

# **Romans in One Lesson**

(An Overview of Paul's Letter to the Romans)

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## **I. Background for This Lesson**

- a. Recently, in our house church, we have been in the midst of an expository teaching series on **Leviticus**.
  - i. In preparation for the previous lesson in **Leviticus**, I spent quite a bit of time and energy in personal study of **Romans 12:1**.
    1. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (**Romans 12:1**, NKJV)
    2. This verse is a major transition between the first 11 chapters, in which Paul develops his main idea; and the chapters that follow, which address the implications.
  - ii. The "therefore" in **Romans 12:1** marks this major shift.
    1. Paul then returns to his main argument at the end of **Romans 15** and concludes with closing greetings and admonitions in **Romans 16**.
    2. In studying **Romans 12:1**, I wanted to understand it in context. Therefore, I studied that verse and what came *after* it; then that verse and all that came *before* it (switching back and forth multiple times).
    3. In the process of trying to better understand this verse in context, I think I have come to a better, clearer understanding of why **Romans** was written, and how this letter was structured.
      - a. I shared what I was finding with my wife, Alison, and she found it very helpful. Based on that feedback, I thought it might be good to share it with our house church in a Sunday message.
      - b. Many years ago, in another church, Alison and I had taken a class on Romans. The teacher said in his introductory remarks, "If you get Romans, then God gets you."
        - i. I certainly would never make nor endorse a statement like that, but that is what the teacher said.

- ii. Unfortunately, at the end of that series, my wife Alison felt she still did not “*get*” Romans. Consequently, she was left wondering whether God had indeed “*gotten*” her!
  - iii. Happily, she feels better about that now.
- b. **Romans** may be the New Testament book that is the most often misunderstood, to the greatest spiritual damage, by Protestants in general. This tendency goes back to Martin Luther.
  - i. Luther elevated this to the “most important book in the Bible”, and then told people how to understand it. Also, this is the basis on which Luther came up with his doctrine of “justification by faith alone”.
    - 1. From Martin Luther’s *Introduction to the New Testament* (in his translation of the Bible into German, published 1522-1545):
      - a. “Paul’s Epistles, especially that to the Romans, and St. Peter’s first Epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They ought rightly be the first books and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most, and by daily reading, make them as familiar as his daily bread.
      - b. “In them you find not many works and miracles of Christ described, but you do find it depicted, in masterly fashion, how faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell, and gives life, righteousness, and salvation. This is the real nature of the Gospel, as you have heard.
      - c. “If I had to do without one or the other, — either the works or preaching of Christ, — I would rather do without His works than His preaching; for the works do not help me, but His words give life, as He Himself says. Now John writes very little about the works of Christ, but very much about His preaching, while the other Evangelists write much of His works and little of His preaching; therefore, **John’s gospel** is the one, tender, true chief Gospel, far, far to be preferred to the other three and placed high above them. So, too, the epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter far surpass the other three Gospels, — **Matthew, Mark and Luke**.
      - d. “In a word, **Saint John’s gospel** and his **First Epistle**, Saint Paul’s Epistles, especially **Romans, Galatians** and **Ephesians**, and **Saint Peter’s First Epistle** are the

books that show you Christ and teach you all that it is necessary and good for you to know, even though you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore **St. James' Epistle** is really an epistle of straw, compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it. But more of this in other prefaces."

2. From Martin Luther's introduction to **Romans**:

- a. "This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.
  - b. "Therefore, I want to carry out my service and, with this preface, provide an introduction to the letter, insofar as God gives me the ability, so that everyone can gain the fullest possible understanding of it. Up to now it has been darkened by glosses [explanatory notes and comments which accompany a text] and by many a useless comment, but it is in itself a bright light, almost bright enough to illumine the entire Scripture."
  - c. Later, Luther continues, "... Hence it comes that *faith alone* makes righteous and fulfils the law; for out of Christ's merit, it brings the Spirit, and the Spirit makes the heart glad and free, as the law requires that it shall be. Thus, good works come out of faith. That is what he means in **Romans 3:31**, after he has rejected the works of the law, so that it sounds as though he would abolish the law by faith; 'Nay,' he says, 'we establish the law by faith,' that is, we fulfill it by faith."
- ii. Calvin also took a lot out of context from **Romans**, to construct his own distinctive doctrinal framework, developed in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (published in 1539 and 1541).
1. The five classic points of Reformed theology are commonly referred to by the acronym 'TULIP', which stands for:
    - a. **T**otal depravity

- i. After the Fall of Adam and Eve, mankind became totally corrupted, with no inclination or ability to do anything good.)
- b. **U**nconditional election
  - i. God arbitrarily chooses which individuals to save and which ones to condemn.)
- c. **L**imited atonement
  - i. Christ died only for the elect.
- d. **I**rrresistible grace
  - i. We are saved by God's *grace*, which Protestants typically define as '*unmerited* favor'. The idea is that when God extends his grace to totally depraved people like us, we are incapable of resisting it.
- e. **P**erseverance of the saints
  - i. Unconditional eternal security; sometimes called "once saved, always saved". This is the idea that it is impossible for a 'saved' person to lose his or her salvation.)
- 2. Several points of Reformed Theology are based on Calvin's interpretation of certain passages from Romans, particularly: total depravity and unconditional election.
- iii. The 'Romans Road' is a plan that evangelical Protestants have been using for many years to present 'the gospel' (at least as they understand it) to unbelievers. It is an attempt to present the gospel to an unbeliever and bring them to salvation via a chain-type study based on several passages cherry-picked from Romans. Some of them are taken out of context or misapplied. Presentations vary, but run similar to the following lineup of verses (along with the applications to be made by those teaching the studies):
  - 1. **Romans 3:10-12, 3:23** – No one is righteous; we are all sinners.
  - 2. **Romans 6:23** – The wages of sin are death.
  - 3. **Romans 5:8** - Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

4. **Romans 10:9-10, 10:13** – If we confess with our mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in our hearts God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.
  5. **Romans 8:1** – There is no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ.
  6. **Romans 8:38-39** – Nothing can separate us from God’s love (from which they conclude that we can’t lose our salvation)
- iv. The reason I say these verses were ‘cherry-picked’ from Romans is that some other passages from **Romans** that *could have been included* were omitted, such as:
1. **From Romans 6** – The Romans Road has no teaching about baptism and dying to sin (repentance).
  2. **From Romans 11** – The Romans Road does not teach that we can lose our salvation (branches that have been grafted into the olive tree will be cut off if they do not remain in it).
  3. **From Romans 14:17** – There is no mention of *the kingdom of God* in the Romans Road presentation.
    - a. Note that when Paul finally made it to Rome, the gospel he preached there was “*the kingdom of God*” (**Acts 28:23, 28:31**).
    - b. Jesus said that the gospel that would be preached to the whole world was “the gospel of *the kingdom*”.
      - i. “And *this gospel of the kingdom* will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (**Matthew 24:14**, NKJV)
- c. David Bercot has been working on a New Testament Commentary series. After finishing the first volume, on the first half of **Matthew**, he jumped to **Romans** because he has received more questions from his readers on **Romans** than on any other New Testament book or letter.
- d. The approach we will take in studying Romans today: striving to be *excellent readers* of the text.
- i. We should read this letter very carefully, striving to read and understand everything *in context*. Our goal should be to understand *what Paul was trying to say* (instead of what we may want to pull from

the text to back up some doctrinal framework or some group's agenda).

- ii. I will draw from principles laid out in *How to Read a Book – The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* (originally by Mortimer Adler, with a revised edition co-authored by Charles Van Doren). This book teaches how to approach reading any great work of literature that is not easy to understand. Basic strategies include:
  - 1. Ask questions of the text, and then dig into it, and to related texts, to find the answers to your questions. Critical questions can include:
    - a. Who is the primary intended audience the author was writing to or for?
    - b. Why was this written? What is the main theme of the work?
      - i. What are the supporting or secondary themes?
      - ii. What reasoning or evidence is used to support the case being presented by the author?
    - c. What does the author see as the implications that come from accepting (as true) the thesis presented by the author?
    - d. What are the key terms used by the author, and *what does the author mean* when he uses those terms?
- e. **Question:** Why am I attempting to tackle this difficult letter *in just one lesson*?
  - i. Paul's letter to the **Romans** has one main theme; Paul takes most of eleven chapters to develop that.
  - ii. Paul concludes his main argument at the end of **Romans chapter 11**. If we were to take only a few chapters at a time, before getting to the conclusion of his argument, it would be easy for us to take things he is writing out of context.
    - 1. Therefore, breaking this up into multiple segments could lead to our misunderstanding what he is saying and coming to wrong conclusions.

## II. Who is This Letter Written To?

- a. This letter was written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome before Paul had ever traveled there personally.
  - i. Read **Romans 1:8-15**.
    1. Paul had heard great things about the church in Rome and wanted to visit it, but to this point had not been able to get there.
  - ii. Read **Romans 15:22-29**.
    1. At the time of writing, Paul was planning to return to Jerusalem (from wherever he was), then go to Spain and stop in Rome on the way.
  - iii. Recall that Paul visited Rome for the first time when he was taken prisoner there for a trial by Caesar, in **Acts 28**. Therefore, this letter had to have been written prior to that.
- b. **Question:** If Paul did not start the church in Rome, who did?
  - i. While we do not know the answer to that question, we do know about some early Christian activity associated with Rome.
  - ii. Recall from **Acts 2** that some of those in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost were “visitors from Rome” (**Acts 2:10**).
  - iii. Aquila and Priscilla, who are to be greeted in **Romans 16**, are referred to in **Acts 18** as having met with Paul in Corinth, after they and other Jews had been expelled from Rome by the emperor, Claudius.
- c. Based on some of the things Paul writes, it appears that the church in Rome was going strong at the time Paul was writing this letter, before he ever visited that church. We find high praise from Paul to the church in Rome.
  - i. “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is *spoken of throughout the whole world*.” (**Romans 1:8**, NKJV)
    1. Very few of the churches mentioned in the New Testament receive such great praise!
  - ii. “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” (**Romans 15:14**, NKJV)

1. This passage is often taken out of context to support the (incorrect) idea that all Christians are automatically competent to counsel or admonish other Christians.
  2. I believe that Paul here is saying that he believed the church in Rome had within it such spiritual maturity that there were members within it who were competent to admonish the others (without outside help from someone like an apostle).
- iii. “For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore, I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”  
(**Romans 16:19–20**, NKJV)
1. Contrast with Ephesus in **Acts 20**, where Paul warns the elders that savage wolves will soon rise up, even from among their own number.
- iv. While **Romans** has some general admonitions and exhortations, no major sins or problems are identified in it by Paul!
- v. This is not like what we see in so many other letters referring to churches with major problems.
1. **Corinth** – division, immorality, major false teachings regarding resurrection of the body
  2. **Ephesus (Acts 20)** warnings against false teachers
  3. **Galatians** – Judaizers
  4. **1 John** – gnostic type teachings
  5. **Revelation 3 & 3**: lost first love, lukewarm, rampant immorality, threats of having lampstands removed.
- d. Based on a few details in **Romans 15** and **16**, it appears that Paul was in or near Corinth at the time he was writing this.
- i. Paul refers to collecting a contribution for the church in Judea, from Macedonia and Achaia (**Romans 15:25-26**).
  - ii. He makes reference to Phoebe, who is from Cenchrea, which is close to Corinth (**Romans 16:1**).
  - iii. He refers to Erastus, “the treasurer (or perhaps Director of Public Works) of the city” (**Romans 16:23**). Note that this man also is mentioned in **Acts 19:22** and **2 Timothy 4:20**.



1. I have seen the famous inscription in the pavement in Corinth, in Latin: "Erastus, laid this at his own expense, in appreciation for his appointment as public works director."
  2. This appears to be referring to the same Erastus who was mentioned by Paul in the Scriptures. If so, that would suggest that Paul was writing this letter from Corinth.
- iv. Keep in mind that Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth during his second missionary journey (**Acts 18**) and three months in that region (Achaia) in **Acts 19-20**.
1. We know that the church in Corinth was predominantly a Gentile church, from **1 Corinthians 12:2**.
- e. Paul was writing this letter to the Christians in Rome, a *predominantly Gentile* church.
- i. "Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles." (**Romans 1:13**, NKJV)
  - ii. "For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry..." (**Romans 11:13**, NKJV)
  - iii. In **Romans 15:7-13** Paul quotes three prophecies about the Gentiles, and then applies them to the church in Rome.
  - iv. There are a few Jewish individuals in the church, identified in the greetings in **Romans 16**; however, the church overall is considered and addressed as a Gentile church, by Paul.
    1. Priscilla and Aquilla (**16:3**); identified as Jews in **Acts 18:1-2**.
    2. Andronicus and Junias (**16:7**), who Paul refers to as his "fellow countrymen". Consider the language of **Romans 9:3**, where Paul speaks about the Jews.
- f. Although this was a predominantly Gentile church, they knew the Jewish Scriptures VERY well. While this may seem odd to many Christians today, consider the *overwhelming evidence* for this within the text of this letter.
- i. In presenting his case, Paul quotes from all over the Old Testament. I counted at least *fifteen different books* that he quoted from, including:
    1. From the Law of Moses (**Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy**);

2. From the major prophets (**Isaiah** multiple times, **Jeremiah**);
  3. From the twelve minor prophets (**Hosea, Habakkuk, Joel, Malachi**);
  4. From the **Psalms** (multiple times) and **Proverbs**; and
  5. From other books, too (**2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Job**).
- ii. Keep in mind that many times Paul just quotes or alludes to a passage of Scripture, without even telling his readers *which book* it is from.
1. There were no footnotes in the letter he sent them to show the references.
  2. Paul assumed they knew the Scriptures well enough to recognize where the passages he quoted could be found!
- iii. Paul also gives several allusions that, while not direct quotes from the Old Testament, clearly draw heavily from imagery contained in those books. For example, he references:
1. The potter and clay (think of **Isaiah 29, Isaiah 64** and **Jeremiah 18**);
  2. God “will crush Satan under your feet” (**Genesis 3**); and
  3. “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (the sacrificial system described in **Exodus** and **Leviticus**).
- iv. Characters from the Old Testament Paul refers to in his letter include:
1. Adam
  2. Abraham
  3. Sarah
  4. Isaac
  5. Jacob
  6. Rebecca
  7. Esau
  8. Elijah
  9. Moses
  10. Pharaoh

## 11. David

## v. Paul also refers to:

1. Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments;
2. Circumcision;
3. “the covenants”;
4. Temple service and sacrifices;
5. And the fact that Abraham was declared righteous (**Genesis 15**) *BEFORE* he was circumcised (**Genesis 17**).

## vi. Paul said this to a Gentile church:

1. “Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?” (**Romans 7:1**, NKJV)

## vii. To many Christians today, it does not fit with our understanding that Gentile converts would have this level of knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures.

1. However, it is abundantly clear that they did.
2. We see evidence of this same phenomenon in **1 Peter** and in **1** and **2 Corinthians**. In those letters, the apostles are *addressing Gentile believers*, yet quote freely from throughout the Old Testament,
  - a. Peter wrote: “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.” (**1 Peter 4:3**, NKJV)
  - b. Paul addressed the Corinthian church: “You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.” (**1 Corinthians 12:2**, NKJV)
  - c. The classic example of an obscure Old Testament passage being referred to when addressing Gentiles:
    - i. “For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.’ Is it oxen God is concerned about?” (**1 Corinthians 9:9**, NKJV)

- ii. Here Paul is quoting from **Deuteronomy 25:4**.
3. **Question:** How could *Gentile* converts possibly know the Hebrew Scriptures so well? Did they even know *how to read* Hebrew?
- a. Note that Paul was quoting from the Septuagint (LXX), the famous translation of the Old Testament into Greek, made by the Jews about 200 years before the time of Christ.
  - b. Read **Romans 15:12-13**. There Paul quotes from **Isaiah 11:10**, where the text of the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) and the Greek LXX differ.
    - i. The main point Paul is making is taken from the phrase, “in him the Gentiles shall hope”. This phrase is found in the LXX, but is not in the MT.
    - ii. Paul was reading and quoting from the LXX. In this example, we find that the New Testament Greek and the Greek of the LXX match, *word-for-word*.
    - iii. The text of the LXX is in Greek, the same language that Paul’s letters were written in. Therefore, the Old Testament text of the LXX could be read and understood by all the Gentiles.
  - c. Another example where we can see that Paul is quoting from the LXX is in **Romans 3:13**. There, Paul quotes from **Psalms 5:10** of the LXX (corresponding to **Psalms 5:9** in most modern Bibles, where the Old Testament is based on the MT).
    - i. Both **Romans 3:13** and **Psalms 5:10** in the LXX say, “with their tongues they have practiced deceit”.
  - d. **Question:** How many quotes from the gospels are found in Romans?
    - i. **Answer:** I counted zero. I am not aware of any!
    - ii. I assume that the written gospels were not yet in wide circulation at the time Paul was writing.

- iii. In the beginning, the LXX was the Bible of the church in Rome, as well as in Corinth and elsewhere.

### III. Try to Put Yourself in Their Sandals

- a. They are Gentiles who have come to solid faith in Jesus.
  - i. They are reading or hearing the Jewish Scriptures via the LXX. It is the only Bible they have. They know all the stories, the prophecies, the Psalms, etc. They believe it is all inspired and from God.
  - ii. Around them live groups of Jews who are reading the same books, believing it all, yet they have rejected Jesus and are living by a very different set of customs (still trying to follow the Law of Moses).
- b. If it was me, I would be wondering things like:
  - i. What happened to *the Jews*?
  - ii. They believe in the same one God as we do and in the same Scriptures, so *why don't they believe in Jesus*, too?
  - iii. Are the Jews, the descendants of all the people we are reading about, *still a part of God's kingdom*? What is going to happen to *them*?

### IV. Consider the Conclusion of Paul's Romans 1-11 Argument, in Romans 11

- a. In the argument Paul makes in **Romans 1-11**, I believe he is answering the question we just discussed: namely, "What happened to the Jews?". I believe we can see this very clearly in the *conclusion* of Paul's argument, in **Romans chapter 11**.
  - i. **Note:** It is very clear that Paul is *not* trying to answer the question, "How does an unbeliever become saved?".
    - 1. The church in Rome was a mature church that was doing well. They already understood the plan of salvation (how someone becomes a Christian), and did not need to have Paul explain this to them again.
    - 2. **Rhetorical Question:** Since Paul was *not* answering the question, "How does an unbeliever become saved?", why do so many Christians today turn first to **Romans** when looking for a roadmap to salvation (the 'Romans Road')?
- b. Read **Romans 10:1-4**.
  - i. Paul says he wishes that the Jews were saved; however, they are not.

c. Read **Romans 10:16-11:10**.

- i. The Jews (largely) were rejected by God, since they rejected Jesus. On the other hand, (many of) the Gentiles have been accepted by God, since they embraced Jesus.
- ii. Furthermore, this pattern of the Jewish nation rejecting the Lord (and being rejected) in contrast to the Gentiles accepting Him was foretold in the Jewish Scriptures themselves!
  1. See how Paul uses quotes from **Deuteronomy**, **Isaiah** and other Old Testament books to make his point in **Romans 9-10**.

d. Read **Romans 11:16-24**.

- i. Paul concludes his argument with his parable of the cultivated olive tree.
  1. This parable is about the fate of *two groups of people*. The original tree represented the Jewish nation that gave us Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets and the Hebrew Scriptures.
    - a. The branches broken off from the original tree = the Jewish people *who did not have faith* in Jesus.
    - b. The wild olive branches that were grafted into the original tree = Gentiles *who believed in Jesus*.
- e. From the conclusion of the argument in **Romans 11**, we can see the theme that Paul is building up to in the prior chapters of **Romans**.
  - i. The questions Paul is answering to the Gentiles, who now believe the Jewish Scriptures:
    1. What happened to the Jews? (the primary question in Romans)
      - a. Those who have not believed in Jesus are lost. They have been broken off of the tree they were a part of.
      - b. You Gentiles (who have faith in Jesus) have taken their place.
      - c. However, the Jews can be grafted back in again if they repent and come to faith in Jesus.
      - d. Paul wishes it were otherwise (that his own people could be saved). However, most of them are lost. Only a

relatively small remnant from among them is pursuing a path that leads to salvation.

2. In view of this, how should the Gentile Christians *see themselves* in God's plan?
  - a. We Gentiles are the continuation of what God began through the Jewish nation.
  - b. We Gentiles have become partakers of the "root and fatness" of the original olive tree. We continue to benefit greatly from that.
- f. Now that we know the conclusion of the case being made by Paul and understand why he wrote Romans, we can understand his arguments from **Romans 1-10** in the context of why they were written.
  - i. This is the story of two peoples: the branches broken off (the Jews who did not believe) and the Gentiles who embraced faith in Jesus (the wild shoots that were grafted into the original, cultivated olive tree).

## V. Some of the Key Terms Paul Uses in Romans

- a. "Law"
  - i. Generally (but not always), when Paul uses the word "*law*" in this letter, he is referring to the *Law of Moses*. Examples include:
    1. "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on *the law*, and make your boast in God..." (Romans 2:17, NKJV)
    2. "... I would not have known sin except through *the law*. For I would not have known covetousness unless *the law* had said, "You shall not covet."" (**Romans 7:7**, NKJV)
    3. "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, *the giving of the law*, the service of God, and the promises;" (**Romans 9:3-4**, NKJV)
  - ii. On the other hand, there are a few places where Paul uses the term "*law*" to refer to something other than the Law of Moses. We need to consider the context in order to discern what "*law*" Paul is referring to. Some examples:
    1. "for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law

to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)" **(Romans 2:14–15, NKJV)**

2. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith." **(Romans 3:27, NKJV)**
3. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." **(Romans 8:2, NKJV)**

b. "Works"

- i. Note that the Greek word for "works" ( ἔργον / ergon ) also can be translated "deeds" or "actions".
- ii. Generally (but not always) in this letter refers. "works" refers to the *works of the Law of Moses*. Examples where this clearly is the case include:
  1. "For by *works of the law* no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." **(Romans 3:20, ESV)**
  2. "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from *works of the law*." **(Romans 3:28, ESV)**
  3. "but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the *works of the law*. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone." **(Romans 9:31–32, NKJV)**
- iii. However, there are also places where the same word "works/deeds" is used in a more general sense.
  1. "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality." **(Romans 2:5–11, ESV)**



- a. I find it ironic that in the **second chapter of Romans**, the favorite book of Martin Luther, Paul demolishes Luther's thesis (that we are saved by faith alone, apart from any works) in one statement. Paul says in **Romans 2** that God does not show favoritism; He will judge both the Jews and the Gentiles *according to their works* (according to what they have done).
- b. The same expression is used regarding *judgment by works* (namely, we will be judged based on our actions, on how we have lived) is found in **Revelation 20**: "The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works." (**Revelation 20:13**, NKJV)
- c. A very similar expression is used by Jesus in **Revelation 22**: "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work." (**Revelation 22:12**, NKJV)

## VI. The Case Made by Paul, Romans 1-10

- a. This is all about two groups of people: the *broken-off branches* (Jews, most of whom do not believe) and the *grafted-in branches* (the Gentiles like those in Rome, who have come to faith in Jesus).
  - i. Now, let's consider how Paul builds his case through the first ten chapters of **Romans**.
- b. **Romans 1-2**: God does not play favorites. He is just and equitable and treats *both groups* the same.
  - i. Men have rejected God and turned to all kinds of sin and depravity.
  - ii. As we previously read from **Romans 2:5-11**:
    - 1. God will render to each according to his works/deeds.
    - 2. There is no favoritism with God.
      - a. For those who do good (regardless of whether Jew or Greek) they will receive glory, honor and peace.
      - b. For those who do evil (regardless of whether Jew or Greek), there will be wrath and indignation.
- c. **Romans 3:1-20**: Paul speaks regarding the Jews.

- i. The main advantage of the Jews was that they had received “the oracles of God” (the Scriptures, the inspired word of God).
- ii. On the other hand, the Jews did not follow the commands of God. The Jews did not follow the law, as even the law (the Jewish Scriptures) states. The law just exposed their sins.
  - 1. The “no one is righteous” medley of Scriptures Paul uses to show that the Jewish Scriptures even point to the fact that the Jews were not righteous.
  - 2. After citing those Scriptures, Paul concludes:
    - a. “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” (**Romans 3:19**, NKJV)
    - b. Therefore, the Jews are *in no position* to boast and consider themselves better than the Gentiles.
- d. **Romans 3:21-31**: Both groups, the Jews and the Gentiles, will be *justified by faith*, apart from the Law of Moses.
  - i. “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” (**Romans 3:28-30**, NKJV)
- e. **Romans 4**: Paul uses the Hebrew Scriptures to show that even Abraham (the father of all of the Jews) was called righteous by God without circumcision (*before* he was circumcised). This foreshadowed that:
  - i. God’s people could be considered righteous apart from the law (which circumcision represented).
  - ii. The *true descendants* of Abraham are those who have the *faith* of Abraham (whether Jew or Gentile).
  - iii. In the Law (**Genesis 17:4-5**) it was stated that Abraham would be the father of *many nations* (not just of the Jews, but of the *Gentile believers also*).
- f. **Romans 5-7**: Death and life came to all (the entire human race), through one man.

- i. Sin and death came to *all people* through the disobedience of *one man*: Adam. Similarly, life comes to *all people* through the obedience (and death) of *one man*: Jesus. (**Romans 5:12-20**)
- ii. Paul then uses the life/death discussion as an opportunity to explain that we have died with Christ, in baptism. (**Romans 6:1-14**)
  - 1. The grace (favor of God) must never be used as an excuse to continue sinning.
  - 2. We died to sin and were buried with Christ
    - a. Therefore, we must no longer be slaves to sin.
    - b. "If we died with Christ, we shall live with Him."  
(**Romans 6:8**)
- iii. We were slaves to sin and death; but have now become slaves to God and to righteousness. (**Romans 6:15-23**)
- iv. This spiritual death we underwent, being buried with Christ, also freed us from the Law. This freedom-after-death is similar to how the death of a spouse releases the surviving husband or wife from their marriage covenant. (**Romans 7:1-6**)
  - 1. "Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." (**Romans 7:4, NKJV**)
- v. At the end of **Romans 7** Paul speaks about a great personal spiritual struggle. (**Romans 7:13-25**)
  - 1. It is not clear to me if this refers to a struggle he is currently in the midst of, or the struggle he faced before becoming a Christian; or if perhaps he is using a rhetorical device to speak on behalf of the condition faced by all mankind.
- g. **Romans 8**: We who are in Christ have been freed from the Law of Moses.
  - i. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."  
(**Romans 8:2-4, NKJV**)
  - ii. We are *all* sons of God, through the Spirit.

1. This is regardless of whether we are from a Jewish or Gentile background.
- iii. God had predestined this plan, that a group of people would be saved through faith in Jesus; and conformed to the image of His Son. **(Romans 8:28-30)**
  1. As we see in the conclusion of this discussion, in **Romans 11**, we have a choice regarding whether we want to be part of “the elect” or not. Paul later explains that if the Jews repent and turn to faith in Jesus, they can become part of the elect, as well! **(Romans 11:23-24)**
- h. **Romans 9:** God predestined that a new group of people, his elect (those who have faith in His Son, not those pursuing the Law of Moses) would be saved.
  - i. Paul wishes that his own people, the Jews, were saved; however, most of them are lost. **(Romans 9:1-5)**
  - ii. God’s plan from the beginning was to save a class of people, *the elect*, who were living by faith. In this context, “election” has to do with a *group* or *class* of people (which He refers to as “My people”), rather than to specific individuals. **(Romans 9:14-29)**
    1. This does not negate free choice. *Each of us, individually, must make the choice* to become part of the elect, and must decide to remain in Christ to the end.
    2. The *Gentiles* (many of them) have decided to pursue the righteousness that is by faith have attained it, while the *Jews* (most of them), who tried to pursue righteousness via the Law of Moses, have not attained it. **(Romans 9:30-33)**
- i. **Romans 10:**
  - i. Paul reiterates that the Jewish people are lost because they tried to pursue righteousness by following the Law of Moses, rather than pursuing the righteousness by faith in the Son of God. **(Romans 10:1-4)**
  - ii. He then uses the Law of Moses (quoting from **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy**) and the writings of the Prophets (**Isaiah** and **Joel**) to prove that righteousness would come *by* faith (not by following the Law of Moses). **(Romans 10:5-13)**

1. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich *to all who call upon Him.*" (**Romans 10:12**, NKJV)
- iii. Paul then goes on to quote more passages from the Old Testament (**Deuteronomy**, **Isaiah** and **Psalms**) to demonstrate that the Jewish Scriptures foretold that while Israel would largely reject the message, another people (the Gentiles) would embrace it. (**Romans 13:16-21**)

## VII. Conclusion and Take-Aways

- a. We Christians (most of whom are Gentiles) are the legacy of the original 'tree' God created (= Israel). The way all this has come about is all part of His greater plan.
- b. We need to remain in our faith in Him and fear God, lest we also be cut off. (**Romans 11:19-21**)
  - i. Paul's illustration and warning demolish the popular modern teaching of "once saved / always saved" (a/k/a "unconditional eternal security").
- c. As those who are fulfilling the legacy begun with the Jews, we are now called to offer bodies as *living sacrifices*. (**Romans 12:1**)
  - i. This reference to offering sacrifices points back to the work of the priests under the old covenant, where they offered several different types of sacrifices.
    1. Peter also used this kind of language to explain that we Christians are members of the new, holy, royal priesthood that offers spiritual sacrifices acceptable to the Lord (**1 Peter 2:4-5** and **2:9-10**)
  - ii. Paul expands on this idea of being "living sacrifices" in **Romans 12-15**. We are called to a *sacrificial way of life* that includes:
    1. Having humility, love, and submission; serving others. (**Romans 12:3-16** and **13:8-10**)
    2. Returning good for evil. (**Romans 12:17-19**)
    3. Sharing with others. If our enemies are hungry, feed them. (**Romans 12:20-21**)
    4. Submitting to the governing authorities. (**Romans 13:1-7**)
    5. Not living according to lusts of the flesh. Having pure lives that no longer conform to the world. (**Romans 13:12-14**)

6. Not putting stumbling blocks in the paths of our brothers. Not judge others in matters of opinion. Striving for unity. (**Romans 14:1-15:6**)
- d. Paul calls the Gentile Christians to have gratitude toward the Jews, for the spiritual legacy and blessings we have received from them. (**Romans 15:25-28**)
  - i. In his letter to the **Romans**, Paul pointed the Gentile Christians to the example of the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia. They had offered material assistance to the Jewish Christians in Judea.
  - ii. The principle cited by Paul: "If the Gentiles have been partakers of spiritual things (from the Jews), their duty is also to minister to them in material things." (**Romans 15:27**, NKJV)
    1. It is amazing that although Martin Luther considered **Romans** to be the most important book of the Bible, *Luther was horribly anti-Semitic*. What a contrast to Paul, who said in **Romans 9 and 10** that his own people, the Jews, were lost; but he would forfeit his own salvation if, somehow, that could save them!
    2. Here is a short excerpt from a profoundly disturbing work, '*The Jews and Their Lies*' (written by Martin Luther, 1543):
      - a. "My advice, as I said earlier, is:
      - b. "First, that their synagogues be burned down, and that all who are able toss in sulfur and pitch; it would be good if someone could also throw in some hellfire. That would demonstrate to God our serious resolve and be evidence to all the world that it was in ignorance that we tolerated such houses, in which the Jews have reviled God, our dear Creator and Father, and his Son most shamefully up till now but that we have now given them their due reward.
      - c. "I wish and I ask that our rulers who have Jewish subjects exercise a sharp mercy toward these wretched people, as suggested above, to see whether this might not help (though it is doubtful). They must act like a good physician who, when gangrene has set in, proceeds without mercy to cut, saw, and burn flesh, veins, bone, and marrow.
      - d. "Such a procedure must also be followed in this instance. Burn down their synagogues, forbid all that I enumerated earlier, force them to work, and deal

harshly with them, as Moses did in the wilderness, slaying three thousand lest the whole people perish. They surely do not know what they are doing; moreover, as people possessed, they do not wish to know it, hear it, or learn it. There it would be wrong to be merciful and confirm them in their conduct.

- e. "If this does not help, we must drive them out like mad dogs, so that we do not become partakers of their abominable blasphemy and all their other vices and thus merit God's wrath and be damned with them."

- i. **Question:** Does Martin Luther's abject hatred of the Jews call to mind sentiments that would take hold among leaders in Germany almost 400 years later?

- 1. Do you think that is just a *coincidence*?

- e. One final take-away from **Romans**: Going forward, let us Gentile Christians pay *very close attention* to the Old Testament Scriptures!

- i. Recall the deep knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures that Paul knew the Gentile Christians in Rome had (based on all the Old Testament passages quoted and examples referred to).
  - ii. In **Romans 15:3-4**, after Paul quotes from **Psalms 69** (designated Psalm 68 in the LXX) he reminds the Christians:
    - 1. "For whatever things were written before [referring to the Hebrew Scriptures] were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (**Romans 15:4**, NKJV)
  - iii. The Old Testament Scriptures are the root and sap of the tree that feeds us, the wild branches that have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree! (**Romans 11:16-18**)
  - iv. With a renewed appreciation for this perspective, let us dig deeply into the Old Testament Scriptures, which were written for our learning!

## VIII. A Final Charge

- a. After listening to this lesson, I encourage you to go back and read through Romans on your own. Have the attitude of the Bereans; go back and study the Scriptures on your own to see if what I am saying in this lesson is true and consistent with all the other Scriptures.

- i. Remember how Peter wrote that Paul's letters, while written with divinely-inspired wisdom, nevertheless contained, "...some things *hard to understand*, which untaught and unstable *people twist to their own destruction*, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." (**2 Peter 3:16**, NKJV)
- b. If you conclude that what was presented here is correct, let us work together to reclaim Paul's letter to the **Romans** from Luther and the Protestant Reformers, who have been distorting it *for almost five centuries*.
  - i. With a better understanding of **Romans**, let us work to restore the original faith handed down by the apostles, "*the faith which was once for all entrusted to the saints*".