

General Comments on Romans

In summary, the letter to the Romans is principally to Jewish members of the ecclesia who are trying to force Gentile members of the ecclesia to observe the Law of Moses in general, and be circumcised in specific. Paul's intent is to argue the Law of Moses helps Israel avoid sin, but ultimately exposes Israel's sin when they fail to live it. The Law of Moses is not a means of obtaining forgiveness of sin. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the means of forgiveness of sins, so the Law of Moses is fulfilled in that sacrifice. The Jewish members of the ecclesia can still observe the Law of Moses if they choose to, but the Gentiles do not have to.

Unlike his other letters, this letter was written before Paul visited Rome, so it is written to people he has no personal relationship with. He plans on visiting them relatively soon, so this is Paul's warning that if they do not self-correct, they will have to deal with him when he arrives, and answer with responses all of the theological arguments and questions that effectively dismantle the Law of Moses.

Historical Context

Composition of the Ecclesia

In the historical setting this letter was written, there was no "Christian Church" yet, or anything that one would consider "Christianity" or "Christians" from any sort of modern religious, cultural, political or social point of view. At the point in time the letter to the Romans was written the Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus as Messiah are known as "the way" (cf. Acts 16:17, Acts 18:25-26, Acts 24:14) or "this sect", meaning a sect of Judaism (cf. Acts 28:22).

All of these people we call "Christians", including Paul (especially Paul, cf. 11:1, Philip. 3:5), would have considered themselves culturally and religiously Jewish and would feel perfectly comfortable attending Jewish synagogue anywhere and the Temple at Jerusalem. It is not until decades after the letter to Romans is sent the Christians are seen internally and externally as a separate religious entity from Judaism, with different practices.

At the contemporary time of Paul, there would have been four recognized sects of Judaism: [Pharisees](#), [Sadducees](#), [Zealots](#) and [Essenes](#). The members of the ecclesia would have been considered a subset of Pharisees, winning some converts from other sects as well. John Baptist would have fit in well with the Essenes.

The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch (cf. Acts 11:26), which is present day southern Turkey, close to the border with Syria. But, this appellation did not appear to spread until after the Apostolic era. It is not until 96 A.D. that Christianity is officially recognized as different and separate from Judaism by Rome (e.g., [Fiscus Judaicus](#)).

The [Birkhat haMinim](#), the twelfth prayer of the [Amidah](#), is generally interpreted to be the Jewish means of expelling believers in Jesus as Messiah from the Jewish congregation. Dating the Birkhat haMinim is problematic, but [rabbinic tradition](#) places it late in the first century, between 90-100 CE. The passages of John 9:22, John 12:42 and John 16:2 suggest there was an informal understanding among the Pharisees at Jerusalem against the ecclesia, and the Birkhat haMinim could have been the widespread formalization of that sentiment.

By the time of the [Bar Kochba Revolt](#) in 132 A.D. the two groups had completely split, as the Christians refused to participate in the revolt, and were not punished by Rome.

In the New Testament timespan, the contemporary idea of a "Christian Church" simply did not exist. The New Testament "ecclesia" is not the same concept of a contemporary "church". For a good introduction to the Jewishness of the New Testament, see various lectures available online from [Dr. Amy-Jill Levine](#). An early commentator on the Jewishness of the New Testament would be [John Lightfoot](#), who's commentaries on the Gospels provide significant insight into the Hebraic nature of the text.

Expulsion of Jews from Rome under Claudius

Many commentators bring the historical event of the [expulsion of Jews](#) from Rome under Emperor Claudius as a defining or explanatory event for the book of Romans. Biblical reference to the event is made in Acts 18:2, with the same persons being addressed in Rom. 16:3, so they've relocated back to Rome. Commentators then draw conclusions about how the Gentile Roman Christians ran the Church in the absence of the expelled Jewish Christians, and how the returning Jewish Christians would have responded to finding the Church [Hellenized](#).

There is nothing in the text of the letter itself to suggest this is the case. The text is addressing [Judaizers](#) within the ecclesia (ch. 1-11), which problem is pervasive throughout most, if not all, of the churches which Paul has visited or established (e.g., discussions on keeping Kosher and necessity of circumcision throughout the book of Acts, the dissensions within the ecclesia of Galatia).

The popular Christian reading is imposing a modern conception of "Christianity" versus "Judaism" on an ancient text

that doesn't support it. Christianity as something separate from Judaism doesn't occur for decades after the time of the letter to the Romans, so the explanatory utility of this historical event is questionable, at best, and largely owes its popularity to a doctrinal approach of Grace versus Works that developed much later in the Christian Church.

Owing to the scant relevant historical records, Historians disagree over the timing, cause and impact of Claudius' expulsion.

Theological Context

The Law

Throughout the text, the many references to the "law" are almost always referring specifically to the Law of Moses (cf. 7:1, ct. 8:2). Paul's line of arguing is the Jews who've accepted Jesus as Messiah need to recognize it is Jesus Christ who expiates their sins as the Lamb of God (cf. 3:25), it isn't the Law of Moses. They also need to not force the Law of Moses on Gentiles among the ecclesia. [Judaizers](#) within the ecclesia is a persistent problem Paul contends with throughout his letters (e.g., Galatians), but this is the most robust diatribe against them, likely written after these other letters.

Grace versus Works

American Christian churches, especially Calvinists and Evangelicals, emphasize the Grace and discount, or even ignore, the Works in the discussion of ch. 1-11. Paul's position is not hostile to works, as he considers it necessary to be free of sin through the process of sanctification (cf. 6:15-23), which necessarily entails repentance and doing good works.

While Paul argues against Gentiles needing to observe the performances of the Law of Moses, specifically circumcision, he still requires the Gentiles members of the ecclesia to live a godly life and observe the overarching spiritual purpose of the Law of Moses (cf. 13:8-14).

There is no Grace versus Works in Paul's theology, as he preaches the ecclesia needs both, not one or the other. Paul's opposition to "works" is opposition to the Law of Moses being forced on Gentiles. Any notion Paul is opposed to works in salvation is dashed by his statement in 2:13, where he says that Gentiles who are doers of the principles of the Law, without explicitly knowing the Law of Moses, will be justified.

Be United in Christ

Paul's letter to the Romans is written primarily to culturally and religiously Jewish Jews (i.e., literal Hebrews in every sense, not Gentile Romans who had converted to Judaism) living in Rome who are part of the ecclesia (i.e., they accepted Jesus as the Messiah). The theological section of the letter (ch. 1-11) never addresses Gentile Romans among the ecclesia.

Paul, a Pharisee, is writing to people who have a similar religious background and culture, and the text is immersed in a rhetoric and style they understand. He addresses the Jews as "brothers" repeatedly (cf. 1:13, 7:1, 7:4, 8:12, 8:29, 9:3, 10:1, 11:25, etc.) and appeals to their joint affinity for the Law of Moses (cf. 7:1).

The principal concern addressed by Paul is to persuade the Jews of the ecclesia at Rome that they need to stop pushing the Law of Moses on the Gentiles in the ecclesia, because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is what brings about forgiveness of sins, not the Law of Moses (ch. 1-11). Secondly, Paul addresses the need for the Jews and Gentiles in the ecclesia to be united, not divided (ch. 12-15).

Paul makes heavy use of Old Testament passages as he builds his case, and crafts his arguments very carefully, deliberately anticipating and addressing counter-arguments and concerns the Jewish audience would have. This text is a masterwork of Pharisaic logic and argumentation, as Paul reveals his exceptional understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and skill at rhetoric in arguing persuasively for Jesus being the source of justification, or righteousness, not the Law of Moses. Paul argues the Law of Moses keeps the adherent from sin, but also exposes sin when the adherent fails to observe it. The only way to receive forgiveness for that sin is to have faith in Jesus Christ, and therefore be made righteous by Grace, His free gift to the sinner who does not deserve it.

In the second part of the letter (ch. 12-16), Paul addresses the Gentiles, asking them to not cause problems over the Jews who want to remain kosher (cf. 14:1-3) and who still want to observe the Jewish Holidays (cf. 14:5-6). He tells them it is more important to accept each other even as Christ accepted both groups (cf. 15:1-13).

Paul's Soteriology (i.e., Doctrine of Salvation)

In ch. 1-11 of the letter to the Romans, Paul is addressing Jews within the ecclesia who are entirely too focused on the works of the Law of Moses. Paul wants them to understand the role of Jesus and recognize the Law of Moses does not bring about the forgiveness of sin, it defines sin, exposing the

practitioner to the eternal consequences thereof. As such, Paul pushes hard to get them to understand that Jesus' atonement is the source of the divine Mercy they need to be made righteous, or free of the eternal consequences of sin, the free gift of Grace. It is not the works of the Law of Moses that justifies them, makes them righteous, by forgiving their sins, it is the Mercy of Christ that justifies them. This forgiveness, mercy, grace is a free gift from Christ, it is not something you earn by repenting. Repenting and keeping the commandments is what keeps us from more sin, it doesn't undo the eternal consequences of sins we've already committed.

Standard Biblical soteriology, which Paul adheres to (this is not a novel Pauline doctrine, see also cp. D&C 20:29-31 for the identical formula), is:

Justification (cf. 5:1) by Grace through faith (forgiveness)
Sanctification (cf. 6:19) by works (repent, keep commandments)
Exaltation (cf. 8:16-17) by enduring to the end (until you die)

The Jewish audience understands sanctification by works, which is the Law of Moses, so Paul is emphasizing Justification by Grace through faith in Jesus Christ (ch. 3-5). He also discusses Exaltation (ch. 8). By doing so, Paul is explaining to the Jews within the ecclesia that their fellow Gentiles within the ecclesia do not need to observe the performances of the Law of Moses.

Not at any time is Paul telling the Jews they must abandon the Law of Moses. His goal is to get them to stop pushing the Law of Moses on the Gentiles within the ecclesia. If they continue to observe the Law of Moses, Paul is fine with that. He tells them it is no longer required, so they do not need to observe it anymore (cf. 7:1-6), but he does not tell them to stop practicing it (cf. 7:7-12). This is Paul's concession to the Jews within the ecclesia, while protecting the Gentiles within the ecclesia.

Literary Context

Translation

As with all of Paul's writings, they are difficult as it is. In Romans, the KJV is particularly problematic in its translation at times, which makes it even more challenging. A modern scholarly translation is recommended, as it will be clearer for obscure passages. A modern translation will also make the numerous Old Testament quotes obvious, either with quotation marks, text offsets or capitalization.

There are significant changes in the IV/JST on Romans, especially [chapter 7](#). The LDS Edition KJV Bible catalogs the larger changes in the back of the appendix, but there are additional changes made that are not catalogued there.

Placement in Canon

While the letter to the Romans was late chronologically among Paul's letters, it was placed first because it was generally considered Paul's definitive work. In the canon it also immediately follows the closing subject of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, where Paul is in Rome, trying to support the ecclesia and persuade Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah (cf. Acts 28:17-29).

The letter to Romans is also the longest of Paul's letters, and their appearance in the canon is apparently based on length, longest to shortest, not on chronology. Authorship of the book of Hebrews was, and still is, in dispute, so it was placed last.

Literary Composition

There is a clear difference in composition between Romans and Galatians the letters to the Corinthians. The composition of the audience causes the difference in content. The audience in Romans and Galatians is largely Jewish believers among the ecclesia, where in Corinthians the audience is largely Greek believers among the ecclesia. In Romans and Galatians, Paul is quoting the Hebrew Canon and bringing Israelite theology to bear in his arguments. In Corinthians, Paul is addressing matters of Greek philosophy, or "wisdom".

The "Question and Answer" rhetorical style employed by Paul in this letter is uniquely tailored for his intended Roman audience. Paul was going to visit Rome in the relatively near future and so he pre-seeds the ground with a letter. He addresses issues among the Roman ecclesia that are causing division, largely stemming from the application of the Law of Moses among the members.

Some of the Jewish members of the ecclesia are trying to get the Gentile members of the ecclesia to observe aspects of the Law of Moses. While the matter of keeping Kosher had been previously resolved (cf. Acts 10), there were many other observances of the Law that had not been divinely dismissed, such as circumcision (cf. Acts 15), which Judaizers were still pushing onto the Gentiles within the ecclesia (cf. 2:15-19, Gal. 5:6-11, Phil. 3:2-3).

Some of the Gentile members within the ecclesia were eating meat sacrificed to Roman idols. The connection to idolatrous practices went well beyond the issue of keeping Kosher, bringing

into question what parts of Gentile culture had to be abandoned when accepting the Jewish Jesus as their Saving Christ.

Paul wants to eliminate these contentious issues within the ecclesia immediately with this letter, and makes it clear if they ignore his letter then they will be having that discussion face to face shortly.

Chapters 1-11 are primarily addressed to the Jewish leaders within the ecclesia, those who were likely Pharisees, like himself, people steeped in the Law of Moses, very well acquainted with the Law and Prophets. As such, these chapters are composed as a series of rhetorical questions with copious proof texts from the Law and Prophets to support Paul's conclusions. Paul anticipates questions and addresses them proactively, leaving no room for question over the necessity of letting go of the Law of Moses as a requirement for the ecclesia. Can they follow if it they like? Yes. But must they follow it? Absolutely not (cf. ch. 7).

Chapters 12-15 then address the wider ecclesia, bringing the Gentile audience into the discussion. Paul tells them they need to stop offending the Jewish members about their consumption of Roman meat sacrificed to idols (cf. ch. 14).

Paul's experience in dealing with Judaizers within the ecclesia over the past many years while traveling through Asia has primed Paul for precisely this task (e.g., Galatians). He knows what their concerns are, what their arguments are, what their tactics are. And he fully addresses all of their theological concerns, leaving them nothing to argue with. Speaking in military terms, this letter is the equivalent of a strategic decapitation of the Judaizers within the Roman ecclesia. As a concession to the Jewish population within the ecclesia, to show Paul is playing fairly, he tells the Gentile members to stop pressuring or irritating their Jewish brothers about eating Roman meat.

Summary of Text

Chapters 1-11 are primarily aimed at Jews within the ecclesia, and chapters 12-15 are primarily aimed at Gentiles among the ecclesia.

Chapters 1-11 revolve around who is saved and how they are saved. The early Church, largely composed of Jews, is still committed to observing the Law of Moses (cf. Acts 10, Acts 15), and they are unwilling to let go of it. They very much want to continue the practice of observing the Law of Moses, and expect the Gentiles to observe it as well. This is fostering a "them versus us" mentality within the ecclesia, naturally causing

division, which Paul is attempting to mitigate. Paul's intent in these chapters is to argue the Law of Moses doesn't justify the believer, only the sacrifice of Christ justifies them, through his Grace and Mercy.

Chapters 12-15 then address the Gentiles of the ecclesia telling them to serve one another selflessly, setting aside differences within the ecclesia, as the most important thing is they all accept Jesus as the Messiah.

Chapters 1-11, Law of Moses exposes sin, Christ forgives sin.

Ch 1. Opening salutation to the Church at Rome (v1-17) and generalized comments on the fallen nature of man, which afflict Jew and Gentile alike (v. 18-32).

Ch 2. Even though the Gentile Romans are bad, don't judge them, because you might end up being hypocrites (v. 1-11). Gentiles who keep the Law of Moses are as good as Jews who keep the Law of Moses (v. 12-16). Jews who sin are the same as Gentiles who sin (v. 17-29).

Ch 3. Then what good is it to be a Jew? (v. 1-20). We are justified (i.e., made righteous, sins forgiven) by faith, not by the Law of Moses (v. 21-31).

Ch 4. Abraham was justified by his faith before circumcision and before the Law of Moses, and he is the father of many nations.

Ch 5. Jesus died for us when we did not deserve it, and we are made righteous by his sacrifice (v. 1-11). Death and sin came from one man, and eternal life comes from one man (v. 12-21).

Ch 6. Accepting forgiveness doesn't mean you get to sin more, it means you accept Christ and want to be like Him (v. 1-11), you are no longer bodies of sin, but bodies of righteousness (v. 12-14). Christ freed us from the slavery of sin, so we are His servants of righteousness (v. 15-23).

Ch 7. Letting go of the Law of Moses is not a sin (v. 1-6), obeying the Law is not now a sin as the spiritual purpose of the law remains (v. 7-12), the Law of Moses exposed the sin which is in our weak flesh (v. 13-25).

Ch 8. Jesus accomplishes what the Law of Moses could not, he exalts us as children of God, making it possible for us to be like Himself.

Ch 9. Being natural Israel doesn't matter, what matters is God choosing the individual who pursues righteousness, regardless of them being Israelite or Gentile.

Ch 10. Paul laments that Israel in general and the Jews in specific have rejected Jesus Christ, the God of Israel.

Ch 11. But, God has not cast away Israel, they will be redeemed.

Chapter 12-15, Unite in Christian Service to One Another

Ch 12. Dedicate yourselves to full Christian service, without hypocrisy.

Ch 13. Keep the commandments and you won't have to worry about the Roman government.

Ch 14. Don't argue about eating Roman sacrificial meat, keeping kosher, what day to worship on, or any of this superficial stuff, it isn't worth it, don't put stumbling blocks in front of each other.

Ch 15. Accept and serve each other, Jews and Gentiles, get along because you all believe Jesus is the Messiah.

Chapter 16. Closing salutes, and final warning (v 17-20).

Comments on Romans 1

There are changes in the IV/JST for [this chapter](#), but they are explanatory glosses that do not significantly change the meaning of the text.

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, 2 (which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) 3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; 4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead: 5 By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: 6 Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: 7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

v1-7 Introduction, identifying the author, his calling and commission, and the intended audience. These verses are densely packed with content for the Jewish audience among the ecclesia.

v1 "servant", the Greek [term](#) used here can be used for a slave, indentured servant or a serving attendant. Paul's intent is to highlight Jesus is his Redeemer (cf. Isa. 53:5, 1 Cor. 6:20), and he is indebted to Him as such. It also serves to contrast the subsequent statement of being an apostle. Paul wants to make it clear he is not presenting himself as notable or important, he is a servant of the Lord doing what he has been told to do.

"apostle", meaning "[an authorized ambassador](#)". We tend to think it means "special witness", but the word is intended to convey the title comes with an authoritative commission from the one whom they represent, like a delegate. While being humbly deferential in calling himself a "[servant/slave](#)", he is also pointing out he is an authorized witness.

v3-4 Paul presents four witnesses, other than himself, to Jesus' role as Messiah and Son of God. They are a combination of predictions from the Old Testament and things witnessed firsthand from Jesus' New Testament ministry, in an A-B-A-B fashion:

- 1) "the seed of David according to the flesh", this comment is intended to identify Jesus as the Messiah, per the promises made to David, cf. Gen. 49:10, 2 Sam. 7:16, 1 Cron. 22:10,

Ps. 89:34-37, Isa. 9:6-7, Isa. 11:1, Jer. 23:5, Jer. 33:17, Micah 5:2.

- 2) "declared to be the Son of God with power", a number of times the voice of the Father in Heaven announces Jesus to be His Son, cf. Mark 1:11, Matt. 17:5, John 12:18; related to Ps. 2, Ps. 110.
- 3) "according to the spirit of holiness", a reference to the many miraculous healings Jesus performed, related to Isa. 42, while pronouncing Himself to be the Messiah, per John 10:25-38.
- 4) "by the resurrection of the dead", Jesus did something nobody else could do, which there are witnesses of, cf. Matt. 27:52, John 20-21, Acts 1:3, 1 Cor. 15:6.

v5 The calling of the apostles has extended to all nations, not just Israelites, as predicted, cf. Isa. 11:10, Isa. 42:1-6, Isa. 49:6-22, Mal. 1:11. Paul is making it clear the times of the Gentiles has arrived, and it is no longer only about Israel.

v6 "the called", these are the ones called out of the world to follow Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 6:17), from whom the elect are chosen (cf. Matt. 22:14, John 15:19). They are not part of the group described in v. 18-32.

v7 "called to be saints", in the ensuing text of this chapter Paul contrasts those whom he is addressing (v. 8-15) with those of the world (cf. 18-32). This group is expected to be holy.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; 12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. 13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. 14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. 15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

v8-15 Paul praises the ecclesia in Rome for their apparent faith (v. 8-9) and tells them he is eager to visit them and

preach the gospel to them (v. 10-13), just as he has to others (v. 14).

The "first" leading v. 8 is connected to the "at length" or "at last" (NAS) of v. 10. Paul is saying that at present they are separated (v. 8-9), but hopefully they will soon meet (v. 10-15).

v8 "your faith is spoken of", as Paul is about to lecture the Judaizers among the ecclesia about the connection between faith and Justification, he points out his audience has considerable faith. He is effectively dismissing the question of, "Do I have the faith Paul is saying we must have?" Paul is leading up to "Yes, you do have faith, and that faith in Christ is what justifies you."

v9 Paul lets the intended audience know part of his role as an apostle is to think about and pray over this specific group, which he has done. He is letting them know this letter is part of his commission as an apostle, and he has been actively seeking inspiration in the message he is about to give them. This message is not hastily dashed off, it is something he has been pondering over with great care.

v10 Paul hopes divine providence will soon bring him to Rome.

v11-12 Paul hopes to see them soon so they all may be spiritually edified together.

v11 "ye may be established", a better translation of the [Greek term](#) would be "strengthened", which many [translations](#) favor.

v13 Paul expresses the desire to visit with the ecclesia at Rome, so he can preach the gospel there and have success there as he has elsewhere among the Gentiles. Given the subsequent discussion in this chapter and the next, it is likely Paul's intent is to gently let them know they are now no different in his eyes than the people of the various non-Israelite nations he has proselyting among.

v14 "I am a debtor", meaning "I am under obligation to", in the sense that he still has responsibilities towards them and so must continue to stay with them and teach them at present.

v15 "ready to preach", a better translation would be "eager to preach", conveying the anticipation developed in the earlier verses.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

v16-17 Paul states the righteous will live by faith, a summary statement for ch. 1-11.

These two verses serve as a bridge between v. 8-15 and v. 18-32. In v. 8-15 Paul praises the ecclesia at Rome for their faithfulness and says he will come to them after preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, because salvation has been made available to all, both Jew and Gentile, so all need the gospel preached to them. Paul then launches into v. 18-32, where he says all men, both Jew and Gentile, are capable of the excesses of idolatry. Just as all men can sin, all men can be saved, so Paul preaches to all men.

v17 "the just shall live by faith", a quote of Hab. 2:4. Paul is bringing the context of that passage into the current discussion over righteousness and wickedness. In Hab. 1-2, the imagery is that of Babylon coming to punish the rebellious wicked among Judah, with only the faithful being rewarded with life because of their fidelity to the Lord (drawing on the covenant curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28).

Habakkuk himself complains the majority of Judah is wicked (cf. Hab. 1:3-4), and so the Lord sends Babylon to punish wicked Judah (cf. Hab. 1:5-11). Habakkuk is saying the people of Judah are wicked, but the Babylonians are even more wicked, so why does the Lord allow the destruction of Judah? (cf. Hab. 1:12-17) The Lord's response is the righteous will live by their faith. Paul's use of this passage is to point out that both Judah and Babylon are wicked, and destruction is all around them, but the Lord will protect the righteous who are faithful. As Paul moves into the subject of v. 18-31, he wants to make it clear that both Judah and Gentiles are capable of idolatry and all its excesses, so the issue isn't Judah vs. Gentile, the issue is righteousness vs. wickedness, as Habakkuk recognized, a prophet they acknowledge.

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is

manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24 wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: 32 who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

v18-32 The anger of God is on all wicked men who oppose the truth (v. 18), because His truth is made available to all (v. 19). Ever since the beginning of man has God revealed His eternal and divine nature to mankind (v. 20). But, mankind rebelled against God and chose their own ways instead (v. 21), claiming to be wise (v. 22), they chose to create their own idols to worship (v. 23). So, God let them worship their own bodies (v. 24-25), in a very literal way (v. 26-27). As they forgot God (v. 28), mankind resorted to any and every kind of sin (v. 29-31). And even though they know that doing such things results in spiritual death, they not only do it themselves, but encourage others to do it as well (v. 32).

Paul emphatically states carnal men have no faith, and sin against the laws of God. He is recounting the general history

of humanity "from the creation of the world" (v. 20) and how they have chosen to worship their own bodies rather than God who created them. In verses 22-31 Paul contrasts various heathen behaviors with those behaviors dictated by God's Law, specifically the Law of Moses. In doing so Paul condemns the sinners to death, both spiritual and physical (v. 32).

The rebellious sinners being addressed here are both Israelites and Gentiles. Paul's contemporary readers would have seen both the Gentiles around them and the history of Northern Israel, as well as Judah, in the descriptions Paul is making. This is not an attack on the Romans to the exclusion of Judah, it is explicitly including Judah, via the quotation of Hab. 2:4 in v. 17. Paul condemns all mankind, making the exception being the righteous individual acting by faithfulness.

v18 "hold the truth in unrighteousness", [meaning](#) these wicked men hide, withhold, suppress, repress, hinder the truth.

v20 "invisible", i.e., eternal, cp. 2 Cor. 4:18. Unseen, or unseeable in sense of them not being part of the temporal or sensible world we presently inhabit.

"being understood by the things that are made", according to the KJV rendering Paul appears to be appealing to what we would refer to as the [Cosmological Argument](#). However, the Greek "poiema" translated to "things that are made" in the KJV would be better translated "achievements" or "accomplishments". The most literal translation of "poiema" to English would be "do-effect", in reference to the things someone does. So, what Paul is saying is that since the Creation of the earth, God has manifested Himself to man in the things He does, but man has ignored Him and the works He makes manifest.

"even his eternal power and Godhead", a poor translation. A better translation would be "his eternal power and divine nature" (NAS).

v22-23 Israel's history of idolatrous practices clearly implicates them in this accusation. Paul is not singling out Gentile Romans in this passage.

v24-32 These verses describe the opposite of the "saints" described in v. 7, the contrast being intentional.

v24-27 Paul is commenting on the carnal nature of idolatry, hence its general appeal. As the various idolatrous religions

are simply fabrications of man, they tend to be quite carnal in their practices. And, at the time contemporary with Paul, the Romans and Greeks, as History tells us, were quite idolatrous and lascivious in their practices. Paul makes it perfectly clear the lascivious acts associated with idolatry are no more acceptable then, than they were anciently then the Lord condemned the Egyptians and the Canaanites for the same behavior. Naturally, Israelites have had a sordid history when it comes to idolatry as well.

v26-27 "change the natural use...against nature", while it is common for the LDS reader to see references to "the natural man" negatively in light of Mosiah 3:19, Paul is thinking of the commandment to "be fruitful, and multiply" in Genesis, which is thwarted when people engage in sexual immorality. The reproductive act is used to promote idolatry and homophilia becomes culturally normative to the point that the biological pattern of nature for the begetting of life is forgotten and jeopardized.

v27 "receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet", the NAS renders this phrase "receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error". Paul is saying the doctrinal errors caused by their idolatry results in self-inflicted punishment. Paul is saying homophilia is a self-destructive act, in every sense.

v29-31 The laundry list of sins presented here is the point of accusation in 2:1-3, where Paul rhetorically asks if they are guilty of any of these sins while hypocritically condemning others for the same.

v32 "judgment", the phrase "Who knowing the judgment of God" is "dikaioma". The most literal translation to English would be "just-effect" or those just acts one is to engage in according to God's dictates. The entry in Strong's for the term:

1345 dikaioma {dik-ah'-yo-mah}
from 1344; TDNT - 2:219,168; n n
AV - righteousness 4, ordinance 3, judgment 2, justification 1;
10
1) that which has been deemed right so as to have force of law
1a) what has been established, and ordained by law, an ordinance
1b) a judicial decision, sentence
1b1) of God
1b1a) either the favourable judgment by which he acquits man and declares them acceptable to Him

- 1b1b) unfavourable: sentence of condemnation
- 2) a righteous act or deed

The appearances of this term and the KJV and NAS rendering are as follows:

Passage	KJV	NAS
Luke 1:6	ordinances	requirements
Rom. 1:32	judgment	ordinances
Rom. 2:26	righteousness	requirements
Rom. 5:16	justification	justification
Rom. 5:18	righteousness	righteousness
Rom. 8:4	righteousness	requirement
Hebr. 9:1	ordinances	regulations
Hebr. 9:10	ordinances	regulations
Rev. 15:4	judgments	righteous acts
Rev 19:8	righteousness	righteous acts

The most fair translation of the term would be "requirements", "regulations," or "ordinances".

Thus, Paul is saying those people who know what God requires, as far as having a godly walk, but who go in the complete opposite direction are deserving of death. And this is the typical line on condemning those nations who oppose the Lord (cf. Lev. 18). The Egyptians and Canaanites were exposed to worship of the Lord via the Israelites, but they rejected it and chose to follow their own carnal idolatries instead. The result is obviously spiritual death, but also physical death in the sense that their nations have become extinct through self-destruction, as well as the Lord commanding Israel to exterminate the Canaanites from off the land because of their egregious wickedness, cf. Gen. 15:16.

"worthy of death", this verse states those who are familiar with the judgments of God, yet still engage in the various practices detailed in v. 28-31, are worthy of death. Compare 6:16-23, 7:5-13, 8:5-13 for similar statements in clearly spiritual context.

This passage cannot be taken in context to mean Paul is endorsing capital punishment on anyone in the ecclesia who commits the acts listed in v. 18-31. Even in 1 Cor. 5:5 where Paul seems to be suggesting an incestuous person is guilty of a capital offense, he states that the individual should be abandoned to Satan for destruction. And later in 2 Cor. 2:5-10 Paul encourages the ecclesia to fellowship the apparently

repentant incestuous person back into the ecclesia so Satan doesn't prevail.

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