

KINGDOM. SUPPLEMENT 3

[THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS] INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Introduce.

We will look at the origin of the letter: Who wrote the Letter to the Romans? When and where was it written? How is this letter divided into parts? What is the content of the letter? What are the main messages of the letter? How should we interpret some difficult passages in the letter?

A. THE WRITER OF ROMANS

The writer is a Jew (Romans 9:3-4), who is well acquainted with both the Hebrew and the Greek text of the Old Testament, with Jewish opinions and prejudices and with the Greek world. The authorship of the letter to the Romans is as surely established as any other book in the Bible or even in the ancient world. In the letter, Paul introduced himself as the writer of Romans (Romans 1:1) and several times speaks in the first person. All the early church fathers said that Paul wrote Romans.

B. THE RECIPIENTS OF ROMANS

How did the congregation in Rome originate?

1. The dispersion of the Jews to many countries.

The dispersion of Jews began with the exiles to Assyria (8th century B.C.) and Babylon (7-6th century B.C.). The dispersion caused Jews to continue living in many countries like Babylonia (modern Iraq), Persia (modern Iran), Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Greece and Italy. In the providence of God, this “dispersion” became an important reason why the gospel was spread so quickly throughout the Roman Empire. The Jews had received permission to exercise their religion according to their own customs everywhere in the Roman Empire. They built synagogues (meeting places) everywhere in the midst of the Gentile nations. Many Gentiles visited the synagogues, were attracted to the pure monotheism (the worship of just one God) in the Old Testament and converted to Judaism.

Non-Jews who were circumcised and began to keep the whole law were called “proselytes” (Greek: prosélutoi) (people who came over from one religion to another religion, converts to Judaism)(Acts 2:10; 13:43). Non-Jews who only believed in the one God and accepted the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), but were not circumcised and also did not adhere to the rest of the ceremonial law, were called “worshippers of God” (Greek: sebomenoi) (Acts 16:14). In Acts 13:42-43 people (possibly former Gentiles) requested Paul and Barnabas to come and speak in the synagogue. When they did that, many Jews, proselytes and worshippers of God from among the Gentiles followed them. Paul and Barnabas urged them to continue in the grace of God (that is, to remain in the Christian message).

Because the apostles were Jews, they always had access to these synagogues, where they could preach the gospel and meet people without causing suspicion to the authorities. These proselytes and worshippers of God were the best prepared to receive the gospel and formed the foundation of the new congregations among the Gentiles (Acts 13:43-49)

2. The Jews in Rome.

There were many Jews and converts to Judaism in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. Originally they had come as prisoners, but after their freedom the Jewish community settled in Rome in a large district across the Tiber River. They had considerable influence on the Romans. Roman writers spoke about synagogues that were popular places of meeting, ridiculed Romans who became Jews and wrote about Roman proselytes who sent gifts to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 11:28-30).

3. The origin of the congregation in Rome.

It is not known how the gospel came to Rome for the first time.

(1) The ministry of Jesus.

The earliest ministry to Romans was that of Jesus himself. He ministered to non-Jews (Matthew 8:5-11; John 4:7; 12:20-21). For example, in Matthew 8:5-12, he healed the servant of a Roman centurion.

(2) The ministry of Peter.

On the first day of Pentecost (May A.D. 30) many Jews and converts to Judaism from Rome were present to celebrate Pentecost (Acts 2:10-11). Some of them must have been among the three thousand converts to Christianity after the preaching of the apostle Peter and on their return to Rome must have preached the gospel in Rome.

The tradition that the apostle Peter founded the first Christian congregation in Rome is possible and is based on a statement of Dionysius of Corinth in the second half of the second century A.D. The events described in Acts 1 to 12 occurred between A.D. 30 and A.D. 44. It is possible that during those years, the apostle Peter made one or more visits to Rome in order to establish the already existing Jewish Christians in Rome. In A.D. 36, Peter was in Jerusalem to

meet the newly converted Paul (Acts 9:26-28; Galatians 1:18). In about A.D. 40, Peter preached the gospel to the first Gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10:1-48). This was before the reign of Caesar Claudius (Acts 11:28) and King Herod (Acts 12:1), who received the control of Judea from Claudius. From A.D. 41 onwards the attitude of the Jews in Jerusalem changed for the worse against the apostles. In A.D. 44 Peter was again in Jerusalem when he was arrested and imprisoned by Herod. The congregation prayed for him in the house of Mark's mother and after his release by divine intervention, Peter left for another place (Acts 12:1-17). Because many Christians gathered in their house, Mark was probably acquainted with the other apostles and several of the early other followers of Jesus Christ.

(3) The ministry of Mark.

According to the testimony of the early church fathers, Mark worked together with Peter in Rome. This probably happened in the period after A.D. 44 when the apostle Peter had left Jerusalem for another place.

The church father Eusebius wrote in A.D. 300, "Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing (the Gospel of Mark) what had been preached by Peter." The church father Clement of Alexandria, wrote in A.D. 190, "The occasion for writing the Gospel of Mark was the following: Peter had publicly preached the word in Rome ... Mark had followed him for a long time and remembered what he had spoken. Many people, who were present, urged Mark to write down what Peter had said. He did this and distributed the Gospel among those who had asked him for it. When Peter learned about this, he neither strongly forbade it nor promoted it."

And the church father Papias, who was a disciple of the apostle John, wrote in A.D. 115, "Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote down accurately ... whatever he remembered of what was said and done by the Lord. ... Mark gave careful attention to leave out nothing of what he had heard and also to falsify nothing." There is absolutely no reason to deny the unanimous testimony of the ancient historians that Mark wrote this Gospel and that it was mainly based on the preaching and teaching of the apostle Peter in Rome. Mark probably wrote his Gospel of Mark in A.D. 44-46 in Rome for the Romans.

(4) The ministry of other Christians.

People travelled extensively in all parts of the Roman Empire by way of its network of roads and cargo ships, which sailed from beginning of March to the middle of November each year. The New Testament shows several great travellers: Priscilla and Aquila at different times of their lives travelled from Pontus (in Asia Minor) to Rome, from Rome to Corinth (Acts 18:2), from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19; 1 Corinthians 16:19), from Ephesus to Rome (Romans 16:3), and again from Rome to Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:19).

Also Luke, Timothy, Titus and Paul himself travelled extensively (2 Corinthians 11:25-26). There existed constant traffic between Rome and all her provinces and people travelled a lot. The mission-minded congregation at Antioch (Syria) certainly had travellers to and from Rome who could have spread the message and thus strengthen the existing congregation at Rome. In the same way, the congregations of Philippi, Corinth and Ephesus may well have co-operated, because communications between these great cities and Rome was constant.

Paul wrote in Romans 1:8 that the faith of the Romans was known all over the world. Therefore the congregation at Rome must have existed for quite some time. The Roman writer, Suetonius (in *Vita Claudii* xxv:4, A.D. 75-160) wrote, "Since the Jews were continually making disturbances at the instigation of "Chrestus", Claudius expelled them from Rome." He was referring to the quarrels between Jews who became Christians and Jews who remained hostile to the new faith. This happened in A.D. 49, and thus Priscilla and Aquila probably became Christians before they came from Rome to Corinth in A.D. 49. The conclusion is that the congregation in Rome probably came into existence primarily through the testimony of ordinary Christians.

(5) The ministry of Paul.

During his first three missionary journeys between A.D. 47-57, Paul had become acquainted with several believers belonging to the congregation at Rome (Romans 16:3-15). However, he himself came to Rome for the first time in A.D. 60 as a prisoner after he had appealed to the Caesar of Rome to rule his case (Acts 25:1-12). Nevertheless Paul was very effective in proclaiming the gospel from his prison in Rome so that throughout the whole palace guard it had become clear that Paul was imprisoned not for a crime but for being a Christian (Acts 28 and Philippians 1:12-14). From his prison in Rome, Paul wrote the letters Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians in A.D. 60-61. Finally, during his second imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, which was his last letter in about A.D. 64/65. Peter was not in Rome while Paul was there, otherwise Paul would have written about him.

(6) The Christian tradition about the ministry of the apostles in Rome.

While the apostle Paul travelled extensively between his two imprisonments in Rome between A.D. 61-64, the apostle Peter and Mark were in Rome (1 Peter 5:13). Peter wrote his first letter about A.D. 62-63 from Rome and his second letter about 64 A.D. from Rome. A fourth century Latin church father, Ambrosiaster, wrote in his commentary on Romans that the congregation at Rome was not founded by the apostles, but by certain Jewish Christians who imposed a "Judaic form" on the congregation (Compare this statement with Acts 15:1 and 21:24). The tradition that ascribed to the apostle Peter a 25 year episcopacy between A.D. 42-67 over the congregation at Rome is very dubious, because the

apostle Paul would not have omitted such an important fact from his letter to the Romans and Luke would not have omitted it from his book of Acts!¹ Moreover, bishops only came into existence during the second century A.D.

4. The situation of the congregation in Rome.

The congregation at Rome consisted of a majority of Gentile (non-Jewish) converts and a minority of Jewish converts (Romans 1:5-6,13; 11:13; 15:9-18). This led to tensions within the congregation:

(1) The apostle Paul combated certain views generally held by the Jews and the converts to Judaism.

The Jews believed that physical descent from Abraham, circumcision and keeping the law were sufficient to gain the favour of God. The Jewish religious teachers of the law taught that “God had promised Abraham that he would save his descendants on the ground of Abraham’s merits, no matter how godless and sinful the Jews were.” They also taught that “no circumcised person would ever go to hell” and that “all Israel would share in the eternal life.”

The Jews believed that the blessings of the Messianic kingdom would be limited to the Jews and converts to Judaism. However, in this kingdom there would be a difference. The Jews within this kingdom would be elevated high above the non-Jews. The theocratic kingdom with all its blessings would belong only to Israel (thus, “first class Jews”)! Gentiles (non-Jews) could secure a subordinate place in this kingdom only by becoming Jews (proselytes) (thus, “second class Jews”).

The Jews believed that as Jews they were free from the duty to submit to the authority of Gentile governments. They had doubts about paying taxes to these Gentile governments and they despised Gentiles! This constantly led to rebellion within the Jewish ranks, the consequent banishment of Jews from Rome and finally to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D.

(2) The apostle Paul rebuked the Gentile Christians for not considering the scruples of the Jewish Christians.

“The weak Christians” were believers from among the Jews and proselytes. They still kept the law (were circumcised, kept the Sabbath, the Jewish festivals and Jewish food rules). “The strong Christians” were generally believers in Christ from the Gentiles (Romans) who were not acquainted with the Jewish ceremonial laws. Paul commanded the strong Christians *not to look down (despise)* “the weak Christians” (generally the believers in Christ from the Jews) with their scruples. And he commanded the weak Christians not to judge the strong Christians with their convictions (Romans 14:1 to 15:13).

(3) The apostle Paul taught that there is only one gospel or message of salvation for both Gentiles and Jews.

Both Gentiles and Jews have sinned and miss God’s perfect standard of righteousness and God’s goal for their lives (namely, to possess the glorious characteristics of God) (Romans 3:23).

Both Gentiles and Jews in the Old and in the New Testament are justified (saved) in the same way, namely, through faith in Jesus Christ and his completed work of salvation apart from observing the law (Romans 3:24-25,28).

Both Gentiles and Jews who believe in Jesus Christ are “the true descendents of Abraham” (Romans 4:11-12).

In short, “there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.”² Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:12-13).

(4) The Church in the Old Testament and the New Testament in the Bible are called by exactly the same names.

- God’s firstborn (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; Hebrews 12:23)
- God’s sons and daughters (Isaiah 43:6-7; 2 Corinthians 6:18)
- The city Jerusalem (a symbol for God’s people) is called: a woman, or a bride, or spouse (Isaiah 54:1,5-6; Revelation 21:9-10)
- The twelve tribes (Genesis 49:28; ; James 1:1; Revelation 7:4; Revelation 21:12)
- A kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6)
- A holy people (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9)
- A chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Titus 2:14 (elected, special people)
- God’s treasured possession (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6), “a people that are the very own of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:14). “a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9)
- God’s covenant people (Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16)
- A dispersed nation, a wandering people, scattered in the dispersion, strangers (Deuteronomy 30:1; Psalm 105:10-13; Ezekiel 12:15; Esther 3:8; 1 Peter 1:1)

¹ Cf. Dota manual 4, supplement 19, “Development of leadership in Church History”. Section B. “Bishops”.

- The first fruits of God's harvest (Jeremiah 2:3; James 1:18)
- Sheep (one flock) of the sheep pen of Israel and of the sheep pens of the other nations (Ezekiel 34; John 10:16)
- Israel (1 Samuel 7:23; Galatians 6:14-16)
- Jews (Zechariah 8:22-23; Romans 2:28-29)
- Zion (also a symbol for God's people)(Isaiah 51:16; Isaiah 52:7; Hebrews 12:22-24)
- The present Jerusalem(that is below in slavery to the law) and the Heavenly Jerusalem that is above (Galatians 4:25-26), the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22), the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2), the Holy Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10)
- Temple of God (also a symbol for God's people) (2 Corinthians 6:16)
- Jewish and non-Jewish believers who are heirs together (of God's people), members together of one Body, and sharers together of the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:6; 2 Corinthians 1:20).
- Christians (anointed people) (Hebrew: meshichi; Greek: christoi) (Psalm 105:15) (Acts 11:26) (christianous) who dwell amidst non-christians in the world!

The Jews and non-Jews who believe in Jesus Christ together form one organism, that is represented by the following symbols:

- one flock (John 10:16)
- one family with children of God (Galatians 3:26-29)
- one new man, a household of God, a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:11-22)
- one Body (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 3:6)
- one olive tree (Jeremiah 11:16-17; Romans 11:17-24)
- one chosen and holy people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10).
- one New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:9-14, cf. Hebrews 12:22-24 for Jews and Gentiles (Galatians 4:21-31).

Therefore

- God's Old Testament people (Israel) was *not terminated or replaced*,
- but *continued on a higher level in which "the shadows" became "realities"*
(Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 9:7-10)
- and was *enlarged (extended) to include the believers in Christ in all the nations of the world.*
- Together they form the people of God on complete equal terms (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:2-6).

C. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING ROMANS

1. The place of writing the letter to the Romans.

At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul travelled through Macedonia to Corinth (Acts 20:2-3). This was Paul's third visit to Corinth. He arrived in Corinth before the winter A.D. 56 and spent three months in Corinth. Everything points to Corinth as the place where Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. He had received the contributions made in Macedonia and Achaia for the collection for the poor Christians in Jerusalem and thus he must have been in that area (Romans 15:25-26). He conveyed the greetings of Gaius and Erastus (Romans 16:23), who were Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:14; 2 Timothy 4:20). Paul also mentioned Cenchrea (Romans 16:1), which was the eastern port of Corinth.

2. The date of writing the letter to the Romans.

Because Paul wanted to reach Jerusalem before Pentecost (Acts 20:16), he wrote the letter to the Romans in Corinth towards the close of the winter or the beginning of the spring in A.D. 57. It is generally assumed that Phoebe carried Paul's letter from Corinth to Rome (Romans 16:1-2).

His purpose was to teach, "Justification is by grace through faith". In Romans 15:23-24, Paul said that his missionary work in the eastern part of the Roman Empire was nearing its completion and that he was planning to begin missionary work in the western part of the Roman Empire, especially Rome itself and Spain. Paul felt that *that time had now come* (Romans 1:10).

Therefore Paul wrote his letter to the Romans towards the end of his third missionary journey in 57 A.D.

3. The dates with regard to Paul's third missionary journey.

The dates for the third missionary journey are determined by the times Felix and Festus were governors of Judea. Felix was governor of Judea between A.D. 52-59 and Festus between A.D. 59-61. Paul had been imprisoned for two years before Festus became governor (Acts 24:27). Thus, Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea from A.D. 57-59 and the dates for the third missionary journey must have been between A.D. 53-57.

D. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

1. Paul desired to have a personal ministry in Rome.

According to Romans 15:23, Paul was nearing the completion of his ministry in the eastern part of the Roman Empire and desired to begin his ministry in the western part of the Roman Empire, especially Rome and Spain. Paul had a humble view of his intended ministry in Rome and said that he expected not only to have a harvest among them, but also to receive personal encouragement from their faith. Nevertheless, he was eager to preach the gospel at Rome (Romans 1:8-15). He was uncertain whether he would be able to make the trip to Rome, because he had been prevented from doing so before and he was very much aware of the opposition of the Jews, especially in Jerusalem (Acts 20:3,22-23).

2. Paul helped the Christians in Rome to defend themselves against the onslaught of the Jews.

The awareness that there was a possibility that he might never see his brothers in Rome caused Paul to write this type of a letter. The style of this letter reminds one of the way Paul argued with the unbelieving Jews during his missionary journeys (Romans 4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30). Paul knew that the church at Rome lived among a great majority of non-Christians and he wanted to help the church to defend the Christian Faith against such opponents and even to win them for Christ.

The letter to the Romans is not really a complete compendium of Christian doctrine. But Paul knew exactly what the church in Rome needed. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he wrote:

- Romans chapter 1-8 about the way in which sinners are saved. All Christians in the world need this fundamental teaching about the Christian message.
- Romans chapter 9-11 about the place of Israel (the Jews) after the first coming of Jesus Christ
- Romans chapter 12-16 about the practical Christian life and in chapter 14 specifically about certain aspects of the law.³

3. Paul exhorted the Christians in Rome how to behave as Christians.

Rome was the capital of the Roman Empire and a very large city with many nationalities living in it. Paul exhorted the Christians how to behave themselves towards one another, towards their enemies and towards the Roman government. He also taught how the strong and weak Christians should relate to one another.

4. Paul desired the co-operation of the Christians in Rome for his missionary journey to Spain.

In Romans 15:24 he wrote that he hoped that the congregation in Rome would assist him on his missionary journey to Spain.

Because Paul had several purposes for writing the letter to the Romans, one could summarise his purpose with his own words in 1 Corinthians 9:22 and 10:31, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" and "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

E. THE DIVISION OF ROMANS

The letter to the Romans may be given the title:

"Romans - the gospel about God's righteousness"

The letter portrays Jesus Christ who is the righteousness of Christians before God.

The theme of the letter to the Romans is written in Romans 1:16-17, "The gospel is the power of God for salvation of everyone who exercises faith ... as it is written, 'The righteous will live by faith'."

The letter to the Romans may be divided into two parts:

1. The doctrinal part: Believe God's righteousness (Romans chapters 1 – 11).

This part may be divided into four sections:

(1) Section one: The necessity of God's righteousness.

This is recorded in Romans 1:1 to 3:20.

- In Romans chapter 1, by pointing out the gross sins of the Gentiles, Paul shows that the Gentiles really need God's righteousness.
- In Romans chapter 2, by pointing out the sins of the Jews, he shows that also the Jews really need God's righteousness.
- In Romans chapter 3:1-20, he draws the conclusion that sin and the condemnation of sin are universal. Pure human righteousness (whether acquired by religious works of the law, whether by good works of man) does not exist in the world!

³ The law is called "Torah" in Hebrew and "Sharia" in Arabic.

(2) Section two: The way to God's righteousness.

This is recorded in Romans chapters 3:21 to 4:25.

- In Romans chapter 3:21-31, Paul teaches that God has revealed his righteousness in the sacrifice of atonement made by Jesus Christ on the cross. Anyone may receive God's righteousness by exercising faith in Jesus Christ.
- In Romans chapter 4, Paul proves that God's righteousness by faith was also the way of salvation during the Old Testament period.

(3) Section three: The effects of God's righteousness.

This is recorded in Romans chapters 5 to 8.

- In Romans chapter 5, God's righteousness produces fruits like peace and assurance of complete salvation.
- In Romans chapter 6, God's righteousness is indissolubly connected to living a holy life.
- In Romans chapter 7, the Christian has been set free from (keeping) "the law as interpreted by the Jewish religious leaders" (Romans 7:1-6); that every sinner continues to experience the functions of the moral law of God" (Romans 7:7-13) and that every Christian still experiences the struggle against "the law of sin" in his present body (Romans 7:14-25).
- In Romans chapter 8, the Christian experiences the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-27) and he is in all (the events on earth) more than a conqueror through him who loves him (Romans 8:28-39).

(4) Section four: The Giver of God's righteousness.

This is recorded in Romans chapters 9-11.

- In Romans chapter 9 Paul vindicates the righteousness and faithfulness of God, in spite of the unbelief and disobedience of Israel. Israel's unbelief and consequent rejection by God were not total: there was always a remnant of true and faithful believers (in the God of the Bible and his Messiah/Christ) (Psalm 2:2).
- In Romans chapter 10 Paul teaches that God's righteousness is (only) available in Jesus Christ and is (only) given to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, regardless whether he is a Jew or a non-Jew (Gentile). Israel's unbelief, disobedience, obstinacy and consequent rejection by God were not arbitrary: God's invitation to salvation (justification) has gone out to all the nations on the earth. It is today still extended to the Jews.
- In Romans chapter 11 God uses the *partial* hardening of Israel to save a great number of non-Jews (Gentiles) and he uses the salvation of the Gentiles to save a great number of Jews (that is, Israel) (Romans 11:11-24). Israel's unbelief and consequent rejection were not final: God will not only save the fullness (the full number of elected) from among the Gentiles, but also the fullness (the full number of elected) from among the Jews. This means that all people whom God chose *before the creation of the world* (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:9b) will certainly believe in Jesus Christ *during the history of his world* (Romans 8:30; 11:25-32; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:9a,10).

2. The practical part: Do God's righteousness (Romans chapters 12 - 16).

This part may be divided into two sections:

(1) Section one: The visible demonstration of God's righteousness.

This is recorded in Romans chapters 12:1 to 15:13.

- Romans chapter 12 teaches the behaviour of the Christian with respect to God, other Christians and opponents.
- Romans chapter 13 teaches the behaviour of the Christian with respect to the government, the neighbour and Christ.
- Romans chapter 14:1 to 15:13 teaches the behaviour of the strong and weak Christians towards one another.

(2) Section two: The co-workers of God's righteousness.

This is recorded in Romans chapters 15:14 to 16:27.

- Romans chapter 15:14-33 describes Paul's Gentile ministry, policy and plans.
- Romans chapter 16 describes other co-workers of God's righteousness.

F. THE MAIN MESSAGES IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

1. God reveals himself to all people in history.

God reveals himself through his creation. He reveals his existence or reality and his power through what can be seen in creation (Romans 1:19-20). He also reveals his moral laws in every human heart and conscience (Romans 2:14-15). God also reveals himself in his judgements of the sins of people (Genesis 6:5,11-13), through his providential care of people (Acts 14:17 and 17:24-28) and through the preaching of the gospel (Matthew 24:14). Because God has revealed his existence and will to all people, not a single person will be able to make any excuse for not seeking God (Romans 3:11,19).

2. All people in history have sinned and need God's righteousness.

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "To have sinned", means to have fallen short of God's perfect standard and to have missed God's goal for their lives, which is to express God's glorious presence and characteristics. Therefore according to Romans 3:10-11, there is no difference between one nation and another nation.

Although some people might be *righteous in their own eyes and think that they will go to Paradise* because they are trying to keep the religious laws,⁴ there is not a single human being who is by nature righteous in the eyes of the God of the Bible! Although people understand that the world has problems, there is no one who really understands his own deplorable condition in the eyes of God. Although people seek scientific and philosophic knowledge and answers, there is no one who in his own strength seeks the God of the Bible, who is the Source of understanding and of salvation.

Because all people in history have sinned, all people in history need salvation. That is, they miss the righteousness which the God of the Bible requires in order to be justified (saved).

Compare what Jesus says, “Whoever does not believe, *stands condemned already*, because he has not believed in the Name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18). “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for *God’s wrath remains on him*” (John 3:36). “If you do not believe that I AM (I AM the One I claim to be)(i.e. I AM WHO I AM)(Exodus 3:14), you *will indeed die in your sins*” (John 8:24).

3. People are only justified by faith.

Moses said in Leviticus 18:5 that the man who obeys God’s laws would “live by them”. The Jews thought that this meant that whoever tried to keep the law⁵ as good as he could, would be justified and would inherit Paradise.⁶ The Jews therefore tried to establish their own “righteousness” by obeying all the laws of God as well as they could.

Their thinking was wrong! They forgot that what God demanded was not *just trying* to keep the law, but *absolute complete and perfect obedience to the law* of the God of the Bible! No one in the history of mankind is able to obey God’s law completely and perfectly! Everyone falls short of God’s perfect standard! Romans 3:19-20 says, “We know whatever the law says, it says to those under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God, because no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.” James says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point, is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10). And Paul says, “All who rely on serving the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law’” (Galatians 3:10). No one will be justified by keeping the law, because there is no one in the history of the world that has kept the the law completely or perfectly, except the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus Christ is “the end of the law” (Romans 10:4) so that people may receive God’s righteousness not by trying to keep the law, but by believing in Jesus Christ. He was sinless and perfectly fulfilled all the demands of God’s law. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ receives *the absolute perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ* as a free gift. No one can earn his *own righteousness* by keeping God’s laws or by doing good works. Therefore Romans 3:28 says, “A man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”

Romans 4:1-5 shows that the Old Testament did not teach that people could be justified by doing the works of the law. Genesis 15:6 says, “Abraham believed God and it was *credited* to him as righteousness.” Better than the word “credit” is “reckon”, “impute” or “ascribe.” Although religious people might boast before other people about their works of the law, they can never boast before the God of the Bible! God does not justify people who justify themselves, but only people who believe in Jesus Christ.

Compare what Jesus says about this:

“I AM THE WAY. No one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6; cf. Matthew 11:27-29).

“You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:7).

4. People who have been justified through faith have peace with God.

A person who believes in Jesus Christ, has “peace” with God.

- The word “peace” first means that you are very sure that all your sins *in the past* have been forgiven, that you are completely righteous in God’s eyes and have been reconciled with God (Romans 5:1-2,10).
- The word “peace” secondly means that all evil *in the present time* is being overruled by God for your benefit. All the suffering you endure produces perseverance, character and hope (Romans 5:3-5; 8:28).
- The word “peace” thirdly means that *the future events* on earth can never separate the Christian from God, that he is saved from God’s future wrath against sin and that no one and nothing can separate him from God’s love for him (Romans 5:9,21; 8:37-39; cf. John 10:28).

5. Although the Old Testament law cannot justify a person, it has an important function.

No one will be justified (saved) by observing the law (Romans 3:28)!

- The law functions as “a mirror” in which people learn to recognise their own sins (Romans 3:20).

⁴ The religious laws are: (1) believe that there is one God, (2) pray three times every day, (3) fast at certain times, (4) give one tenth of their money (5) and make a pilgrims journey three times every year.

⁵ “The law” consists of (1) the moral laws in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), (2) de ceremonial laws as circumcision, the Sabbath, the ablutions, the sacrifices, the food laws, the tithes (3) the civil laws of Israel as for holy wars, clothing, marriage and divorce, the penal laws for rape and stealing, etc. etc. The religious leaders in Israel devised 613 man-made laws and added these to God’s laws. The law is called “Torah” in Hebrew and “Sharia” in Arabic.

⁶ “Inherit paradise” means: to inherit eternal life; to be saved (cf. Romans 10:2-5)

- The law functions as “a magnifying glass” through which people see the magnitude and ugliness of their sins (Romans 5:20).
- The law functions as “a judge” who condemns all people to be *guilty* and holds them all accountable to God (Romans 3:19).
- The law functions as “a school teacher” who shows people their need of Christ and Christ’s righteousness (Galatians 3:24).
- The law functions as “a guide” who shows people how they should live the Christian life (Romans 13:8-10).
- And the law functions as “a bridle” which restrains all kinds of wickedness among people (1 Timothy 1:9-11).
- But can never function as ‘a means to justification’ (salvation).

6. Justification is indissolubly connected to sanctification.

“Justification” means that God *declares* a believer righteous and thereafter *regards and treats* him as completely and perfectly righteous in his eyes on the ground of the atonement Christ made on the cross and which the believer receives by faith with empty hands.

In Romans chapter 6 the emphasis of the word “holiness” is not on the process of sanctification, but rather on the condition being sanctified once for all! “Holy” means: *separated* from what is evil and *dedicated* to what is good in the eyes of God. The Christian has once-for-all broken with sin and has once for all committed himself to righteousness.

Romans 6:5-7 teaches that everyone who through faith has been united with Christ in his death will certainly be united with Christ in his resurrection! Through faith in Jesus Christ, his old self has been crucified with Christ, so that his physical body is no longer conditioned and controlled by his sinful nature. The involuntary compulsory slavery to sin has definitely been broken! Paul teaches that the true nature and design (goal and form) of Christianity is to produce newness of life. Paul shows that such is the nature of the union with Christ, that it is impossible for any person to share in the benefits of Christ’s death, without also sharing in the benefits of his resurrection! Sharing in the benefits of Christ’s resurrection primarily means conformity to Christ in a holy life here on earth and secondarily conformity to Christ in a life of glorious immortality of spirit and body after death (Romans 8:11). Both are included in the new life which flows to us from Christ.

On the one hand, Paul teaches that it is impossible for a person to be conformed to Christ’s death, without also being conformed to his resurrection and life! There is an analogy between the *literal* death and resurrection of Christ and the *spiritual* death and resurrection of the Christian here and now on earth. There is also a causal relationship between the death and resurrection of Christ on the one hand and the spiritual death and resurrection of the Christian on the other hand: Just as the resurrection of Christ was the certain consequence of his death, so also a holy life of a Christian (that is, his resurrection with Christ) is the certain consequence of his justification (that is, his dying with Christ). The resurrection of Christ renders the sanctification of the Christian certain! The Christian shares in Christ’s life, because he also shares in his death.

On the other hand, Paul teaches that it is impossible for a Christian to be conformed to the life of Christ, without being conformed to the death of Christ! A Christian must first be justified before he can be sanctified! Just as Christ’s death preceded his resurrection, so justification of a Christian must precede his sanctification! A Christian shares in Christ’s death in order that he may share in Christ’s life.

Thus, the letter to the Romans teaches that the state (condition) of justification and the state (condition) of holiness are inseparable! The state of holiness leads to the process of sanctification. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ renders the justification and sanctification of the Christian absolutely certain. Through faith in Jesus Christ, the Christian shares here and now in the death and resurrection of Christ in Jerusalem two thousand years ago!

7. Christians should live through the Holy Spirit.

“Living in the Spirit” is not a mystical experience, but is a daily concrete responsibility. It means setting the mind on what the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus Christ) desires, that is, setting the mind on what the Bible teaches (Romans 8:5; cf. John 14:26; 16:13-14; Ephesians 6:17).

It means putting to death the misdeeds of the body” (every kind of sin that expresses itself in the human body) (Romans 8:13). That is why Romans 6:13 and 19 urges Christians to no longer offer the parts of their body as instruments to do wicked things, but to rather offer them as instruments to do what is right in God’s eyes leading to holiness.⁷

8. God is the sovereign (almighty) Ruler in everything.

God’s sovereignty means that God is the King of the universe and that no one can stop him from carrying out his plan for this world and for every Christian.

- Everything that happens on earth is used by God for the good of Christians (Romans 8:28). Thus God is sovereign in his goodness.

⁷ Righteousness = do what is right in the eyes of God. This leads to holiness = a life that turns away from sin and commits itself to change to Christlikeness.

- All people whom God elected or chose, will be saved (Romans 8:29-30). Thus God is sovereign in whom he saves.
- Nothing that happens on earth can separate a Christian from God or God's love for him (Romans 8:35-39). Thus God is sovereign in his love.

9. People become God's children on the ground of what God has accomplished.

- People become God's children, not by their human descent, but only on the ground of *God's sovereign promise* (Romans 9:6-9).
- People become God's children, not by their human merit of good works, but only on the ground of *God's sovereign election and calling* (Romans 9:10-13; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).
- People become God's children, not by their human desire, free will or human exertion, but only on the ground of *God's sovereign mercy* (Romans 9:14-16, cf. Romans 9:18).

That is what Jesus Christ teaches when he says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him". "All the Father gives me will come to me, and whatever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37,44,65).

10. God's plan is to save (justify) both Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles).

Romans 11:11-27.

- The *rejection* of unbelieving and disobedient Jews (Israel) has led to the *acceptance* of masses of believing Gentiles (cf. Acts 13:44-48; Romans 11:11).
- And the *acceptance* of the believing Gentiles leads to the *acceptance* of masses of believing Jews. "A great multitude that no one could count from every nation (including Israel)" will be saved (cf. Revelation 5:9-10; Revelation 9:9-10).
- At the second coming of Jesus Christ "the full number" of (elected) Gentiles and "the full number" of (elected) Israel will be simultaneously reached (Romans 11:26-27).

Thus, all people whom God has elected from the Gentiles and the Jews in every generation in history, will be "called, justified (saved) and glorified" (Romans 8:229-30,33).

But, unbelieving Gentiles and unbelieving Jews "will be broken off or cut off from the root of the olive tree" (Romans 11:20-22) and "thrown outside the kingdom of God" (Matthew 3:10,12; Matthew 8:11-12; Revelation 21:8). "Everything that causes sin and all who do evil will be weeded out of the kingdom of God" (Matthew 13:41)! "The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace" (Matthew 13:49-50). "The kingdom of God will be taken from them and they will be broken to pieces, crushed" (Matthew 21:43-44)!

11. God requires that Christians be transformed.

All Christians should continually be transformed to more and more Christ likeness (Romans 12:1-3 and 13:14).

The Letter to the Romans teaches:

- Although God takes the initiative with regard to salvation (justification) and life, every Christian remains responsible to respond to God's initiatives. The letter to the Romans teaches that there is "no divine election without human responsibility"
- There is no divine election without human responsibility. The doctrine of election may never be separated from the doctrine of the responsibility of man.
- There is no state of justification without the state of holiness and the process of sanctification. The doctrine of justification may not be separated in the human mind or daily life from the doctrine of sanctification.
- A Christian can only have assurance of salvation when he continues to live in trust and obedience.

12. God requires that Christians submit to all God-given authorities.

All Christians must submit to the authorities that God has set over them (Romans 13:1-7).

The seven authorities of God in the Bible are:

- The authority of God above all and everything (Revelation 1:5; 19:16; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).
- The authority of man above the created earth (Genesis 1:28).
- The authority of man over the woman in marriage and in the Church (Ephesians 5:22-25; 1 Timothy 2:11-12).
- The authority of parents over their minor children (Ephesians 6:1-4).
- The authority of employers over their employees (Ephesians 6:5-9).
- The authority of the government over her citizens (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-18).
- The authority of the council of elders over the church members (Acts 20:17,28; Hebrews 13:17).

All citizens must submit to the civil authorities over them unless the government clashes with the highest authority (God) (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). All human authorities that are opposed to God's authority must be resisted in an appropriate way. Note the "beast out of the sea" which represents all antichristian political authorities in the world (Revelation 13:1-10).

13. God requires that Christians accept one another with their differences.

Christians have received different gifts of the Spirit and thus have different functions (tasks) in the Body of Christ. Every Christian as a member belongs to all other Christians (Romans 12:3-8).

The strong Christians must accept the scruples of the weak Christians, but only to the extent that these scruples do not clash with the truth in the Bible. And the weak Christians must not condemn the convictions of the strong Christians, but only to the extent that these convictions do not clash with the truth in the Bible (Romans 14:1-15:13).