

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
- V. The Vindication of God’s Righteousness: His Promises to Israel, 9:1-11:36
 - A. The problem: Israel’s rejection, the divine perspective, 9:1-33
 - B. The explanation of Israel’s rejection, the human perspective, 10:1-21

This chapter is the reverse side of the topic of chapter 9. Divine sovereignty should always be balanced by human responsibility. It is mankind’s duty to respond to grace. The compatibility of divine sovereignty and human responsibility is beyond human grasp; it takes an infinite mind. Believers rest in the wisdom of God knowing that their duty is obedience and He is the promise keeper (See 4:20-21).
- 1. Paul’s eagerness for Israel’s salvation, vv. 1-2

The apostle begins this chapter the same way as the previous, with a heart-felt cry for the nation’s salvation.

 - a. The declaration of it, v. 1

Paul earnestly desired the conversion of His people and understood that his prayer for them made a difference, that prayer was an effective means to that end. While he firmly embraced predestination, the divine side of redemption, he understood that means should be employed. This seems to echo his passion revealed in 9:1-5, a genuine compassion for his people.
 - b. The explanation of it, v. 2

This seems to be a repetition of the point that he argued in 9:30-33. Zeal characterized by enthusiasm and sincerity is not enough; passion and devotedness does not make an action right. Sadly, they were ignorant of the Scriptures that they sought to follow but twisted its meaning.
- 2. Their error: they rejected God’s way of righteousness, vv. 3-4

Their mistake lay in seeking to establish their own righteousness by good works before God. In doing so, they failed to receive God’s righteousness as a gift.

 - a. Their desire for legal righteousness, v. 3a

The Hebraic sense of “knowing,” not the Greek sense, which is cognitive in nature, involves the idea of heart-felt commitment; the Jews substituted human performance for faith.

b. Their rejection of God’s righteousness, v. 3b

It is as if in being given the gift of Moses and the prophets, they refused to allow God to give them the redeemer, the Christ. “God’s righteousness” means a right standing before God, imputed divine righteousness. They did not understand that it was a gift and tried to earn it instead. God did not act in mercy to the ancient people because of their character, but because of His own; He granted them unconditional promises (Deut. 9:6, 7, 13, 24, 27; 10:12-22).

c. The cause specifically; their failure to see Christ, v. 4

The phrase, “Christ is the end of the law” is difficult because “end” has several meanings (i.e., goal, fulfillment, or termination). It seems that the latter sense fits the context best. Stifler says bluntly, “‘End’ means termination.” Christ ended the old order that was merely a shadow of anticipation, introducing the new order or age of His Spirit. Paul assumes the error of the Jews is correct (salvation was through law-keeping), saying that the era has ended forever in the gift of God’s righteousness.

3. Their error: they rejected the gracious character of God’s salvation, vv. 5-13

The apostle’s point in this section is to emphasize and contrast the difference between a supposed righteousness through the law and righteousness through faith.

Law Righteousness

The Jewish error
Exclusive (Jews only)
Based on works
Based on self-righteous
Brings failure
Performance focused
Leads to pride of accomplishment
Glorifies mankind

Faith Righteousness

The Lord’s method
Inclusive (whosoever)
Come through faith alone
Based on God’s righteousness
Brings salvation
Trust focused
Leads to humility/gratitude
Glorifies God

a. The error of a law-righteousness, v. 5

If a person, from the moment he/she draws the first breath until the last, should live a perfect life of obedience to the Law of Moses, they can claim heaven by works. The word “do” is in the present tense, implying habit. The law demands what no human can deliver, perfection. Therefore, the law is an instrument of condemnation that should bring sinners in despair to Christ.

There is a slight problem in the use of Lev. 18:5 in that the original setting does not appear to have any reference to legal righteousness as opposed to that of grace. It is, however, a clear description of the principle of legalism.

b. The righteousness of faith, vv. 6-10

1) As expressed in the Old Testament, vv. 6-8

The text behind this passage comes from Deut. 30:10-14, principally, and Deut. 9:4, the former passage teaching righteousness through faith (as Lev. 18:5 summarizes the essence of the law, Deut. 30:12-14 encapsulates the gospel). The Deuteronomic text is about doing well in the land God promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), anticipating the Palestinian Covenant. If they keep the commandments (note the plural) and turn to the Lord with all their heart (note the singular), they will enjoy the possession of the land. Moses is saying that grace is through faith, a simple inclining of the heart toward the Lord. God is accessible because He has revealed Himself. Deut. 30:14 is the gospel in the Old Testament (see v. 8). One comes into relationship with God through faith, not because of his/her endeavors.

Paul is suggesting, by the ascent-descent comment, that believers did not participate in nor precipitate the incarnation or the resurrection (vv. 6-7). Christ came, not as a reward for people's doings, but from sheer divine grace and mercy. Salvation is not something attained; it is obtained. Further humans will prove futile in searching for Christ; it is entirely unnecessary. He came voluntarily to us!

2) Its New Testament expression, vv. 9-10

Verse nine seems to be an elucidation of the "word is near you" in the previous verse. Paul seems to be teaching the believers the means of appropriating salvation from a human perspective, something they already know being believers, to strengthen them in the faith. The "if" is a third-class condition meaning potential future action (Paul is not asking the Roman Christians to believe; he is teaching them the nature of believing).

The nature of faith is the same in both great eras, though the object is clearer since Christ has come. Believers must confess from the heart that Jesus is the Christ, the deliverer. "Faith" and "confession" are not two things; they are sides of the same coin. Faith is the inward side of the matter and is the cause of the outward side. However, confession without belief is self-deception and hypocrisy; trust without confession is cowardice.

To confess Him as Lord means to embrace His claims to deity and sovereignty over our lives.

Verse 10 has three couplets that reflect the inward and outward aspects of redemption: heart and mouth, believe and confess, righteousness and salvation.

c. The freeness of the righteousness of God, vv. 11-13

1) Its universality, vv. 11-12

The gospel is for all; it is to be universally proclaimed to Jew and Gentile alike. The quotation is from Isa. 28:16, though in doing so Paul adds to the text the word “whoever.”

“Believes in Him (v. 11)” is present tense telling us that trusting Christ is not a one-time event; it is a continuous expression. The Christian life is one of persevering faith, not a one-time event. There is a beginning, but it is a believing that continues.

The universal extension of the gospel (v. 12) is suggested by the twice-occurrence of “all.” While there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles in that all are lost, it is also true that all can be saved. This is the insight found in the New Covenant.

- 2) Its surety and sufficiency, v. 13
The “for” states a reason; it is a quotation from Joel 2:32. Everyone who desires to love Christ can come to Him. To “call upon the name of the Lord” is the characteristic OT way of expressing worship, specifically the worship of supplication. In the Joel passage “salvation” meant physical deliverance from an enemy; here Paul uses Joel and interprets it as teaching spiritual forgiveness and eternal salvation (the Old Testament is a book of physical shadows that picture spiritual fulfillment with the coming of the promised deliverer). “What is enfolded in the OT is unfolded in the NT” is an old saying that captures the point). With “believe” and “confess” another synonym is added, “call.”
4. Their error: they rejected the universal preaching of God’s salvation, vv. 14-21
Paul continues to stress that the failure of Israel was theirs. Israel forgot that there must be a response to the invitation to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.
 - a. Israel’s failure of believing, vv. 14-18
While this passage is often used to promote missionary endeavor (and we are right in doing so), its primary application is to the nation of Israel.
 - 1) The basis of true faith, vv. 14-15
In v. 14 Paul gives us a series of questions, typical of his polemical literary style in the book, followed by a sustaining quotation for Isa. 52:7 (perhaps Nahum 1:15) in v. 15. The verse tells us that God’s messengers are a divine blessing to a needy world. Someone has called this “the Great Commission” of Romans.

It is interesting to think about the two books wherein the quotation is found that Paul used here. If he was using Nahum (he has quoted another Minor Prophet in this chapter [Joel], he used a *past* event, news of the destruction of the Assyrian Empire and Nineveh, its capital. God predicted Assyria’s fall, and this had come true, the “beautiful feet” being a metaphor for the messengers that brought the news. If Paul has

the Isaiah passage in mind, the statement would be about a *future* event, the coming of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom. It seems more likely that his reference is to Isaiah than Nahum, but the point is that he sees application to Israel in his day. It is interesting how NT writers interpret passages making them applicable to their context.

The chain begins with God sending and ends with man calling on God to come! It begins with a divine initiative and ends in the divine saving of man. The first step in the chain of evangelization is a messenger; someone must be sent from God. The second step in the evangelistic task is that the sent one must preach. Here the word, “preach,” means “to proclaim.” The apostle quotes Isaiah 52:7. The feet of a servant are beautiful because without their coming there could be no announcement of the good news of deliverance. The Isaiah passage is a promise of restoration after the Babylonian captivity. Paul uses the passage as a shadow of a greater, spiritual fulfillment in the Messiah. The third step is hearing; it is the emphasis of the passage. People must hear. The fourth step is to believe on Him. The fifth step is to call upon Him. The content of the call is in 10:9-10.

Saving faith is composed of at least four elements: (1) a message explained, (2) a person to embrace, (3) a response of heart-felt faith and repentance, and (4) a life reflective of gratitude.

2) The failure in the third and fourth link, v. 16

Israel failed at the third and fourth steps in evangelization; they refused to believe as predicted by the prophet Isaiah (53:1). The passage predicts the lament (confession, mourning) of the nation when they shall realize at Christ’s second advent that they crucified their Messiah. John 12:37-41 is an application of this passage, the John quoting it, to indicate that in Jesus’ day, as in Isaiah’s, the people refused to believe though they had instruction.

3) The links summarized, vv. 17-18

a) The conclusion, v. 17

“So” implies a conclusion or summary. Faith comes through the message heard about Christ. It was not God’s fault that Israel did not believe; they refused to hear.

b) The proof, v. 18

To prove this, the apostle quotes Ps. 19:4, a passage concerning natural revelation (Rom. 1-2). His application of the text seems to be beyond its original meaning. He uses it as an analogy (a “just as” formula). As God’s word of general revelation has been proclaimed to all the earth, so God’s word of special revelation has been proclaimed all over the earth as well. The point of the verse is that the gospel

message, “the word or message of Christ,” has been proclaimed in the world of the apostle’s day.

b. Israel’s failure, Gentiles embraced, vv. 19-21

Paul seems to be anticipating an excuse on Israel’s part and replies to it.

1) The failure predicted, v. 19

“Did they not know?” is the sense of the verse. It seems best to understand the question this way: did Israel not know that there would come a time of rejection because of their unbelief? Did they not understand that God’s mercies came through Israel, but was not exclusively Israel’s?

The apostle quotes from Deut. 32:21 where Moses predicts national failure, national rejection, and a turning to Gentiles to arouse Israel’s attention through jealousy. Paul’s simple point is that the OT anticipates the inclusion of non-Jews, Gentiles, into the covenantal family of Abraham.

2) The failure explained, v. 20

Paul uses a text from the prophets (Isa. 65:1-2) to sustain the same point. Isaiah is “bolder” because his prediction is specific. God will turn to the Gentiles who never sought him (65:1).

3) The failure restated, v. 21

Israel, on the other hand, persisted in rejecting God’s grace and hardened their hearts (65:2). God embraced Gentiles in His plan, in part, to spur the Jews to faithfulness.

***The positive outcome of this will be explained in detail in the next chapter. God is not done with Israel according to the faith of Abraham.*

Applications:

1. How would the apostle describe the error of the Jewish people? They had so much privilege but failed miserably. They had a desire for God, but it did not arise from the heart (v. 2); they wanted to approach God their way and not God’s, being proud and self-righteous (vv. 3-4); and they did not truly understand the Bible they sought to seriously read and perverted it (vv. 5-13). Why do you think people want to go their own way? What is it that in us that makes us rebels? Why are so much privilege and so much blindness twins?
2. Why do you think people relish the thought of something that is a gift, having no cost, and yet find the offer of a free salvation foolish? Why do you think people would rather earn salvation than accept a gift? What is it in our natures that simply finds it difficult, even impossible, that it could be so? Could it be that we find it difficult to believe that God is as good and as gracious as He claims to be because we have never met one so utterly kind and, therefore, believe that He is simply too good to be true?
3. Being religious is not the same as being righteous. Israel’s failure concerned inward motivation, not outward actions. The Jews had a zeal for God but lacked the righteousness of God. Many people are morally conservative and respectful of God and religion in general,

commendably so, but the issue that determines the validity of an act, or actions, is motive. If a person does what is commendable, but does so out of a self-centered reason, it does not commend him/her to God. Do you know people who seek to be commendable to God by their own virtues? Virtues do not impress God if they do not possess the perfections of God. Are you glad that we have a substitute who is our righteousness?

4. There are several things this passage clearly teaches. You may be ignorant of the Scriptures, but full of religious zeal. You may be ignorant of the Scriptures though a student of them. You may be ignorant of the Scriptures by rejecting what is clear and compelling and choose to emphasize what is unrevealed, obscure, or trivial. A person can know a lot about the Bible without knowing its author! There is an adage: "You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink;" privilege available does not mean privilege possessed! Some people appear to be so close, yet they are so far away.
5. There is no excuse for unbelief even though it abounds in believers and unbelievers. Is there any excuse, such as "I never heard the words of God," for us? Paul's answer is that unbelievers are without excuse, and how much more of us, because God has sent them messengers with "feet." Natural revelation is not sufficient to redeem, but it is sufficient to create a taste for God. What people do with that "taste" determines if they want to hear more or not. If they choose to hear no more, their condemnation is just. In rejection of what is insufficient, they block out the possibility of what is sufficient because their rebellious hearts want to hear no more.
6. God's word is true because it is God's word. The character of the person who speaks is the guarantee of the truthfulness of what they say. God by His very nature is righteousness and truth; therefore, He can be imminently trusted. Who would have thought that God had in mind to create a multi-ethnic community of followers? God said that in Moses and the prophets, but the Jews of Jesus' day found it foolish. They simply did not read the Bible carefully and were blinded by national prejudice. Could it be that we are as blinded by our prejudices at times? Is not the Bible to be trusted even when we find ourselves in conflict with it?
7. God is often found by those the farthest from Him. Our text indicates that people found what they were not searching to discover, people who did not ask for Him. Clearly, people do not desire God (what unbelievers desire are the benefits of divine blessing without embracing the person who blesses), yet God in His mercy and grace comes to people who have no interest in Him creating the interest. No one can come to God unless they first are drawn to come (faith follows self-perception). See Rom. 3:10-11. People are enticed to come to God by the revelation to them of the beauty of God in Christ. We must never think that we are the ones who know who will and will not come to Jesus because the issue is not with people; it is with God.