

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
 - VI. The Daily Application of God’s Righteousness: The Believer’s Walk, 12:1-15:13
 - A. The Application in the Church, 12:1-21
 - B. The Application outside the Church, 13:1-14
 - C. The Application in Doubtful Things, 14:1-15:13
 - 1. The problem, vv. 1-4
 - 2. The principles, 14:5-14:20
 - a. The principle of freedom in Christ, vv. 5-12
 - b. The principle of perspective: the true judge vv. 10-12
 - c. The principle of living life without offending, 14:13-15:6
 - d. The principle of caring for others, 14:13-15
 - e. The principle of serving others, vv. 16-18
 - f. The principle of up-building, vv. 19-20
 - 3. An exhortation to tolerance, 15:1-6

It is important in reading this section on the strong or weak believer that Paul does not see one more spiritual than the other. Neither falls to the judgment that what they are doing is sinful. Sin is only apparent to Paul when the conscience is violated. Thus, “weak” and “strong” are not to be seen as worse and better. The terms should not carry a valuation of bad or good. The issue is one’s reaction to weakness or strength of conscience in others.
- a) The example of Christ, vv. 1-4
 - 1) The exhortation, vv. 1-2

It is clear from Paul’s exhortation that he places himself among the strong. The strong, those free from the inhibitions and scruples of the weak regarding food and days, are asked to tolerate the infirmities of the weak.
 - 2) The basis, v. 3e

The ground of the exhortation is the example of Christ. The text cited is Psalm 69:9, a psalm in which David writes typically of Christ. The reproaches

that fell on David from Saul prefigure those that fell on Christ from His enemies. As Christ did not put Himself first, neither should anyone at the expense of another. Like Christ, believers should have a servant's attitude.

- 3) The role of the Scriptures, v. 4
"For" gives the reason Paul can cite a Hebrew text to support his exhortation. An Old Testament text can be cited because it is part of the literature whose intent is to give saints hope. The Hebrew Scriptures give strength to endure affliction and temptation.
- b) A prayer for unanimity, vv. 5-6
 - 1) The content of it, v. 5
The unity that Paul wishes for the Romans in context is moral, not doctrinal. There is to be unity in disposition and action, or, in other words, not merely pleasing themselves individually.
 - 2) The intent of it, v. 6
Unity in the assembly of God's people glorifies God! It is interesting that Paul selects a passage from each section of the Hebrew canon (the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets).

In Deut. 32:43 Moses saw the Gentiles praising God with the Israelites. Ps. 118: 49 pictures David rejoicing in God for his victories among the nations that had become subject to him. The remaining two quotations (Ps. 117:1, Isa. 11:10) picture the Gentiles praising God alone apart from participation in Israel.

- g. The principle of glorifying God through unity, vv. 7-13
 - 1) The service of Christ to the nations, vv. 7-12
 - a) The request and the example, v. 7
"Wherefore" indicates that Paul is drawing a conclusion in his argument. We must accept one another as Christ has accepted us.

The imperative suggestions a tension point in the Roman church. The same command is found in 14:1 but the difference here is that Paul cites a string of OT Scriptures about God accepting the Gentiles into the family of God.

- b) The manner of His service, vv. 8-9a
Here is a hint that the problem in the church was the issue of the necessity of circumcision. The apostle tells us in Eph. 2:11-3:13 that it was God's intent from the beginning to bring Jews and Gentiles together into one people, which he called "the mystery."

"The minister of circumcision" should be translated "a minister of circumcision," probably a reference to being a member of the Abrahamic Covenant. The meaning is that Christ became a servant of the Abrahamic Covenant by receiving its sign and seal. Christ identified with the great

covenant and, in doing so, caused it to benefit Jews (v. 8b) and Gentiles (v. 9a).

c) The scriptural confirmation, vv. 9b-12

In support of reaching out to the Gentiles, the apostle gathers four Scripture passages, each of which states that the blessing of God includes Gentiles (Deut. 32:43; Ps. 18:49, 117:1; Isa. 11:10). It is interesting that Paul selects passages from each section of the Hebrew canon (the Law, the Writings, and the Prophets), each having the same theme (Gentile inclusion).

In Deut. 32:43 Moses saw the Gentiles praising God with the Israelites. Ps. 18: 49 pictures David rejoicing in God for his victories among the nations that had become subject to him (as Christ will bring gentiles to Himself). The remaining two quotations (Ps. 117:1, Isa. 11:10) picture the Gentiles praising God alone apart from participation in Israel.

d) A prayer for abounding hope, v. 13

(1) The content of it, v. 13a

The argument of the entire epistle concludes (“now”). It is a benediction!

(2) The intent of it, v. 13b

“That you” indicates the purpose of the foregoing. It is a prayer that the God of hope would fill them with hope. It is the Holy Spirit in the Age of the Spirit through His indwelling ministry that we all find the source of spiritual enablement.

VII. Epilogue, 15:14-16:27

A. Personal Explanations, 15:14-33

1. Regarding his ministry, vv. 14-21

a. Paul’s purpose in writing, vv. 14-15

1) The commendation in it, v. 14

Paul is convinced that the Roman Christians are mature, though not without their problems as expressed in 14:1-15:13. Mature saints still have spiritual deficiencies though they may be “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish (instruct) one another.” Mounce summarized Paul’s commendation this way, “Morally, they were ‘full of goodness,’ intellectually they were ‘complete in knowledge,’ and functionally they were ‘competent to instruct one another.’”

2) The declaration of it, v. 15

The clause, “because of the grace that is given to me of God,” is a reference to his position as a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles.

b. God’s purpose in Paul’s ministry, vv. 16-19

1) The declaration of it, v. 16

Paul’s ministry was to bring the Gentiles as a people to God!

2) The eventuation of it, v. 17

Paul was successful in the mission God appointed to him and he praises God for it.

- 3) The explanation of the glorying, vv. 18-19
Illyricum is modern day Albania/Croatia on the Adriatic Sea (the Romans called the area the province of Dalmatia); Paul had labored in the gospel from Jerusalem to the Adriatic Sea. Obviously, the book of Acts and the epistles only give part of the story of his ministry.

Here Paul lists several ways that his ministry to the Gentiles has been made effective: by word, by deeds, in signs, in wonders, and through the power of the Spirit. It seems that “signs” and “wonders” are biblical terms for miracles.

- c. The Pauline principle of ministry, vv. 20-21
 - 1) The principle stated, v. 20
Paul’s plan was not to enter the fields of others; he was a pioneer. He did not wish to build on another’s foundation.
 - 2) The principle substantiated, v. 21
The apostle’s appeal to validate his ministry is an Old Testament verse, Isa 52:15 (“And he will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shout their mouths....”). The Isaiah passage predicts the ministry of the suffering servant, Jesus Christ. Paul’s ministry was the proclamation of Him to the Gentiles; he is a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy as one who proclaimed the final fulfillment of the text in the Messiah.
2. Regarding his plans, vv. 22-29
 - a. The plans to come to Rome, vv. 22-24
 - 1) The hindrance in the past, v. 22
The hindrance in coming to the Romans was the need to complete a ministry that encompassed 1400 miles in length. However, he does not specify the origin of the repeated hindrances.
 - 2) The occasion of his coming, v. 23
Paul considers his pioneering work to have been completed in Greece, Turkey, and Palestine (the eastern Mediterranean). Further, he had desired to visit these people for some time.
 - 3) The details of his plans, v. 24
The apostle’s plan is to labor in Spain (considered in Paul’s day the end of the world), stopping among the Romans for a brief time (he would come to Rome after two years of incarceration in Caesarea awaiting trial). Plans often come to fruition, but not as we planned!
 - b. The journey to Jerusalem, vv. 25-29
 - 1) The plan of Paul, v. 25
This would be Paul’s fifth visit to Jerusalem since his conversion (Acts 9:24-30, 11:29-30, 15:1-29; 18:21, and here).
 - 2) The reason for the journey, vv. 26-27
Paul planned to bring a love-gift from the Gentiles in Macedonia and Achaia. They considered themselves debtors to the Jews for bringing them the gospel. This is grace-giving and the crowning fruit of his ministry to the

Gentiles. Paul gives no explanation for the cause of the poverty in Jerusalem. Perhaps it was the result of the famine predicted by Agabus (Acts 11:27ff). To go to Jerusalem from Corinth and then to Rome was to add two thousand miles to his journey.

3) The sequel to the plan, vv. 28-29

After going to Jerusalem, he looked forward to a new field of labor passing through Rome to get there. Spain (called Hispania by the Romans) was amalgamated into the empire in the reign of Augustus. It was subdivided into three provinces with many flourishing Roman colonies. According to Clement of Rome (*I Clement* 5:7), an early elder at Rome, the apostle labored in Spain after his Roman release.

c. The request for prayer, vv. 30-33

1) The motive, v. 30

Paul knew of the hostility of the Jewish leadership and asks for the prayers of the Romans in that regard.

2) The object of the prayer, v. 31

Paul narrowly escaped death in Jerusalem being rescued by Roman soldiers who took him into custody. He would face a two-year imprisonment before being brought to Rome through a horrible shipwreck in Malta. God answered their prayer in a strange way! Paul's prayer for safety was answered positively in that he was not killed, but he was flogged (Acts 22:25ff) and bitten by a poisonous viper.

3) The final aim of the prayer, vv. 32-33

Paul asks for spiritual refreshment by and among the Romans. He asks for true Christian fellowship that was given him elsewhere (Acts 28:14-16, 30-31; Phil. 1:12-18). However, it came about neither how, when, nor as he expected. He arrived over two years later as a prisoner!

Three brief benedictions are in this chapter (vv. 5, 13, 33).

Applications:

1. The Gentile Christians were indebted to the Jews for bringing to them the gospel and this was expressed tangibly through the gift that was denominated a love gift, a free-will gift grounded in gratitude. Paul's ministry was ending in the eastern Mediterranean since churches had been planted, but the expression of thankfulness was the culmination of his efforts. We owe a debt of appreciation to those who brought to us the gospel as well. Have you thanked those who were instrumental in bringing the claims of Jesus to you lately?
2. Our passage tells us much about what should be on our lips. Boasting of any spiritual success is simply to evidence an inappropriate focus. Paul boasted, but the object of his boasting was the Lord for His mercies and accomplishments through him. Is your delightful boast in the wonder of the forgiving grace of God purchased by Jesus Christ on an instrument of Roman execution? Do you boast in God or in yourself? Those who came to the gospel through Paul's ministry are described as his offering to God. His labors were the apostle's sacrificial offering to God. Do you see your endeavors for God in that manner? Is

our work about us or about God, our success or God's praise? Simply put, it is a duty of those who have the means to contribute to the necessities of others, especially to those from whom they have received spiritual benefit.

3. Paul asked prayer for his safety on delivering a love-gift to needy believers in Jerusalem. In retrospect we know what happened. The Jewish leadership had him arrested and he would spend two years imprisoned in Caesarea before being sent to Rome to answer the false charges against him. What does it tell us when God does not answer the way that we ask Him to do at times? Did the Lord answer the prayers of the saints? Is it possible that in praying we should make it clear that our desires may not be God's.
4. We are to pray for people engaged in the proclamation of the gospel; people compelled with a desire to extend the witness of Christ to those who have never been presented with Jesus' claims. To accomplish this endeavor, Paul, as well as all our missionaries, needed two things: earnest prayer for their success and the physical, financial ability to execute their vision. These two purposes were part of the motive for writing the Romans (there was also the desire to make his message clear to them and to help settle cultural conflicts). You may not be called to be on the front line of missionary endeavor, but that does not mean that we are deprived of the privilege of spreading the gospel.
5. The Bible reveals an infinite mind in its composition. Who could have written a book over a span of three centuries that has a single theme? Who could have imagined that a promise to Abraham, with all the stresses in his life, would be the central promise of God in that book? Who could have thought that the promise given to Abraham would be fulfilled through Jesus, God's son, centuries later? What is clear is that the promise would include Gentiles though Abraham was a Semite. It is little wonder that the Apostle Paul would see fulfillment of the covenant in the church, calling it a mystery. What a wonderfully powerful and majestic God that we serve!