

Small Group Guide
Romans
Cleary Baptist Church July 24, 2011

Romans

While in Corinth, at the close of his third missionary journey, Paul wrote a letter to the church at Rome informing them of his plans to visit after his return to Jerusalem (15:24, 28- 29; cf. Acts 19:21). No doubt, Paul wanted to visit the Romans; but the mission-minded apostle really had his eye on Spain. He desired to visit Rome in preparation for future apostolic endeavors into Spain (Romans 1:10-13; 15:23-28). Paul's passion was to "preach the gospel in regions beyond" - to break ground where others had not toiled (2 Corinthians 10:16). Therefore, part of Paul's purpose in writing the Roman Christians was to make sure that he would have a solid base of operations from which to launch his mission endeavors into Spain. However, this wasn't his only purpose in writing. The overarching purpose of his letter was to address the tension which existed between Jew and Gentile believers within the church at Rome. This tension was fueled by ethnic arrogance between the two groups as each believed they maintained certain perceived advantages over the other. The Jewish Christians boasted over their privilege as custodians of the law (Romans 3:27), while the Gentile Christians boasted over their receipt of the blessings rejected by the (non-believing) Jews (Romans 11:17-20). In other words, the Jewish believers felt they were superior in God's eyes to the Gentile believers, and vice versa. This perception led Jew and Gentile believers in the church to be puffed up and not accepting of each other. The following study unpacks how Paul practically and theologically dealt with the issues of "pride" and "arrogance" within the church at Rome.

God's impartiality is revealed in His condemnation of "all."

Study the Text . . .

Paul first deals with the hostility between the Jewish and Gentile Christians by explaining the truths and ramifications of the gospel (chapters 1-11). This is no accident. In the first eleven chapters Paul isn't simply trying to write a theological treatise, but instead writes about gospel truth in order to address a very practical situation within the life of the church (i.e., ethnic arrogance). Therefore, Paul's purpose in writing chapters 1-11 is to show that God is impartial and shows no distinction between Jew or Gentile, instead before God's judgment bench both Jew and Gentile are equal. In other words, amidst all the talk about justification, propitiation, sanctification, election, and so on in these chapters, Paul's point is very simple: to show that God doesn't show favorites! Instead, He is just and righteous. The gospel levels both Jews and Gentiles as equals, none is better or superior to the other. In these first eleven chapters we see the impartiality of God revealed in two primary ways. First, in 1:18-3:20, God's impartiality is seen in the fact that both Jew and Gentile are guilty before God resulting in wrath and condemnation on "all" (both Jew and Gentile). In 1:18-32 Paul writes that "all" persons (Jew and Gentile) are accountable to God for sin. Then in 2:1-3:8 Paul specifically addresses the Jew to make sure they understand that they too are included in this "all" and are also

accountable before God's judgment bench. Finally Paul uses OT Scripture to give a defense against both groups showing once again that "all" humanity (both Jew and Gentile) are under the power of sin and are guilty before God.

Read 1:18-3:20 and discuss the following questions. As you read the passage don't get bogged down in all the details, instead just focus on the overall point Paul is making.

- Identify or circle every occurrence of the words "all" and "every." (1:18, 2:1,9,10; 3:4,9,12,19,20)
- Within the context of the passage who is the "all" and "every" a reference to? (both Jews and Gentiles)
- According to the passage how does God respond to the ungodliness and unrighteousness of both groups? Give specific examples. Does He treat both groups in the same way? Does one group get off the hook or receive a lesser penalty? Why or why not?
- What does handing out the identical judgment to both groups reveal about God? Where does Paul explicitly state this within the passage?
- How does the fact that God is impartial in His condemnation of both Jew and Gentile alike address the issue of arrogance between the two groups within the church?

Group Discussion . . .

- How does the truth of this passage help keep you humble before God?
- Do you ever subtly think in your mind that you aren't that bad or guilty before God? Or that deep down you are really a good person? Why or why not? How does this sort of perspective impact your walk with Christ?
- In what ways does the truth of this passage keep you humble in your relationship to others?
- How does pride in your relationship toward God lead to pride in your relationship toward others?
- Do feelings of superiority over other believers ever creep into your heart and mind? Or do you ever subtly feel like you have certain advantages before God that other believers do not possess? Why or why not? What's the proper way to deal with such attitudes?

God's impartiality is revealed in His justification of "all" who believe.

Study the Text...

Not only is God's impartiality revealed in the fact that both Jew and Gentile are guilty before God's judgment bench (1:18-3:20), but it's also revealed in that He declares righteous "all" (whether Jew or Gentile) who trust in Christ (3:21-4:25). When it comes to being justified before God neither group has certain advantages or shortcuts over the other. Both groups come to God and are declared righteous in the same manner, not through possession or adherence to the law, but through faith in Christ alone. It is this

impartiality, found in the gospel, which “shuts out” all boasting between the two groups since the God of the nations (of both Jew and Gentile) justifies the “circumcision” and the “uncircumcision” by faith alone apart from works of the law (3:27-31). The example Abraham is a beautiful demonstration of this truth (4:1-25).

Read 3:21-4:25. Once again as you read don't get bogged down in all the details of the passage but instead stay focused on the overall point being made.

- Circle or list all the occurrences of “all” in the passage. (3:22,23; 4:11,16)
- According to the context of the passage who is the “all” a reference to? (Jews and Gentiles)
- In verse 25 Paul writes that “God put [Jesus] forward as a propitiation by his blood”? This is an allusion to the “place of propitiation” or “mercy seat” from the Old Testament. How is this “mercy seat” different from that of the Old Testament? In other words, who now has access to this new and perfect “place of propitiation”? (3:26; not just the Jew but “the one who has faith in Jesus”, Jew and Gentile alike)
- What does the fact that Jew and Gentile alike now have access to the “place of propitiation” reveal about God?
- According to the passage why do Jew and Gentile believers in the church at Rome have no room for boasting?
- How does the example of Abraham in chapter 4 support Paul's point at the end of chapter 3, namely that God shows no distinction and is impartial toward both Jew and Gentile?
- According to the passage what would have been the outcome if Abraham would have been justified by works? How is this particularly relevant to the situation between the two groups of believers at the church in Rome?
- According to chapter 4 who are the offspring and descendants of Abraham?

Group Discussion...

- How does the doctrine of justification by faith keep you humble before God?
- In what way does the doctrine of justification by faith help keep you humble before others?
- In what subtle ways do you ever find yourself boasting in your justification (as if you earned or deserved it)? How does this subtle arrogance hinder your walk with God? How does it hinder your relationship with fellow believers?
- How does this passage showcase the supremacy and glory of Christ, particularly within the church?
- Keeping the context of the passage in mind, how do we tarnish the glory of Christ when we (in the church) live in arrogance toward one another?

Welcome “all”, as Christ has welcomed you.

Study the Text . . .

After eleven chapters of rich theological truths showcasing God's impartiality in the gospel, Paul transitions to show the practical implications of these truths. In chapters 12:1-15:13 he writes that this lack of distinction and impartiality displayed in the gospel should provoke Jew and Gentile Christians in the church at Rome to not think too highly of themselves but instead to humbly accept (or welcome) one another.

Read Romans 15:1-13. Please read this passage remembering how the practical exhortations given flow directly out of the previous truths we've studied in the first eleven chapters of the letter.

- A reference is made to the "strong" and "weak" at the beginning of chapter 15. Who are the "strong" and "weak" referring to? (the "strong" is a reference to the Gentiles, the "weak" is a reference to the Jews; see chapter 14 for the context)
- In verse 2 Paul exhorts "each of us" to please his neighbor. Within the context who is Paul writing about? (both Jew and Gentile)
- How does verse 4 specifically fit with the context of the passage?
- What is the picture Paul is painting in verse 6? The "you" is a plural pronoun and is referring to whom? Why is this a proper way to conclude this letter? How does God receive great glory from this picture?
- What is the significance of the plural pronoun "our" in verse 6? Who is this a reference to?
- What is the primary motivation for "welcoming" and "pleasing" others? Why is this important to remember and not lose sight of?
- How has Christ "welcomed" Jew and Gentile believers? What was his motivation for "welcoming" them? How should this motivate Jew and Gentile believers in the church at Rome to respond?
- How often is the word "glorify" and "glory" used? How is it specifically used within the context of the passage and why is this significant?

Group Discussion...

- Within the context of the passage what does it mean to "welcome one another"?
- What does this practically look like?
- Have you ever found it difficult to "welcome" or "accept" certain people, personalities, races, etc.? Why or why not?
- How does the gospel specifically motivate us to "welcome" or "please" those who are hard to love?
- In verse 8 Paul writes that Jesus became a servant to the Jews and Gentiles. We think of Jesus in a lot of different ways, such as Lord, Master, Ruler, and so on. However, most don't think of Him as our "servant." Why is it important that we view Him as such? What are some ways we could take this too far?
- This week how can you practically and tangibly "please" your neighbor, rather than yourself, for their edification?