

Study 19: Romans Summary

Introduction

This “summary” study is intended to pull together succinctly the highlights of the things that we have covered in the Romans study. It will also provide a readable overview of the letter for future reference.

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- Write a short essay on the application of what you have learned from Romans to your own life. - Even though we are sinners, how does God see us?

Notes for study 19: Summary

Background of Rome, and occasion of the letter

Rome was the greatest city in the world and the headquarters of the Empire, with a population of well over a million (including women, children and slaves). As in most parts of the Empire, the Jewish population was present and active. Many of the Christians in Rome were not Jews, and the letter clearly addresses both Jews *and* Gentiles.

The occasion of the letter was (most likely) Phoebe from Corinth making a trip to Rome. The time of writing was Paul's third journey, and quite late in the journey – just before he is about to depart to go back to Syria and Judea. His travel plans are well established, and he is about to leave for Jerusalem. The date is early in the year AD 58, as Paul wanted to be back in Jerusalem by Pentecost of that year.

Romans bears much similarity to the Galatian letter, and was probably written about the same time. It was written after the Corinthian letters.

Judaizers had been troubling the churches everywhere, and it was only a matter of time before they began to trouble the church at Rome. So, Paul writes the letter – not to deal with specific issues as he had had to do in other places (Galatia and Corinth for example), but as a letter of encouragement and of forewarning. It was to help them to be instructed in the faith.

Whilst some in the church in Rome had some miraculous gifts (12:6), but the few that they had were not sufficient to have them properly grow in God's knowledge (1:11).

Key introductory thoughts

In his usual style, Paul "signs his letter" at the beginning, and introduces his authority and characteristics. He next brings out some statements *about* the gospel. It had its origins with God, and was not something invented by man. His argument is that the gospel was God's eternal purpose all along, not Judaism. Hence the importance of the statement of the origins of the gospel with God.

Jesus is "...declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead..." His crucifixion proved Jesus to be a man, but in the resurrection, He was proved to be God. Whilst others were raised from the dead, only Jesus was raised from the dead – never to die again!!!

The theme of Romans

The theme is summed up by Paul's very succinct statement in 1:11 that sets the theme of the whole book, and he essentially expands on it from here to the end of chapter 11 "...I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith..." (NIV)

The three groups Paul describes:

Paul begins in 1:18 along a journey that leads to the inevitable conclusions that man is in need of a Saviour – whether we are Jews or Gentiles. The first group are the amoral Gentiles, who have abandoned any notion of God. The second are the moralistic Gentiles, who do not live under codified law, but are still condemned by their actions. The third group are the Jews who did live under the codified Law. He begins with the Gentiles.

God's majesty is revealed in creation. The world did not just happen. It could only come about by an intelligent being. Because of what we can see, we are without excuse. We will all stand before God and not one of us will be able to say that we didn't know anything about God. Despite this, the Gentiles went off and did abhorrent things. They even thought that God was just an animal or a human like god. They thought that idols were God, and they worshipped them – ignoring the

power of the true and living God. Looking at the “list” of sins that Paul describes, even most of the Gentiles would find at least some of them wrong – even if they were involved in others.

The second group *know* right and wrong. He describes them as *judging* others, but they do those very things themselves. Knowledge plus opportunity gives an obligation (1:20&21). Those in the first group had a knowledge of the creator and the opportunity to seek Him out – which provided an obligation to do so, and being rightly condemned because they didn’t follow through with the obligation. Likewise the second group also have an obligation. They have a knowledge of right and wrong, and the opportunity to do right, but end up doing wrong. Like the first group they are rightly condemned for not following through with their obligation. They are somewhat (but not totally) removed from the immorality. Despite their semblance of righteousness, they will not escape the righteous judgement of God (2:3).

The third group are self-righteous. Even the most humble is still guilty of not (fully) keeping the Law. Their perception is self-directed and self-deceiving. Having the form is one thing, but having the truth is another. They are just like the first group “...*professing themselves to be wise, they became fools...*” (1:22). The Jews (even the best of them) are still condemned before God.

Why good is it to be a Jew?

“...*being a Jew is profitable if you keep the Law...*” (2:25). That of course, is true, but the only catch is that no-one (apart from Jesus) ever kept the Law perfectly (any system of law for that matter, let alone Moses’ Law).

The real point is that the true Jew is not the one who puts on the outward appearance, parades around showing to others that he is keeping the Law, and demanding that others keep it too, but the one who keeps the law of God inwardly. His heart is really attuned to God. He will have the kind of faith that Abraham showed, and it is observed in his obedience to God.

The Jew had great advantages, because he had a fundamental understanding of God. The problem was, that the Law became a burden. The Jews were keeping *the letter of the Law*, but were ignoring the *weightier matters* of justice, mercy and righteousness (Mt 23:23). They wanted the promises, but were not prepared to accept the *promised one* when He came. As God’s people, they had *a relationship* with God, and were in a position where they should have known better. Whilst the Jew had failed, God had not failed.

Is God right to inflict punishment?

We are unrighteous (speaking particularly about the Jews), and God is righteous and just. We deserve to be punished for our wrongs. We might not like *the consequences* in being punished, but we deserve what we get. If God does not inflict the right and just consequences on the man who sins, then how can he be a fair and impartial God? (But God is also a *merciful* God, and has provided His own Son to pay the penalty!!!)

The purpose of the Law

The Jew’s culture was – “We are right with God because we are Abraham’s children. God has entrusted the Law to us, and sealed our relationship with the sign of circumcision”.

The first premise has already been discounted, and the second premise (the children of Abraham) is not under question, but *those who are of faith are the true children of Abraham* (Gal 3:26-29).

So, Paul deals with the third premise – the place of the Law. Those who live under the Law are obliged to fulfil whatever it requires. He drives the final nail in the argument of condemnation for all of mankind. “...*through the law we have the knowledge of sin...*” (3:20) The Law was given so that we might *know* and *realise* our true position with God. We just don’t have to *think* that we are sinners in God’s sight – we **KNOW** we are!!!

The remedy for the situation

There is a remedy for the dire situation that Paul has painted. God has a plan. In fact, God always had a plan – even before He created the world. Through Christ we are all made righteous, and that only comes by faith – the kind of faith that Abraham had.

Every one of us has sinned and we all fall short of God's glory (3:23). The remedy for sin has been provided. And it is free. We don't have to earn it. In fact, we can't possibly earn it. It is a free gift. It comes from God's grace. He gives us the gift of salvation that we do not deserve. (Contrasted to God's mercy, when he does not inflict on us the punishment that we do deserve).

We cannot boast about *what we have done*, or that *I'm better than you!* Because we are all equally condemned before God. We have absolutely nothing to boast about!

The keeping of any Law (the Law of Moses, or Law of any kind, even the Law of Christ as a system of Law) can never make us right in God's sight. If we try to say that we have done all that Christ's law says that we need to do, and therefore God "owes us" salvation at the end of it all, then we are just as misguided as the Jews.

Abraham as a test case

The Jews recognised the arguments about faith, and our relationship with God through that faith. But they had yet to cut the ties back to Abraham through the national promise. The life of Abraham clearly shows that his relationship with God was outside of Law, and outside of the national promise. In fact rather than being blessed because of the covenant relationship, the contrary is true, that the promises of God came *because of* Abraham's faith outside of the covenant. "...Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness..." Abraham's faith is presented not as one single event, but rather a lifelong faith that stretched over 30 or 40 years, and put into *practice* the things that he knew and believed.

The promises to Abraham did not come *because* he was a Jew, or *because* he was the father of the Jewish nation. They came *before* Abraham became a Jew. It had nothing to do with the covenant, because righteousness was reckoned to him *before* the covenant. It had everything to do with his faith.

Grace introduced

If we work for a living, we expect to get paid at the end of the day. The boss owes us a debt. But this is not the case with God. There is no work that we can do that warrants the righteousness that comes from God. The true picture is that we are charity cases! *Grace* comes from the greek word *charis*, and it is where we get the word *charity* from. God has made us righteous when we are charity cases, because he can see our hearts, if we have shown the same kind of faith that Abraham showed. This does not mean that we have no obligation at all. Our faith should necessitate action. It should be a *doing* faith. Abraham did not just believe God and then sit in Ur of the Chaldees, but he went to the country that God would show him. When he was told to sacrifice Isaac, he *rose up* early in the morning and went out. It is this kind of obedient faith that God requires of us if we are to be made righteous.

What about the Law?

The blessings of God were given to Abraham without the condition of keeping the Law because they came 430 years before the Law did! So, salvation by keeping the Law, makes salvation by faith void – of no effect. Salvation by Law takes us nowhere at all. All it does is to show that we are hopeless and incapable of keeping it. It condemns us for not keeping it perfectly.

The Gentiles did not live under the Law, and were not subject to it. So, it didn't condemn them. (But they are not excused, are still condemned, not right before God, and hence in need of a Saviour).

Paul brings together Faith, Grace, and Promise (vs 16) in stark contrast to the ideas that he has previously discussed of Works, Debt, and Law. We could *work* 24 hrs a day for the rest of our lives, under any system of *Law*, under the misapprehension that God owed us a *debt* for what we have done for Him, but we would totally miss the point (not to mention missing the reward). Rather, God has *promised* us that we will be made right, and He has given us salvation totally by His *grace* towards us, solely based on our *faith* (and of course, our obedience to that faith).

Abraham was not just the father of the Jews. God had said that he would be made the father of many nations (4:17; Gen 17:5). This is true in a physical sense, but it is the spiritual sense that Paul brings out here – he is the father of all those who have faith.

The remedy for the problem of sin

The remedy for sin is faith in God through Christ (3:23-25, 28). This does *not come* by keeping of the Law (as the Jews might have supposed). It is through Jesus that “...we also have access by *faith into this grace*...” Jesus is the remedy for sin, and it is only through Him that there is a remedy (since He was the total and complete sacrifice), but more – it is *only* through Him that we can have a relationship with God because He is our mediator (Heb 9:15; 12:24).

God’s love is complete and boundless. The gift of salvation came not because of our merit – because we earned it – but on the contrary – as *sinner*s Christ gave His life for us.

Through Jesus blood – His sacrifice – we have been made righteous and have had our sins forgiven. We have been *made right* by His sacrifice. Through the resurrection – His new life – He was proven and declared to be the Son of God (1:4). Only when Jesus was resurrected did He fulfil all of the prophecies and sit down at God’s right hand to become the living sacrifice, just as we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice back to God (12:1). Only in the resurrection and His new life was He crowned King, and became our High Priest and Mediator.

Jesus compared to Adam

Adam is presented as the first man with all of the *problems*, and Jesus is presented as the first man with all of the *solutions* to the problems. The contrasts are spiritual contrasts. They apply very plainly to the individual, and to everyone because all have sinned (5:12). The universality of death is “for all have sinned”; and the universality of life is in its provision for “whosoever will” come to Christ.

Without law we could not know right and wrong (4:15; 5:13). One of the purposes of the Law was to establish right and wrong, so that we might know that we have offended God by our actions. God has provided a remedy in Christ, so that where sin flourished, God’s grace flourished even more. The next (natural) question is, well – if we get God’s grace when we sin, then let’s sin even more and get more grace!

Why shouldn’t we continue sinning so that we can get more grace?

This first question springs from the comparison of Christ and Adam. Sin entered through Adam and was conquered through Christ (5:19). The Law entered that we might have the knowledge of sin and be convicted of our sinful relationship with God (5:20). Through the Law we are condemned, but God’s grace is more powerful than sin (5:20), and through it we are freed from sin. His grace is big enough to cover the biggest sin. So, a natural conclusion would be that if we continue to sin, God’s grace will continue to cover our sin.

Certainly not! (NKJV), May it never be! (NASB), God forbid! (KJV), By no means! (NIV), What a ghastly thought! (JB Phillips), No, indeed! (McCord).

God does not *tolerate* sin of any kind. The point is that in becoming christians, we have started a *new life*. We no longer live a life of sin, but we have put to death that former way. It is exactly a mirror of Jesus death. When Jesus died, his earthly life – his life in the flesh – ended. When we became christians, our life of living to fulfil our fleshly desires ended too. Sin is not the purpose

of our life (as it might have been before we became Christians). Paul's illustration builds on the analogy between Jesus' death and our obedience to the faith.

Our baptism mirrors Jesus' death. Our former "fleshly" life ends, and our old man is put to death. In being buried in baptism we mirror the death of Jesus. When we rise up out of the water we rise to walk in a new "spiritual" life. We are new creatures. We have new beginnings. Our former lives (as sinners) are left behind – they are dead and buried – and we receive reconciliation back to God.

In our baptism, we are made free from sin (6:7). And by our faithful obedience to God we put to death our sinful past and "...become alive to God in Jesus Christ..." (6:11). If we have killed off our old and sinful man, how could we even think of continuing in sin?

Up to here in review

Shall we sin because we are not under Law but under grace?

This second question like the first question, has the same answer – *certainly not!*

We are not living under Law but under grace. Because we are not bound by the Law, does not give us the freedom to sin. We cannot just choose what we do and what we don't do, and then claim that it is all right because we are not bound by the law. Sin is still sin, and we cannot be faithful to God and ignore the things that He has said.

Paul uses the example of a slave. We are all in bondage as a slave in one way or another. Some of us are in bondage to sin, and some of us are in bondage to God. We used to serve sin, but now we serve Christ. Paul uses the term *slave* eight times in this passage.

The end of the former life was death and destruction, but the end of our life in Christ is everlasting (6:22) and eternal (6:23) life. Marriage is an illustration of law – a covenant, – a contract.

The two people in the relationship are bound by the covenant of marriage as long as they are both living. But the covenant is only binding whilst they are both alive. Once one of them has died, the law – the covenant – of marriage to the former partner is no longer binding on the remaining person. But on the other hand, if a woman leaves her husband and gets married to another she commits adultery.

Likewise, if we still lived under Moses' law and we then entered into a contract with Christ, then God would regard that as "spiritual adultery". ***But***, we have died to the Law of Moses (7:4), and that death occurred through the body and sacrifice of Jesus. It is to and through Jesus that we have now entered into a covenant relationship with God. "...that you might be married to another, even Him who was raised from the dead..." (7:4 NKJV). It is because one of the partners has died. Paul says "...we have become dead to the Law through the body of Christ..." (7:4).

We have been made alive by the action of the Holy Spirit, and through that action that we have entered our covenant relationship to God by being born again – of water and of the Spirit (Jn 3:5).

The third question – Is the Law sin?

The answer is exactly the same as the first and second questions – *certainly not!*

We have been *delivered from the Law*, but sin is not the Law's fault. It had been given so that we might know what we ought (and ought not) to do. We knew what it said, but ignored it and went against it anyway.

It is always very easy for us to make a rational case to ignore what is right and to do what is wrong (or not to do what is right). But when we come to our senses, we can see that what we are doing (or have done) is wrong – and we knew it was wrong all the time – but we went ahead and did it anyway. "*For sin, took occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.*" (7:11). Through the Law, we knew what was right and what was wrong. Whilst we failed to keep it, the problem was not with the Law, but with me. The Law was intended for our good, but

because we didn't do what it said we were condemned by it. The problem does not lie with the Law, but with us.

The fourth question – Do I die because of the Law?

The answer is exactly the same as the other three questions – *certainly not!*

There is an inner conflict going on within us. We know what we should do, but we do the very opposite. (7:17-20). The root cause of the problem is sin. It dwells in our bodies and “...takes opportunity to produce all sorts of evil desires...” (7:8). The consequence is that we allow sin to prevail over our spirit “...I do what I will not to do...” (7:16). *Our flesh wants to do evil, and the two are in constant conflict.* (7:23).

It all seems so hopeless. How can we resolve this constant war and conflict? Paul says “...who can deliver me from this body of death...” (7:24). The only answer is God when we put on Christ. Even though we end up doing the things that we ought not to do, - and really don't want to do - in our hearts we serve God, despite our human failings.

The answer is being “in Christ”

The battle applies to every one of us who would seek to live the way that God would have us to do. In the end, we always seem to fail miserably, and don't measure up to the mark. And whilst that is true, if we are seeking justification by law (any system of law, including by trying to live under the law of Christ) then we will fail miserably and we will not measure up.

But, *we are not saved by law.* We are saved by grace. All of this happens because (and only *if*) we have the same kind of faith that Abraham had. So, if we walk by faith, and we have our hearts and minds turned towards God, and we have obeyed God in exactly the same way that Abraham did, then we are the true children of God. And like Paul, yes we sin (7:23). But God's grace more than covers our sins (5:20). That does not give us a license to sin (6:1-2), and in fact we find it rather disgusting (7:24).

But in Christ, we are free from the eternal consequences of sin (8:1), although not from its physical effects. But our assurance is sure. We have no grounds to question it, because Jesus Christ has made us free from all such systems of justification (8:2). We have life through the Holy Spirit, and that life is only achieved by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (8:2). We are not (and never can be) righteous in and of ourselves. As christians, whilst we do sin, a life of sin is not who we are. Who we are is the people of God, and we have the life and peace that goes with that.

The test is whether or not we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us. We cannot be identified as christians, unless we have God's spirit dwelling in us (8:9). If we don't have it, then we don't belong to God! Acts 2:38-39 promises the Holy Spirit (as a gift) to everyone. The Holy Spirit and belonging to Christ are inextricably bound together throughout the New Testament. It is not the miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit or because we have some knowledge that is brought by the Spirit. Having knowledge brought by the Spirit and having the Spirit are two different things. Paul says that we are identified with Christ when we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us (8:9).

There is a distinct and positive action of the Holy Spirit working within us “...*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,...*” (8:16 NKJV). The Spirit helps our weaknesses. Prayer is an example of how the Holy Spirit specifically interacts with our spirit (8:26-27). We get the Holy Spirit *when* we are baptised into Christ (Acts 2:38-39). Up until that time we don't have the Holy Spirit, and from then, He comes and dwells in us and fulfils the role that Paul describes here.

The Holy Spirit gives us assurance that we are indeed the children of God (8:16). In fact, He is given as a down payment against our eternal redemption (Eph 1:13,14; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Rom 8:23). Our inheritance with God is certain. It is not just one of *being mentioned in the will*, but one of having such a pre-eminent position as being a joint heir with Christ! The things that we

suffer here in this present world, are nothing when we compare them to the blessings that we will have as God's inheritance (8:18-23). God works things together in our lives for His purposes.

Being God's people, we are called (the called of God), justified (made right), and glorified. Our assurance is sure and firm. *If God be for us, who can be against us?* (8:31) But God went beyond that – "...*sparing not His own Son...*" (8:32).

The Jewish Problem

Paul is concerned for his Jewish brethren. He expresses his great sorrow and lament for the sins of the Jewish people, and their lack of repentance. As God's people they were given the Covenant, and the Law, and also fulfilled the ministries of the Law in the Temple – the service of God – and through them the promises were made.

The Jews traced their ancestry back to Abraham, and claimed to be God's people because of their physical descent. But other nations can also trace their ancestry back to Abraham. It was only some of the descendants that God regarded as His people. It was through Isaac that the promises came, and so not all of Abraham's descendants were to receive the promises.

"they are not all Israel who are of Israel"

Paul points out that just claiming Abraham as our father is not enough to claim that we are right with God. Salvation is open to the Gentiles, and not just the exclusive right of the Jews.

Not all of the descendants can claim the recognition. Even those who *were* of the physical descendants of Abraham did not all express their faith and obedience – and true Israel are those who are of faith. Since justification comes by faith and not physical descent, then there is no problem with the Gentiles being acceptable to God. The scriptures show that God is not only a fair and reasonable God, but also that the Jews would *not* have "*exclusive access rights*".

God is an absolutely Sovereign God, and He has absolute power and authority. God does not show mercy and compassion because *man deserves it*. In fact, on the contrary, man is not in a position to demand anything of God, and so the mercy that God shows to all sinners is purely a matter for His own discretion. Likewise for the Jewish nation. If God wants to show mercy to the Jews, then that is His business. And if He wants to show mercy to the enemies of the Jews (even to the Gentiles!) then that also is entirely His business, and His alone.

Moses was chosen to lead the children of Israel out of the captivity in the land of Egypt. At every turn, Pharaoh resisted Moses (and hence resisted God). A sovereign God could well have removed Pharaoh from power to allow the children of Israel to be set free. But God showed His power over even the most stubborn Pharaoh. There could be no doubt that it was God who was all powerful, and not the persuasive power of Moses.

God has absolute power just as the potter has absolute power over the clay to make whatever he wants out of it. God can make one vessel for honour, (such as with Moses) and another *unto* dishonour (such as with Pharaoh). God has the power and the absolute prerogative. God does not arbitrarily choose what individuals will be saved and what individuals will not be saved. Paul is still answering the objections that the Jews might make concerning the Gentiles. God is the potter, the human race is the clay, and the vessels are the nations.

God's eternal intentions were shown through the prophets who foresaw that the Gentiles would become His people, and that it would not be the Jews exclusive right. Hosea prophesied that God would accept the Gentiles.

The Jews had hung their hat on the National promise to Abraham, but they had ignored the seed promise – *in thy seed shall every nation of the earth be blessed*. It was through the seed promise that Christ was to come, and the blessings were not just for the Jews, but for *every nation*. Even though the Jews had rebelled against God, yet He will not totally cut them off – a remnant will be saved. The Jewish remnant confirms the existence of Abraham, and the God of Abraham!

The Gentiles who were outside of the Law (of Moses) and did not pursue righteousness have now been made right. But the Jews who did pursue righteousness (by attempting to keep the Law of Moses) did not – and could not – get the righteousness that they were seeking. The reason was, that they were seeking righteousness by works – they did not seek it by faith. They stumbled over the right and just Messiah – the Christ. The prophets foresaw that this would happen.

Our salvation only comes when we realise our hopeless position and our total reliance on the true and living God – and that outside of the Christ we have no hope.

The Jews have a great knowledge of God and great zeal to do His works. But there is a problem with their knowledge. Yes they knew God as the true and living God, the one who created the world, and the one who led their forefathers out of Egypt. But their knowledge of Him is only surface deep. They had failed to understand that righteousness comes by faith in the Messiah (and obedience in response to that faith). Instead they thought that righteousness comes from keeping the Law of Moses. They really weren't interested in knowing and understanding God's will.

God's purpose was to bring the Messiah when the time was right. Everything else led up to that. And when the Messiah came, everyone was to submit to Him. But the Jews rejected the Messiah. They really didn't see the need at all. God had in mind a spiritual kingdom, and one where both Jews and Gentiles also would be fellow-heirs. This was totally outside of the Jews frame of view.

There is therefore no distinction to be made between Jew and Gentile. Salvation is for "*whosoever believes...*", not just for the Jews, but to Gentiles also. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile – and God is rich to all who call upon Him.

The proper response to faith

Not everyone has obeyed. The reason that people don't *obey* the gospel is because they don't *believe* the gospel. If we truly believe what God has said, then we will have not trouble in doing what He says. That is exactly the kind of faith that Abraham demonstrated, and the response that Paul demonstrated when God told him what to do through Ananias.

Faith comes through the word of God. We do not figure it out for ourselves, and we do not inherit it from someone else – even our parents. *God has no grandchildren.* We cannot claim a relationship with God because our parents had one, or because we went to Sunday school, or we were brought up in the church.

But the Jews have (by and large) rejected Jesus as the Messiah, and in doing so have rejected God. Did Israel know? Of course they did! They had every opportunity to repent, and turn to the Lord. But where Israel (mostly) rejected God, the Gentiles have turned to Him. The result is that the Jews became jealous and hardened their hearts further against God. The final consideration of Israel is "*All day long have I stretched forth my hand to a disobedient and obstinate people*" God has been extremely patient with Israel, but they are not interested in obeying Him. But that doesn't mean that He doesn't want them to repent and come back to Him.

They have exactly the same opportunity to obey God in faith as the Gentiles do, and to turn to Him. In fact they have a greater opportunity because they have a greater advantage of knowing the true and living God. Justification comes by faith in Jesus, whether we are Jews or Gentiles.

Putting our faith into practice

We should present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Not as a dead sacrifice, but as a living one. How? By a life characterised by our faith! If we could only live up to such a life – a life worthy of the calling we have from God – a life set apart for God – a life which we could present to God as acceptable – then all of that could only be regarded as "*reasonable service*". If we think in human terms (terms of "law"), then such an attainment is futile. We can never pass the test. But justification does not come in such a way. What God wants – and expects – from every one of us is a life characterised by faith.

We are not to be conformed to the world. Rather than *conformation*, we are called to *transformation*. The renewed mind and transformed man has his mind set on *doing* God's things.

It is only by putting our faith into practice that we can build ourselves – and others – up. God's intention is that we function together as an entity. We cannot exist effectively as christians in isolation. The spiritual body (the church) is like a physical body. It requires the complete and working together of all of the parts together.

We need to obey the government – because God has appointed them. We have a civic responsibility to behave in a submissive manner. We pay our taxes. We could cheat on our tax return by not declaring all of our income, or overstating our expenses (or whatever). But we have a civic responsibility to the government – and through them as service to Him, to pay what is due.

Some brethren had different views on “non-essential” things. We need to have consideration for the needs and the feelings of our brethren. Those who eat meat (have bacon and eggs for breakfast) should not think any less of those who abstain. Likewise, those who abstain should not regard those who eat as sinners “...*judge them...*” (14:3). This should very clearly direct our actions and our behaviours towards each other. We need to remember who we are – and not in the sense of greatness, but in the sense of humility – that we will be judged with the same kind of judgement that we use to judge others (Matt 7:1-5). We each need to resolve not to put a stumbling block in the path of our fellow brethren. Even though we might not be doing anything wrong, others can see the things that we are doing and think that it is wrong – and draw the wrong conclusions. The more important things are our relationship with Christ, not what kind of food we eat or abstain from. We need to recognise where our brethren are at in their walk with God. Importantly, we need to consider that perhaps the position that we are taking on a particular issue might not be the “strong” position, but rather the “weak” one?

What is important, is that we consider others in the things that we do, and don't just please ourselves. We need to build up our fellow brethren (as opposed to crushing them by having them conform to our requirements). Consideration of others is one of the prime concerns that we ought to have – *and to practice* – as christians. “...*even Christ did not please Himself...*” (15:3). How much more of an example can we have than this!!!

We should therefore *be like minded towards one another* – the weak and the strong should have the same care for one another and be working towards the care and concern for each other's welfare. This is exactly in accordance with Jesus' example – the one that Paul has just quoted, how He died for us, not because He wanted to please Himself, but because of His concern and love for us (Jn 3:16).

Concluding remarks and travel plans

Paul has confidence in the Romans to put into practice the things that he has been discussing: “...*I am confident in you brethren, that you are full of goodness and knowledge, and are able to instruct one another...*” (15:14).

He has gone the full extent that he was able to do that he might convert the Gentiles *and make them obedient*. He had essentially travelled over the full extent of the Roman Empire. He had gone everywhere that he could – and *he had fully preached the gospel of Christ*. He was not preaching only *half the gospel*. He had wasted no effort and done all in his power to convert the Gentiles – but he had also always tried to convert the Jews first. Beyond that, the places that he went were new fields “...*not where Christ was named...*” lest anyone could say that he “...*should build on another man's foundation...*” (15:20).

Paul's travel to Jerusalem was imminent. This journey is described in Acts 20:3-21:19. His intention was after visiting Jerusalem to then go to Rome and on to Spain (15:24).

He finally ***begs*** the brethren to “...*strive together*...” it goes to the heart of the things that he has been saying about unity and sharing. His final desire was that he would be able to come to Rome and to visit the brethren there.