

## *Introducing the New Testament*

### Worksheet for Week 5

#### Romans

The longest and most widely studied of Paul's letters in the New Testament, his letter to the churches in Rome has played a major role in the development of Christian theology. Read the introduction to the book in your study bible and, if you have one, the entry on the book in your Bible dictionary. Then read through the daily passages suggested on this worksheet. Before tackling the worksheet, you might want to read the entire letter in one sitting, using an easier translation like the New Living Translation.

#### *Background*

Romans has often mistakenly been seen as a theological essay written late in Paul's life, summarizing the key tenets of his faith. Instead, like all of Paul's letters, this letter too was written at a specific time to real churches to address specific problems and it can best be understood by placing it within its historical context.

In 49AD, the Roman emperor Claudius responded to a series of riots in the Jewish community of Rome by expelling Jews from Rome. Though, of course, all did not go, the burgeoning Christian church was largely left in the hands of Gentile Christians in Rome. At the time Paul wrote this letter, 56AD or so, Jews were returning to Rome and the Christian Jews were discovering that Gentiles were leading the churches the Jews had founded. As one might guess, this return created a lot of tension within the community as all the Christians ~ Jewish and Gentile ~ tried to find an accommodation to the new circumstances. Paul has learned of the strife in the churches and writes to teach them (remind them!) of what life should be in these colonies of the new human race. Paul reminds the Christian Jews that no one is required to keep Torah, rather, that we are made right with God by our faith and trust in Jesus Christ (see 3:27-4). Paul reminds the Gentile Christians that the gospel came first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles; that Gentiles have been grafted on the roots of the Jews (see 11:13-19). Neither Jew nor Gentile in the body of Christ (the community of believers; the church; the people of God) has reason to boast!

#### *"The Righteousness of God"*

In his letters, Paul uses the phrase "the righteousness of God" eight times, of which seven are in Romans. What does Paul mean and what does it mean for us? Romans 3:21-22a are pivotal in this letter: "But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup> for all who believe." "Righteousness" is a virtue, the quality of doing what is just and right. In the Old and New Testaments, the "righteousness of God" carries two complementary meanings.

First, it refers to God's covenant faithfulness. God is the great covenant-maker and covenant-keeper - he keeps his promises. Thus, Paul is saying that God has kept his promises to Israel, as revealed through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ! Because God is the great covenant-keeper, we can rely on his promises.<sup>2</sup> The story of God's relationship with his people will end well, because he has promised that it will (see Revelation 21!).

Second, "the righteousness of God" refers to God being a fair and impartial judge. In ancient Israel, law courts worked differently than in our day. Rather than using public prosecutors and juries, there were three parties - a judge, the plaintiff and the defendant. A judge was a good judge (a righteous judge) if he tried the case according to the law, if he was impartial, if he punished sin, and if he protected the weak and defenseless. Thus, as the righteous judge, God has been true to his word and he has judged impartially, for Jew and Gentile alike. Through the faithfulness of Jesus, God has dealt with sin and vindicated the helpless. He has declared innocent ("justified") those who have "have faith in Jesus Christ (v.26).

Just as we can trust God to keep his promises, we can trust that God will always be just!

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<sup>1</sup> Though this phrase has traditionally been rendered as "faith in Jesus Christ," the increasingly preferred translation is "the faith of Jesus Christ," emphasizing the faithfulness of Jesus, just as chapter 4 emphasizes the faithfulness of Abraham.

<sup>2</sup> Be careful here. Too often, Christians find, in the Bible, promises from God that aren't really there. God does promise us that the story for us and for all of creation will end well. He does not promise us a life free of pain, turmoil, trouble, or poverty.

## Bible Readings for Week 5

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in this letter?

<p><b>Day 1 Romans 1:16-2:29</b> A summary of Paul's gospel (v. 16-17); the sinfulness of Gentiles and Jews</p>	<p><b>Day 2 Romans 3:21-4:25</b> The righteousness of God is revealed to all!</p>
<p><b>Day 3 Romans 6:1-7:6</b> If we are made right with God through grace, why not sin to receive more grace?!</p>	<p><b>Day 4 Romans 11</b> The Jewish rejection of Jesus is not final (note the "remnant" in v.5); a doxology</p>
<p><b>Day 5 Romans 12:1-13:10</b> Life as a believer; life in the community of faith and life with the outside</p>	<p><b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b></p>