

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
  - C. The Expectation of Israel’s Restoration, 11:1-36

As indicated previously, chapters 9-11 are a literary unit in the book, the function being to assure his readers that, though the Gentiles have been entered into the covenants of blessing given originally to Israel, God has not forsaken His ancient people. The more I meditate on this book it seems that Paul is dealing with ethnic tensions in the emergent church, Jewish believers thinking that they have some degree of supremacy and superiority; the Gentiles resistantly believing that God has inaugurated a new movement in redemptive history that prioritized them and deemphasized the present role of ancient Israel. Paul’s point is that in the body of Christ Jews and Gentiles have equal standing. However, God does not forget, nor is He negligent, to fulfill the promises that He makes to the people to whom He makes them. To diminish Gentile misperceptions, he makes the point here that God has a special place for the Israel of faith. The religion of Jesus embraces equally, yet distinctively, Jews and Gentiles.

In chapter nine the emphasis is upon the past electing grace of God, beginning with Abraham, to redeem the world. In chapter ten Paul deals with the present unbelief of Israel and the rejection of God’s messengers. This chapter makes the point that Israel’s state of unbelief is not final; in fact, there will be a day when God’s blessing returns to them as it has currently to the Gentiles.

- 1. Israel’s rejection is not total, vv. 1-10
  - Paul explains Israel’s present state of unbelief.
  - a. Paul’s question, v. 1a

The apostle's question presupposes a negative answer. The fact that he called them "his people" is a clue that God has not abandoned them. The "people" also relates to 10:21, "a disobedient and obstinate people."

b. Paul's answer, vv. 1b-6

1) A pointed denial, v.1b

2) The case of Paul himself, v.1c

The "for" alerts the reader to a reason for the denial. The apostle's own salvation is proof that God has not rejected His people. Benjamin was the smallest tribe; David called them "little Benjamin" (Ps. 68). Paul came from a tribe with a checkered history that at one point almost encountered annihilation because of the tragedy at Gibeah, the quartering of a priest's concubine (Judges 19-21), a repulsive act reminding the nation of Sodom and the threat of judgment for tolerance.

When you think about Paul using himself as an example of God's promise-keeping covenantal grace, the apostle is a grand illustration because he, for a time, was the church's greatest antagonist. Human action, even rebellion, cannot alter the love and will of God.

3) The fact of God's love, v. 2a

"Foreknowledge" means a prior love, not knowledge of future action as a basis for a divine decision. God did not choose Israel because He knew they would accept Him; He chose them out of love, and they did not accept him. Paul's point seems to be that past election based on prior love guarantees the future! God has a future for Israel based on His elective, eternal love.

4) The example of Elijah: the problem of appearances, vv. 2b-6

The apostle introduces an illustration, a parallel situation (1 Kings 19:10-18). Elijah's time was one of great apostasy in Israel, but not universally so. The context is the story of wicked King Ahab (Jezebel) and his attack on the prophets of God. Elijah's lament was unfounded; God always has a remnant according to His promise.

a) The illustration, vv. 2b-4

There was a remnant of faithful people in Elijah's days (1 Kings 19:10, 14). General apostasy and a faithful remnant can be coterminous. Some seven thousand did not succumb to religious dereliction (1 Kings 19:18). Emphasis is placed upon God's action; He had preserved them.

b) The application, vv. 5-6

"In the same way" gives the clue to the parallel of Elijah and Paul's days. In the darkest time there is a remnant according to divine grace. When it comes to "true Israel" in Paul's day there was and there will always be, a remnant of the whole. God's intent was not Isaac and Ishmael, but Isaac; it was not Jacob and Esau, but Jacob; it was not all of Jacob, but Jacob's offspring according to divine choice.

The “if” of v. 6 is a first-class condition meaning that it is assumed to be true. Salvation is by grace, not works; the two are antithetical.

c. The conclusion, vv. 7-10

- 1) Election obtained what the failed quest through moral obedience could not, v. 7.

Many Jews were seeking to be right with God, but they pursued this in the performance of religious ritual, racial privilege, and self-effort. They missed their goal! This verse summarizes vv. 1-6

- 2) The blindness of the rest, vv. 8-10

Paul buttresses his argument by citing Scripture. Interestingly, he chooses texts from the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures: Deut. 29:4 (the law), Isa. 29:10 (the prophets), and Ps. 69:22-23 (the writings [here an imprecatory psalm]). The failure of Israel to believe led to a hardening by God of their hearts. God’s hardening blinds people in the sin they have chosen for themselves. Spiritual blindness and deafness are visited upon people as a judgment of their previous derelictions and rebellious refusal to accept God’s grace in humility and gratitude.

2. The illustration of the olive tree, vv. 11-24

This section in the book is an interlude in the argument devoted to the question of Israel’s rejection (vv. 11-15) and a warning addressed to the temporally favored Gentiles (vv. 16-24). Paul knew that the Gentiles in Rome were engaging in inappropriate bragging. To curb their sinful pride, he reminds them that the casting out of the Jews is neither total nor permanent. Gentiles have not replaced Jews in God’s program.

*Parenthesis: For “True Israel” in Israel is there a future?*

*Our scholars are in stark disagreement when it comes to the issue of the possible restoration of Israel. Are the promises to believing-Israel yet to be fulfilled in a national calling of the Jews to faith? There is no disagreement among our conservative scholars that God will keep His promises to Israel; the issue is: has the church inherited to promises to believing Israel and will be fulfilled through the new body of believers? How distinct are we to maintain the separation of Israel and the church?*

*It seems impossible to read this chapter without thinking that there is a future for ethnic Israel in God’s program, that He will re-gather the people of faith into the land promised to them in Abraham and repeated to Isaac and Jacob. This is a view that is not restricted to a premillennial view of history but is held by some others of varied millennial perspectives. The way that God will accomplish His promises is not agreed upon either. I think that what is happening in Palestine today (“Palestina” is the Roman term for the promised land coined in the second century after the dispersion of the Jews following the Bar Kochva Rebellion against Rome (132-135), whether this*

*is another shadow of ultimate fulfillment or the harbinger of the ultimate fulfillment, only time will tell us. There is yet another chapter in redemptive history for those who have become the "true" descendants of Abraham.*

a. The question, v. 11a

Israel's failure is partial and temporal; it is not permanent or final. There is a question of how to understand the verb "fall" or "stumble" since it looks at an event that suggests the opposite of what is anticipated by the apostle's answer. It may be better to place the emphasis on the purpose clause ("that"). The design of Israel's failure was to open the door to the Gentiles. That in turn will lead to the return of Israel to divine favor. The salvation of Gentiles is a subordinate design in God's plan.

b. The explanation, vv. 11b-15

Paul's answer is threefold. First, there is a firm denial. Second, God turned to the Gentiles to provoke His people to jealousy (Paul alludes again to Deut. 32:21); third, the apparent success of the mission to the Gentiles will open the Jews to the gospel, bringing a huge ingathering and great blessing (vv. 12-15). Israel's sin is the starting point of a process that will lead back to blessing for Israel. The middle stage of this process involves the Gentiles.

(1) The purpose of Gentile inclusion, v. 11b

(2) The resultant Jewish restoration, v. 12

Paul here anticipated the national repentance of Israel that he will articulate later (v. 26). God promised to bless the world through Israel (Gen. 12:1-3).

(3) The implication in Paul's ministry, vv. 13-14

The term "magnify (v. 13)" most likely means "to make the most of an endeavor." Paul could be saying that he is pleased to serve the Gentiles or that he saw his ministry to the Gentiles as making the Jews jealous which would result in their salvation. The phrase is difficult to understand.

The "some" of v. 14 indicates that the gathering of the Jews in the time of great Gentile blessing will be small in comparison to a later time.

(4) The marvel of Jewish restoration, v.15

"For" introduces the apostle's conclusion. "World" refers to the collectivity of the Gentiles as it does in v. 12.

c. The admonition, vv. 16-24

The apostle has two purposes in this paragraph about the branches. The roots and tree trunk are the promises made of a land, seed, and blessing (meaning ultimately heaven, Christ, and salvation). The *first* purpose is hortatory. Gentiles are blessed at the expense of the Jew, and they must not boast. The second is didactic: there is a future of spiritual blessing for Israel.

1) The declaration, v. 16

"And" that introduces the verse should be translated as "now." This is a transitional term and serves to bring the reader to the illustration beginning in v. 17. "The lump" or cake from dough probably refers to the nation. Num.

15:17-21 speaks of cake from flour offered to God from the threshing floor. The source is communicated in the result, the quality of the one relates to the quality of the other (dough to cake, root to branches). These symbols picture the Abrahamic Covenant, the source of Israel's future blessings.

2) The illustration, vv. 17-24

In this illustration, there is a warning for Gentiles (vv. 17-22) and a fresh promise of Jewish restoration (vv. 23-24).

(a) The warning to the Gentiles, vv. 17-22

(1) The privilege of the Gentiles, v. 17

The Gentiles share in the same source of blessing (the covenants of promise, Eph 2:12) as the Jew, though they are branches of a different kind in the root.

*Parenthesis: In husbandry, it is not normal to graft a weaker branch to a stronger trunk. The norm is the reverse here. A stronger branch is grafted to improve the tree. In Paul's illustration, the trunk is greater than any branches, giving them vitality. We would call it grace, something only God would think to do!*

"Grafted among them" suggests that not all the Jewish branches were cut off. There is a remnant according to grace!

(2) The warning to the Gentiles, vv. 18-20

The Gentiles are reminded that branches are not self-sustaining. Israel failed through unbelief and that should be a warning to the unnatural branches. There are consequences to our choices. God's election does not negate mankind's responsibility. The election of national Israel did not guarantee everyone's salvation. Pride was the downfall of Israel, and it can be for the Gentiles.

The phrase, "Do not be conceited, but fear (v. 20)," is composed of two imperatives or commands, the first negative and the second positive, suggestive of action already in progress. It tells us that there were tensions in the Roman church between Jews and Gentiles

(3) The reason for the warning, vv. 21-22

The "for" provides the reason for the imperatives of the previous verse. The unnatural branches cannot expect a better treatment than the natural branches. Sinful action leads to judgment for Jew and Gentile.

The phrase "kindness and severity of God" seems paradoxical but to God they are harmonious. There are consequences to our choices. God's election does not negate mankind's responsibility. The election of national Israel did not guarantee everyone's salvation.

The “if you continue” clause is present tense and personal or subjunctive. This construction meant that believing-Gentile-continuance is conditional (this is the flip side of God's sovereignty of Rom. 9); we must be diligent to maintain our faith. This refers to the perseverance of both the group and the individual and consists of the mystery and tension of corporality and individuality in the Bible.

There are both promises (based on God's character) and conditional covenants (based on human response and individual acceptance).

b) The promise of Israel's restoration, vv. 23-24

The rejection of Israel is not final; if they repent, they will be included. If the Gentiles cease to believe they will be excluded. The Jews are the natural branches and will be re-grafted when the times of the Gentiles end, when the door of opportunity closes for Gentiles as it did for the Jews.

2. The promise of Israel's restoration, vv. 25-27

a. The temporary hardening of Israel, v. 25

1) The admonition, v. 25a

The “for” introduces the ultimate ground of the hope of Israel's re-grafting. A floodgate of Jews will come once again to the gospel after the “fullness of the Gentiles” pass (“Fullness” will come when the total number of Gentiles that God has ordained to life through Christ have been gathered into His fold). When the number of Gentile believers is complete, God will open the eyes of the Jews and gather them to Himself. The recalling of Israel is called “mystery,” a sacred secret, something that may be known only by divine revelation. Something hitherto unrevealed.

2) The description of hardening, v. 25b

What happened to Israel is described as callousness, used here as a metaphor for dullness or insensitivity. This partial blindness, instigated by God (vv. 8-10) because of the Jews' rejection of Jesus fits into God's plan to redeem mankind.

3) The culmination of hardening, v. 25c

The word “until” suggests that the time of hardening will have an end. “Fullness of the Gentiles” is a redemptive phrase referring to the time of Gentile salvation, the present age since Pentecost (Acts 2). Taken in this way “fullness” contains the meaning: “until the full number of Gentiles are gathered.” “Shall have come in” refers to the future time when the covenantal promise to Israel will be fulfilled.

b. The salvation of Israel, v. 26

1) The number of them, v. 26a

“All Israel” means the nation as a whole or as an entity, not every person in the nation. Some scholars take “all Israel” to mean a larger entity in contrast to the relatively small remnant of believing Jews in the time of Gentile blessing.

- 2) The manner of it, v. 26b
 

“And so” has proven difficult for interpreters. The most common view is to see the words as an inference of what will happen because of the end of the times of the Gentiles. The reference to Isa. 59:20-21 (Ps. 14:7) and Isa. 27:9 (Jer. 31:33-34) speaks of the coming of Messianic salvation at the time of Christ’s Second Advent. They are references to the Davidic Covenant.
- c. The divine attestation, v. 27
 

The citation in v. 27a is built on Gen. 17:4, also found in Isa. 59:21, a reference to the Abrahamic Covenant. The citation from v. 27b is from Isa. 27:9 or Jer. 31:33-34, a reference to the New Covenant. All the unconditional covenants find their fruition at the Second Coming of Christ.
4. The promise of God to the nations, vv. 28-32
 

This section is a recapitulation of vv. 11-27, but with a broader sweep. Israel has been cast away but awaits a restoration. The section is composed of two contrasts.

  - a. Israel’s inevitable future, though now enemies, vv. 28-29
    - 1) According to the gospel, v. 28a
 

God now treats Israel as an enemy as the gospel goes forth in this age to Gentiles. The hardening is “for your sakes.” However, God’s love has not flagged toward them. Its display in a redemptive sense is small in comparison to what it will be in the future.
    - 2) According to election: beloved, v. 28b
 

The promises of God are secure for Israel, not on the ground of her merit, but based on God’s fidelity to His covenantal promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
    - 3) The rationale, v. 29
 

The “gifts and the calling of God,” the immutable divine promises, are the ground of Israel’s status. The “gifts” are the effect of the “calling” given to the Father and confirmed in a believing remnant.
  - b. Israel’s current disobedience, yet there will be mercy, vv. 30-32
 

The “for” of v. 30 explains the preceding and elaborates the argument.

    - 1) The Gentile experience of mercy, v. 30
 

The Gentile is currently enjoying the mercy of God once primarily granted to the Jew. The disobedience of the Jews brought blessing to the Gentiles.
    - 2) The Jewish experience of mercy, v. 31
 

Paul’s argument seems to be something like this: first, the Gentiles were disobedient (Gen. 6-11); second, the Jews were called and then disobeyed (Gen. 12–Acts 1); third, Gentiles were gathered and disobeyed (Acts 2–Rev. 3); fourth, Israel will be restored to obedience and bless the nations (Rev. 4-22).
    - 3) The rationale, v. 32

The “for” gives the reason for the preceding two verses as well as a summary. Though mankind proved unfaithful throughout the pages of history; God is faithful to His promises.

*Parenthesis: The meaning of “all”*

*In western culture that places an emphasis on individualism, it is easy to think that the word means “each and every one.” Read this way it is hard to avoid a hint of universalism here since we readily agree that “all (each and every)” are disobedient. The parallel “all’s” when read in this manner would suggest that “each and every” has been shown redemptive mercy. The context of the verse deals with two groups of people, not individuals. Thus, the “all” refers to the groups: Jews and Gentiles. The topic is not individuals.*

5. Israel’s future restoration: will be the occasion for glorifying God (doxology, praise for the riches of God’s wisdom), vv. 33-36.

Vv. 34-35 are a citation from Isa. 40:13. Verse 35 continues with a citation from Job 41:11. Notice also that vv. 34-35 are in the form of questions. They are answered in v. 36. Paul is overwhelmed when he considers God’s program of grace for Jews and Gentiles.

- a. The richness of God, stated, v. 33

“Riches” denotes the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God; “wisdom” the beautiful design of all things; “knowledge” His all-inclusive and inexhaustible knowledge and understanding; and “judgments” His actions.

- b. A richness beyond man’s knowing, v. 34a
- c. A richness beyond man’s informing, v. 34b
- d. A richness beyond man’s giving, v. 35
- e. The rationale, v. 36

The “for” gives the answers to the preceding questions. God is incomprehensible, self-sufficient, all-wise, and all-powerful. No one can give to God; no one is His teacher. All things begin in Him and end in Him! Between the two, He sustains all things.

Applications:

1. Do we have an Elijah syndrome? “I alone am left.” Do you ever catch yourself thinking that Christianity is on a slippery slide to oblivion, apostasy abounds, and only you and a few others remain faithful? We should learn the lesson from the great prophet’s misperception. Though times may not appear to be as prosperous as others, there is no ground for pessimism. God is still on His throne, and He continues to accomplish His purposes. If you doubt that think of God’s comments to the prophet and the fact that a believing remnant exists even now among a people that have continually rejected His kindnesses. Do not look around so much as look up! Though most may reject God’s mercies, there is always a remnant according to faith.
2. Religious zeal is only commendable when the object of the zeal is comprehended, and our motives are right. When we strive to commend ourselves to God other than the way He



proscribed, religious zeal is without effect. The Jews had a passionate quest to be near God, but they sought it by mere obedience. Trust and faith in God and His promises are the way to enter the pleasures of God. Do you know people who are outwardly zealous in their practice of religion but are not doing so in the ways God commanded?

3. The judgment of God upon a wicked rebellious people is to allow them to do what they desire to do in their rebellion against Him. The wickedness of Israel was met with allowance that was followed by judgment. C. S. Lewis said it this way, "If people will not say to the Word of God, 'Thy will be done,' God will say to them, 'Thy will be done.'" Have you not found this to be true in your experience? There is an adage. "If you play the fiddle, you will pay the fiddle's fee." God's judgment is permission to do what we desire to show us the folly of disobedience.
4. The web of providence is wonderfully woven, even mysteriously so. God's method of reopening the heart of the Jews was to turn away from them to the Gentiles. Who would have thought that God will lead His ancient people to obedience by opening the hearts of people the Jews despised to cause them to return to Him. God's ways are simply not our ways! How have you experienced the mystery of God's unique ways in your life? Name some ways He turned you around in an unexpected manner even using shocking means.
5. What is unavoidable in this passage is the lesson that God will keep His promises even though His people prove disobedience and stiff-necked. God's promises are unilateral; they are not dependent on human faithfulness. Entailed in the promises of God is the promise of enablement and strength to obey. Though we are faithless at times, God will keep His promises, even though disobedience on our part causes us not to rest in the temporal benefits He has promised. Israel is the greatest example of a people blessed without a cause and they have proven derelict at every turn in their history, yet God will keep His promises. What comforts does this insight give to you? The security of the believer rests in the character and promises of God, not moral conformity! God's promises always come to fruition though centuries may pass before they do so.
6. There is a coming day when the door of opportunity will cease to be as open as it is today. Today God's redemptive mercies are uniquely available to non-Jews, but that day will not always be. Someday God is going to open the hearts of His ancient people which seems to mean that fewer Gentiles will come to faith as fewer Jews do today. Should this insight not suggest to us that we should witness to our friends while the door of availability to Christ remains widely open? The "Times of the Gentiles" will end! As in the case of Israel, the Gentiles will fail due to unbelief and God will restore His ancient people.
7. We, the Gentiles, owe a great debt to the Jews for our possession of the gospel. It was through the promises of God to His ancient people that the promises have come to us. The foundation of biblical Christianity is biblical Judaism. Though the Jews are largely rebellious, unwilling to humble themselves and recognize Jesus as their promised redeemer/Messiah, the revelation they rejected has come to us. At the end of Paul's missionary in Greece, he gathered an offering from Gentile believers in the churches to give a love offering to the stressed Jewish believers in Jerusalem to say thank you for being the vehicle of the gospel to them. Should we not have the same attitude ourselves?