

An Overview of Romans

Chs. 1-4

The thesis statement for Romans is 1:16-17. The rest of the letter is an explanation of this sentence. From 1:18-32 Paul shows how the whole pagan world stands under God's just condemnation. In 2:1-3:18, he puts the Jews in their place by saying that they too have sinned and are thus under the curse of God's wrath even as the Law said. So having the Torah didn't advantage them one bit when it came to being right before God. They cannot claim the moral high ground and pretend to have an in with God simply by having the Torah. And so, nobody will be put into a right relationship with God by Torah keeping.

But the time of Torah is passed. God's righteousness is now received through putting our confidence in Jesus. All people—Jews and Gentiles alike, for there is no difference—are justified and enter into the people of God by faith in Jesus the Messiah through whom God's righteousness has been and is achieved.

In ch. 4, Paul points out that this is in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that all the nations (=Gentiles) would be blessed through his descendant and that Abraham received this promise apart from the Torah and by faith. He was not circumcised when this promise was given and so he is the father of all of us who believe—Jew and Gentile.

Chs. 5-8

Saying that it's by faith and not by Torah keeping doesn't suggest that life is a moral free-for-all where we can sin all we want. We died to sin and have been freed from it. Now we have the Spirit which provides a more effective means of transforming us into God's likeness than the Torah. This is the message of Romans 6-8. So through Christ and the Spirit the problem of sin and death, brought in by Adam, has been taken care of.

Chs. 9-11

In view of the large-scale Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah, what about God's covenant faithfulness? Does that fact nullify God's faithfulness? This is the subject of Romans 9-11. Paul's answer is no indeed. Even with Abraham not all his descendants were part of the promise. Throughout the history of Israel God worked with a faithful remnant. Likewise now. And any Jews who have been "rejected" can once again become a part of the God's people if they will shift their confidence from Torah keeping to Jesus as Messiah and Lord.. (This is not to say they can't keep the Torah; but they need to recognize that the Torah doesn't make them "in" or "superior." It doesn't advantage them and disadvantage the gentiles.) And gentile Christians must not be arrogant against the Jews, since they sprang from them and share in the promise with them.

Chs. 12-16

Thus we finally arrive at chs. 12-14 where Paul calls the Romans and us to live together as the people of God in peace, *shalom*. All the theological argumentation and explanation of chs. 1-11 has been leading up to this point and provides the basis for what is said in these chapters. And in ch. 14 this all comes to its sharpest point as Paul deals specifically with Gentiles and Jews living together and loving each other as the one people of God—living together in view of Jewish food laws and the Jewish calendar. Paul wraps all this up by praying, "Now may the God ... grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:5-6).