

A Bible Study on Romans

Dr. Brant Pitre

Introduction

1. Author: St. Paul the Apostle
2. Date: ca. 57-58 A.D. during 3rd missionary journey (Rom 15:26; Acts 20:1-3)
3. Destination: Rome, imperial capital of the world, most populated city
4. The Church in Rome:
 - a. Founded by Peter?
 - b. Mixed Community of Jews and Gentiles
 - c. Renowned for its faith, but Paul has never visited (Rom 16)
5. Purpose:
 - a. To introduce Paul and prepare way for his mission in the West
 - b. To Call for Unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians
 - c. Jewish Christians: boasting in blessing of Old Covenant (Rom 2-3)
 - b. Gentile Christians: boasting about replacing Israel (Rom 9-11)
6. Significance of the Letter:
 - a. Longest
 - b. Most Influential (St. Augustine; Martin Luther)
 - c. Most Theologically Profound (“Hard to understand” 2 Pet 3:16)
 - d. Important Theological Topics: sin, salvation, faith, works, predestination, etc.

Prologue (Rom 1:1-17)

1. What is “the Gospel/good news of God”? (Gk *euangelion*) (Rom 1:1-17)
2. The Gospel: “the power of God for salvation for everyone who has faith” (Rom 1:16)
 - a. Salvation: what are we saved from? (cf. Atheism)
 - b. Faith: “belief” and/or “trust” and/or “fidelity” (cf. Fideism)

The Bad News: Gentiles are Under the Power of Sin (Rom 1:18-2:16)

1. Atheism (Rom 1:18-21)
 - a. God’s existence: can be known with certainty through creation (CCC 36; Vat I)
 - b. Proper response: honor and worship God the Creator
2. Idolatry: (Rom 1:22-25)
 - a. Sin of Pride: darkens the intellect
 - b. Worship of creature rather than Creator (CCC 2113)
 - c. Punishment: God gives them over to their desires
3. Sexual Perversion (Rom 1:26-32)
 - a. Result: homosexual relations between men and women
 - b. Homosexuality (CCC 2357-59)
 - c. Punishment: God gives them over to their desires
4. Gentile world: a world gone mad because it did not acknowledge God (Rom 1:28-32)
5. Gentiles will be Judged by their Works (Rom 2:1-16)
 - a. Do not judge with hypocrisy
 - b. Last Judgment: God will judge without partiality
 - c. Some Jews believed in total damnation of Gentiles
(*Mek. Ex.* 21:30: “For the heathen Gentiles there will be no redemption”)
 - d. Natural Law: Gentiles unknowingly keep “the law” (CCC 1954-60)
 - e. Ten Commandments: “privileged expression of the natural law” (CCC 2070)

The Bad News: Jews are also Under the Power of Sin (Rom 2:17-20)

1. Against Boasting because of the Law (Rom 2:17-24)
2. Circumcision undone by breaking the Law (Rom 2:25-29)
3. All Men are “under the power of sin” (Rom 3:9-19, cf. 3:23)

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- a. A string of quotations: distinguish between righteous and wicked (Pss and Isa)
 - b. Not all without exception (every human being) (Hahn & Mitch 21 n. 3:23)
 - c. Exceptions: Jesus, children under age of reason, Mary
 - d. All without distinction (Jews and Gentiles alike) (Hahn & Mitch 21)
4. No one will be justified by “Works of the Law” (Rom 3:20)
- a. Justification (CCC 1987-1995)
 1. *Forgiveness* of sin
 2. *Redemption* from slavery to sin
 3. *Sanctification* and *transformation* of man’s whole being
 4. Greatest of all God’s works (St. Augustine; CCC 1994)
 - b. “Works of the Law”: 2 Interpretations
 1. “Works of the Law” = the *entire* Law of Moses (St. Augustine)
 2. “Works of the Law” = *ceremonial* laws of Moses (St. Jerome)
 - c. Both Correct in Context (Hahn and Mitch 21 n. 3:20)
 1. Initial justification (whole law)
 2. Final justification (ceremonial law)

The Good News: Salvation by Grace through Faith (Rom 3:20-30)

1. Salvation: No distinction between Jew and Greek: “all have sinned” (Rom 3:23)
2. Saved by Grace: the free and undeserved gift of God’s life and love (CCC 1996; Rom 5:5)
 - a. Prevenient Grace: prepares you to receive the gift of salvation
 - b. Sanctifying Grace: cleanses and makes you righteous
 - c. Habitual Grace: preserves you in journey toward holiness
 - d. Final Grace of Perseverance: prepares you for moment of death
 - e. Salvation is a *process* (“was saved,” “am being saved,” “will be saved”)
3. Justified by Faith (Rom 3:28)
 - a. “Faith”: “belief” “trust” “fidelity” (Gk *pistis*) (CCC 153-55, 143)
 1. A gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him (CCC 153)
 2. A free human response and act of submission of will and intellect (CCC 154)
 - b. Not “Faith *alone*” (Martin Luther added the word ‘alone’!)
4. Not by “Works of the Law” (Rom 3:28)
 - a. “Works of the Law” = circumcision and ceremonial laws of Moses
 - b. “Works of the Law” ≠ does not equal “good works”
 - c. Good “works” = *are* necessary for salvation (see James 2:14-24)
 - d. Good works do not *earn* the initial gift of salvation:
Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. (CCC 2010)
 - e. Paul and James do not contradict one another: two different kinds of “works”

Abraham: Example of Justification by Faith (Rom 4:1-25)

1. Not justified by “works of the Law” (circumcision) but by “Faith” (trust in God) (Rom 4:1-3)
2. Abraham: justified long *before he was circumcised* (Rom 4:9-12)
 - a. Abraham justified by faith (Gen 15:16; 75 yrs old)
 - b. Abraham circumcised (Gen 17:1-8; 99 yrs old)
3. Abraham (“Father of a Multitude”): both Circumcised and Uncircumcised (Rom 4:16-17)
4. Abraham: icon of hope; total trust in the promises of God (Rom 4:18-25)

Redemption in Christ: Salvation and Original Sin

1. The Problem: human beings are helpless sinners who are enemies of God

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2. The Merciful Solution: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:6-11)
3. Reconciliation with God: the fruit of Christ's death
4. Jesus Christ, the New Adam (Rom 5:12-19)

Adam

The earthly "son of God"
Tempted by the Devil, and Fell
Disobeyed God: ate of the Tree
One Man: brought sin and death
to all humanity
Trespass leads to Condemnation
Lost our place in Paradise

Jesus, the New Adam

The only-begotten "Son of God"
Tempted by the Devil, but resisted
Perfectly obedient unto death on a "Tree"
One Man: brought salvation and life
to all humanity
Free Gift leads to Justification
Restored us to Paradise (communion with God)

5. The Catechism on Original Sin (CCC 403-405)

The Church has always taught that the overwhelming misery that oppresses men and their inclination toward evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam's sin and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the "*death of the soul*". (CCC 403)

5. The Catechism on Original Sin (CCC 404-405) (Continued)

How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam "as one body of one man". By this "unity of the human race" all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a *personal sin*, but this sin affected *the human nature* that they would then transmit *in a fallen state*. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called "sin" only in an analogical sense: *it is a sin "contracted" and not "committed" - a state and not an act.* (CCC 404)

Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but *human nature has not been totally corrupted*: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and *inclined to sin* - an inclination to evil that is called "*concupiscence*". Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.

Deliverance from Original Sin through Baptism (Rom 6:1-23)

1. All the Baptized: baptized into the *death* of Christ (Rom 6:1-4)
 - a. "I have been *crucified* with Christ" (Gal 3:20)
 - b. "We were *buried* with him by baptism into death" (Rom 6:4)
2. Baptism: a pledge of the resurrection of the body (Rom 6:1-11)
 - a. Follow the Pattern of Christ: death and resurrection
 - b. Sinful Body: destroyed in baptism so that we are no longer "slaves" to sin
 - c. Death: frees from sin ("He who has died is free from sin")
 - d. Deliverance from the dominion of death: Resurrection
3. Therefore: Do not act like a slave to sin but a servant of God! (Rom 6:12-19)
4. The Wages of Sin vs. the Free Gift of God (Rom 6:20-23)

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Freedom from the Law through Baptism (Rom 7:1-12)

1. Death discharges a person from keeping the Law (Rom 7:1-3)
 - a. Example: the remarriage of a widow
2. In Baptism: “you have died to the law” (Rom 7:4-6)
3. No longer slave of the Law, but new life of the Spirit

The Spiritual Battle of Concupiscence (Rom 7:15-25)

1. Paul has been set free from sin and the Law
2. But he still struggles with the inclination toward sin (concupiscence) (Rom 7:15-23)
3. The Catechism on the Spiritual Struggle (CCC 1426)

[T]he new life received in Christian initiation [Baptism] has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us (CCC 1426)
4. The Cry of Humanity: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me...?” (cf. Atheism)

The Spiritual Battle of Concupiscence (Rom 7:15-25)

1. Paul has been set free from sin and the Law (Rom 7:1-6)

The Old Creation

“The Flesh”

The Law

Sin/Death

My Members

→Baptism→

The New Creation

“The Spirit”

Grace

Righteousness/Eternal Life

My Inmost Self

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New Life in the Spirit (Rom 8:1-27)

1. New Life: freedom from sin and death (Rom 8:1-7) (See Chart Above)
2. The Holy Spirit: given as a pledge of the Resurrection (Rom 8:9-11)

The Old Creation

“The Flesh”

Old Body

Suffering

→Baptism→

The New Creation

The Spirit

Resurrected/Glorified Body

Glory

3. The Spirit: makes us “children of God” (Rom 8:12-17) (cf. Islam)
 4. Present Suffering Vs. Glory of Resurrection/New Creation (Rom 8:18-27)
- The Catechism on the New Creation:

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At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. After the universal judgment, the righteous will reign for ever with Christ, *glorified in body and soul. The universe itself will be renewed...* Sacred Scripture calls this mysterious renewal, which will transform humanity and the world, “*new heavens and a new earth...*” In this *new universe*, the heavenly Jerusalem, God will have his dwelling among men... [Quotes Romans 8] *The visible universe, then, is itself destined to be transformed*, “so that the world itself, restored to its original state, facing no further obstacles, should be at the service of the just,” sharing their glorification in the risen Jesus Christ. *We know neither the moment of the consummation of the earth and of man, nor the way in which the universe will be transformed.*” (CCC 1042-43, 1046-47)

The Mystery of Predestination (Rom 8:28-38)

1. “Predestination” is biblical—depending on what you mean by it!
2. Divine Foreknowledge: God knows/orders all history in advance: including our responses to grace
3. Human Free Will: God creates Man free to accept or reject his grace (Sir 15:14)
4. God wills all people to be saved and gives grace necessary for all to be saved (1 Tim 2:14; John 3:16)
5. Predestination: God predestines, calls, justifies, glorifies those whom he foreknew (Rom 8:28-30)
6. Reprobation: God predestines no one to go to Hell; but he does know who will reject him (Rom 9:22)

The Mystery of Predestination (Cont’d)

7. The Catechism on Predestination:

God freely wills to communicate the glory of his blessed life. Such is the “plan of his loving kindness,” conceived by the Father *before the foundation of the world*, in his beloved Son: “*He destined us in love to be his sons*” and “to be conformed to the image of his Son,” through “the spirit of sonship.” This plan is a “grace [which] was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began...” (CCC 257, citing Eph 1:4-5)

God predestines no one to go to hell; for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. (CCC 1037)

God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of *a person who can initiate and control his own actions*. God willed that man should be “left in the hand of his own counsel...” (CCC 1730; citing Sirach 15:14)

The grace of Christ is not in the slightest way a rival of our freedom when this freedom accords with the sense of the true and the good that God has put in the human heart. (CCC 1742)

8. Does not mean absolute certainty of salvation (Rom 8:38-39; cf. Baptists)
9. Does not mean unconditional predestination to Hell (cf. John Calvin)

The Predestination of Israel and the Salvation of the Jews (Romans 9-11)

1. Paul’s anguish over his fellow Israelites (Rom 9:1-5)
2. Some Jews have pursued righteousness not through faith but the Law (Rom 9:30-10:4)
3. Salvation: confess with your lips and believe in your heart (Rom 10:5-12)
 - a. Context: “faith” (belief) vs. “law” (circumcision)
 - b. Does not refer to merely believing and not receiving the sacraments (cf. Evangelical Prot.)
 - c. All Who Believe will Be Saved: both Jew and Greek
4. Has God Rejected the Jewish People? NO (Romans 11)
 - a. A Remnant of Israel has accepted Christ (Rom 11:1-6)
 - b. Rejection of Christ by some Jews: meant reconciliation of the world (Rom 11:11-16)
 - c. Acceptance of Christ: will mean the resurrection of the dead

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5. Warning to the Gentile Christians: Do not boast over the root of the Tree! (Rom 11:17-24)
6. The Mystery: “All Israel will be Saved” (Rom 11:25-36)
 - a. A Part of Israel will not believe
 - b. Until the full number of Gentiles convert to Christ
7. The Catechism on the Conversion of Jews and the Second Coming of Christ:

Since the Ascension Christ’s coming in glory has been imminent, even though “it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.” *This eschatological coming could be accomplished at any moment*, even if both it and the final trial that will precede it are “delayed.”

The glorious Messiah’s coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by “all Israel,” for “a hardening has come upon a part of Israel” in their “unbelief” toward Jesus... St. Paul echoes [St. Peter]: “For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?” The “full inclusion” of the Jews in the Messiah’s salvation, in the wake of the “full number of the Gentiles,” will enable the People of God to achieve “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” in which God may be “all in all.” (CCC 673-74)

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Christian Life in the Church (Romans 12)

1. Present Your Bodies as a “Living Sacrifice” (Rom 12:1-2)
 - a. Participation in the Sacrifice of Christ
 - b. Total Self-Gift to God: hold nothing back
 - c. The Catechism on our Spiritual Sacrifice in the Mass

The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ also becomes the sacrifice of the members of his Body. *The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value.* Christ’s sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering. (CCC 1368)

2. Do not be Conformed to this World: How?

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- a. “Be transformed by *the renewal of your mind*”
 - b. Compare Jesus: “Love the Lord your God with all your mind” (Mark 12:30)
3. The Church: the Body of Christ (Rom 12:3-13)
- a. Humility among believers
 - b. One Body with many different spiritual “gifts” (Gk *charismata*)
4. How to Deal with Evil and Persecution (Rom 12:14-20)

Christian Life in Society (Romans 13)

1. Submission to governing authorities (Rom 13:1-5; see Hahn and Mitch, *Romans*)
 - a. Political authority: granted by God to civil rulers (cf. Prov 8:15-16; John 19:11)
 - b. Positive Role of Government: goods and securities for people
 - c. Note: obedience obligatory only when law is in accordance with divine Law
 - d. Importance of Prayer for government leaders (1 Tim 2:1-4)

Christian Life in Society (Cont’d)

2. The “Sword” of Secular Authority and the Death Penalty (Rom 13:4; cf. Acts 25:11)
 - a. “Right of the Sword” (*ius gladii*): Roman authority to enact capital punishment
 - b. Death Penalty in the Old Testament: Breaking the 10 Commandments
 - c. The *Catechism* on Capital Punishment (CCC 2267)

Assuming the guilty party’s identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor. If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people’s safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the person. Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm—without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself—the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity “are very rare, if not practically non-existent.” (CCC 2267; JPPII, *EV* 56)

3. Payment of Taxes and Respect/Honor (Rom 13:5-7)
4. Fulfillment of the Law: Love of Neighbor (10 Commandments dealing with Society)
5. Avoiding Drunkenness and Debauchery, quarreling and jealousy (Rom 13:1-14)

Against Judging/Despising Others (Romans 14:1-15:13)

1. Context: disputes over eating food sacrificed to idols (Rom 14:1-4)
2. Context: dispute over observing Jewish days of fasting (Rom 14:5-9)
3. The Last Judgment: we will all stand before the judgment seat of God (Rom 14:10-12)
4. The Catechism on the Last Judgment (CCC 1038-1041)

The resurrection of all the dead, “of both the just and the unjust,” will precede the Last Judgment... (See Matt 25:31-46). *In the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each man’s relationship with God will be laid bare.* The Last Judgment will reveal even to its furthest consequences the good each person has done or failed to do during his earthly life... The Last Judgment will come when Christ returns in glory. Only the Father knows the day and the hour; only he determines the moment of its coming. *Then through his Son Jesus Christ he will pronounce the*

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final word on all history. We shall know the ultimate meaning of the whole work of creation and of the entire economy of salvation and understand the marvelous ways by which his Providence led everything toward its final end. The Last Judgment will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures and that God's love is stronger than death. (CCC 1038-40)

5. Avoid causing others to stumble; Do not please yourselves but others (Rom 14:13-15:1-3)
6. The Encouragement of the Scriptures: to give us Hope! (Rom 15:4-13; cf. CCC 1817-1819)

Epiloge: Paul's Plans and Final Greetings (Rom 15:14-16:27)

1. Paul's Ambition: evangelization; preaching the gospel where it has not been heard (Rom 15:14-21)
2. Paul's Plan: to travel to Rome after visiting the "saints" in Jerusalem (Rom 15:22-33)
3. Paul's Greetings to Members of the Church at Rome: Phoebe the "Deaconess"? (Rom 16:1)
4. Warning: avoid those who create dissensions (Rom 16:17-19)
5. Promise: "God will soon crush Satan under *your* feet" (Rom 16:20; cf. Gen 3:15)
6. Final Benediction (Rom 16:25-27)