trying as trusting!

b. Life through the Spirit, vv. 5-17

1) The reasons for life “after” the Spirit, vv. 5-8

a) Control through inward inclination, v. 5

The “for” connects with the last clause of the preceding verse. People walk after their inward inclination, bent, or disposition. Believers possess the Spirit as the new abiding principle who produces a new bent or inward inclination.

b) A new inward orientation and end, v. 6

The believer has a new bent that issues in life and peace, not fruitlessness and death. Barclay writes that “to allow the things of the world completely to dominate life is self-extinction; it is the evidence of spiritual suicide.”

Parenthesis: The mind

The mind gathers and processes what enters through the eye and ear gates. What one allows into the mind becomes the mental focus. The mind transfers the information to a faculty of the soul called the heart (or the affections because determination of value is made there). If seen as profitable the heart (the faculty of desire) passes it to the will which in turn promotes a corresponding action; if seen as destructive the decision process ends at that point. The mind that sets itself on earth then ends in a void; the mind that fills itself with good things makes good choices accordingly.

c) A further elaboration, vv. 7-8

(1) The cause, v. 7

The “for” introduces an elaboration as to why the fleshly mind produces death (flesh in this instance means unsaved mankind, those not having the Spirit). The cause is that the unsaved mind is hostile to God. The fulfillment of the law’s righteousness is evidence of

submission to the lawgiver. Hostility and submission are antithetical; it is impossible for a hostile mind to submit.

(2) The consequence, v. 8

This verse is one of the clearest texts indicating that an unbeliever cannot please God until a work of the Spirit has been performed on the inner man. People without Christ are totally depraved, meaning that every facet of their immaterial being is blighted, and totally disabled in their rebellious displeasure to please in the Lord.

Parenthesis: The unsaved and inability

These verses make it evident that a person without the life of God cannot please God, because they possess antipathy, even hostility, toward the Lord. It is not that unbelievers lack the ability to make choices; it is that they see no value, only destruction, in embracing Jesus.

2) The fruit of life and hope in the Spirit, vv. 9-11

In these verses, there is a full and final answer to the question of 7:24, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

a) The believer's new life, vv. 9-10

(1) The fact of it, v. 9

This verse contains two "if" statements; they are what is denominated as first-class conditions meaning they are declarations of fact, not in any sense contingent. The apostle assumes that his audience is Christian.

It is interesting that believers are "in" the Spirit and the Spirit is "in" them. The "Spirit of Christ" is the Holy Spirit; here is a clear text of the interconnectedness of the two.

To be a Christian is to be indwelt by the Spirit of God and to be indwelt by God's Spirit means that Christians are "in the Spirit."

(2) The consequence of it, v. 10

This verse speaks of Christ indwelling the Christian. The indwelling Spirit and the indwelling Christ are distinguishable, but inseparable.

Because Christians possess the life of God, they will not experience the second death. Adam's sin brought spiritual and physical death. The former can be avoided; the latter, the second, cannot (unless one is living when Christ returns of course).

(3) The believer's resurrection, v. 11

Here is the answer to the cry of 7:24. Note that the Spirit is not said to be the agent of Christ's resurrection (it is the Father), but "the Spirit of the one who raised up Jesus from the dead. This observation is important to make the point that the sacrifice of the Son is

acceptable to the Father. Believers' spirits are alive by virtue of the indwelling of the Spirit, soon their bodies will be! Our bodies, though subject to death, will experience life in the resurrection.

3) The believer's obligation to the Spirit, vv. 12-17

The "so then" tells us that the apostle is stating the implications of what he has discussed in vv. 1-11.

a) Because of the Spirit's presence, vv. 12-13

(1) The duty, v. 12

Freedom does not result in freedom, but in duty resulting from the gift of freedom. It is the obligation of every believer to struggle with a nature that awaits its total reclamation.

(2) The reason, v. 13

The "for" gives a reason. A life characterized by the bent of the flesh, the sin nature, will end in judgment. A life lived in submission to the bent of the Spirit will issue in eternal life. Paul implies that the "flesh," meaning fallen human nature, still exists and there is a danger from it.

The "if" statements indicate facts from the perspective of the writer; it is assumed that a believer will struggle to minimize the impact of the remainders of sin's once universal dominance.

The "you" of v. 13 is plural. The penalty for those who live according to the flesh, those devoid of the Spirit, is not physical death only; it is eternal separation from God.

b) Because of the Spirit's leading, vv. 14-15

(1) The fact, v. 14

The "for" of this verse ("because [NIV]") provides the evidence for the preceding statement. The new bent or inclination ("led by the Spirit") is evidence that Christians have a new Father. The Spirit woos us to Christ and then forms Christ in us. The mood of the verb, "being led," is passive meaning it is something done for us, not by us. Our duty is to comply with the Spirit.

(2) The reason, v. 15

The "for" indicates an elaboration. Believers have been brought into a new family relationship! Twice in this verse is a reference to "spirit" without an article so the question is this: should we interpret it as "the Holy Spirit" or consider the absence of the article and render it as an accomplishment of the Spirit, by the works that follow? I take it to refer to what the Spirit produces ("not a spirit of slavery," but "a spirit of adoption").

Parenthesis: The Ground of Assurance.

Awareness of God as Father comes not from rational consideration nor from external testimony alone, but from a truth deeply felt and intensely experienced. Some Christians base their assurance of salvation on feelings alone, others on facts and arguments. Assurance arises from the inseparability of both!

(3) Because of spirit's witness, vv. 16-17

(1) The fact, v. 16

The new principle or inclination in believers is the Spirit; the Spirit's presence is proof that they are the children of God. He makes His people aware of it.

(2) The consequence, v. 17

This verse is a deduction from v. 16. Again the "if" statements are declarations of fact or certainty. Heirship follows from sonship, privilege from position. The "suffer[ing]" we share with Christ is against the power of sin; Christ suffered for the guilt of sin. Believers suffer similarly, but not for the same reason. Their pain arises from the power of it, Christ's from enduring the guilt of it to set us free from it.

2. For deliverance from sin's presence in glory by the Spirit, vv. 18-39

Before glory and the crown, there is suffering. As one has said, "There is a final valley to cross before Mount Glory is reached; it is Mount Suffering." The suffering defined within the broader context is that of struggle with the remnants of sin in the believer's nature (there is no hint in the book to this point of any threat of physical suffering due to their confession of Christ though we do know it existed in Rome). All believers make their way through it; it is not inconsistent with God's affection for us.

a. Sufferings anticipate glory, vv. 18-30

This section is bound together by a threefold groaning (vv. 22 [19], 23, 26). In comparison to glory, the sufferings of this life are insignificant; there is glory to follow suffering, and the Spirit aids believers in their suffering.

1) The groaning of creation, vv. 18-22

a) The fundamental principle, v. 18

The "for" explains the relationship of the sufferings in verse 17 and the glory that is to be revealed. Suffering is the path to incomparable glory. The "sufferings" in context are those that result from the struggle with the reminders of sin's once triumphal reign over us, the remnants.

b) The grand anticipation, v. 19-22

(1) The fact of hope, v. 19

The “for” indicates an explanation of the preceding statement. The incomparable glory awaiting the believer is anxiously anticipated by the sub-human creation, animals. Paul personifies the subhuman creation to convey to his readers a sense of the cosmic significance of humanity’s fall into sin and the believer’s restoration to glory.

(2) The need for hope, v. 20

Paul explains this further (“for”) in v. 19; it is his commentary on Genesis 3:17-19. Because of the curse on the creation, it cannot glorify God as it should or will. Creation became twisted and perverse; its original intent seemingly aborted by its grotesqueness. However, someday the curse will be removed.

Also “in hope” relates to “made subject to vanity.” Paul may have in mind Genesis 3:15. Creation waits, as Christians do, in expectation of a better day.

Who is the one who subjected creation “not of its own will?” It seems that it was God who did this (Gen 3:17) who alone has the right (His own divine justice) and power (His omnipotence) to do so.

(3) The reason for hope, v. 21

“Because” provides the reason creation hopes. Creation too will experience redemption, a restoration after the blight of the fall. The destiny of the earth is not annihilation, but transformation.

It is rather amazing that nature will be part of eternity; heaven is coming back to a recreated earth. The “garden of Eden” will return! I bet the animals will be something to behold.

(4) The surety of hope, v. 22

The final explanatory “for” (v.22) suggests a general truth. Creation agonizes in “childbirth” as people do.

The metaphor of childbirth seems on the surface a little strange. In the Jewish mind, the concept was associated with the dawning of a new age (Mark 13:8). This new “day” that is yet to come will not be without problems and struggle.

Applications:

1. The relationship of chapter 7 to the present chapter is worth our contemplation. The former describes the fact that the normal Christian life is one of struggle with the remainders of sin in all the faculties of our inner being. That chapter explains why we all wish to do better than we do. This chapter describes how we can live undefeated lives, through dependence

on the Spirit. Clearly the power is not ours, but it is within our grasp. It is called dependence, obedience, and yielding.

2. It is interesting to me that we rejoice and delight in the fact that we are without condemnation in Christ Jesus (v. 1), yet we all tend to think that we can do earthly things that impress the Lord to love us more. It must be difficult to grasp the fact that we have been clothed in divine righteousness with every hint of guilt and punishment removed, and yet must find it hard to accept the fact that God loves us with an unconditional love, divine love. Do you do thing with the concept that God will love you more? What does this tell you about your understanding of the grace of God?
3. The ground of assurance of divine forgiveness is the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. That is entirely personal and subjective. However, the presence of the Spirit in one's life is confirmed by the effect of His residency. The fruit of the Spirit, we are told by Paul, is love, love practically defined by such character qualities as joy, peace, patience, longsuffering, etc. Assurance is rooted in an invisible miracle that is demonstrated by a change in our priorities and goals. The root of the tree is not discovered by the leaves on the tree, but by its fruit. Words without change are simply empty. The bent of our thoughts, affections, and pursuits is the decisive test of the possession of Christian character. The witness of the Spirit is unto our conformity to Christ. Do you know people with empty words?
4. We must take care of our bodies, preserving them from defilement because we are members of Christ's body and the temples of the Holy Spirit. How does God indwell us since the deity is spirit (without volume, shape, or proportion? The divine presence is spiritual in nature. That is why the indwelling Spirit is called the Holy Spirit. Are you nurturing the manifestation of His presence? Remember our text (if you by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh, you will live [v.13]). Are you not only seeking positive growth, but dealing with negative traits in your life?
5. Service for God is a gift just as salvation from God is a gift of God. No one can merit the gift of salvation; there is nothing we can do in that regard. What we can do having experienced the wonder of forgiveness is to live in such a manner that God and His Word are respected and obeyed. We do not work to earn Calvary, but we are a people who work because of Calvary. God's favor is not to be purchased on the anvil of compliance, but it can be appreciated and shown so through obedience. We work because of the cross, not to get to the cross. Christ has done that for us by going to the cross.
6. The lost can do nothing to change their spiritual condition ("neither indeed can be," v. 7). They are unwilling to come to Christ simply because the revelation they have received in nature and conscience has left a bitter taste and they desire no more. What can we do for them? Unbelievers can choose Christ, but they do not see Him as valuable. Our first task is to help people to see that He is "the pearl hidden in the field." How do we do this? By living our lives in such a manner that the beauty of Christ can be seen is the first step. The second step is to explain to people the claims that He made concerning Himself (that He is God sent from heaven, that He came to die for sinners, that He conquered death through His own death, that He rose from the dead as proof, that His life can be their own through faith in what He accomplished.
7. Christians who live in sin live a wasted life (described here as "death"). Believer who live in disobedience not only bring upon themselves the chastisement of God, the remedial

corrective mercies of God, but dishonor and bring reproach upon Him. The net result can be a waste of a life. Some Christians though alive are useless because they have chosen to live after the values of the world. Do you know people who profess faith in the Savior but live otherwise? It is only to live in a foolish manner to possess the life of God and not be in the process of being transformed by it.

8. I think that it is rather amazing that though the picture of humanity is beyond bleak and hopeless (1:18-3:20), God in Christ has radically changed our direction (3:21-5:21) by justly forgiving us because of what Christ did for us. As former aliens hostile to God, we have been brought into a new family; we have been adopted! God, the just judgment, has become our Father! Can you imagine such a benefit, such a display of grace for us who hated and despised Him (“while we were yet sinners Christ died for us”). Do you bow in thankfulness regularly?
9. There is no need for the believer to be defeated. He can yield his body to the Spirit and by faith overcome the old nature. The Spirit, who is life, will empower him. The Spirit of God will enable him to overcome the flesh. And the Spirit of adoption will enrich him and lead him into the will of God. These are the promises of one who is more faithful and truthful than any mortal shall ever be!