

Chapter 6: "Reading Someone Else's Mail"

Annotated Outline: Romans

The following pages present an example of an annotated outline for a biblical book, in this case, the Letter to the Romans. This particular example is a *working file*, one that over many years has undergone numerous adjustments, some minor and some major.

One of the enormous benefits of personal computers is the way they allow us to edit our documents whenever we like, without having to retype them from scratch each time. (Those who have grown up with computers will not be able to appreciate this as readily as we old-timers do!) It is particularly suited to the way students of the Bible can (and should) feel free to revise their understanding of Scripture as they gain experience and insight. Consider "opening" a working outline file for each the various biblical documents you study, and keep them current as you are able.

One other advantage of standard electronic word-processing programs is the "outline" view (as Microsoft Word calls it), with which the outline of a document can be collapsed or expanded in helpful ways. The following annotated outline of Romans is set up to do this. Unfortunately, that cannot be demonstrated in this PDF format.

ANNOTATED OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS
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I Opening remarks (1:1-17)

A *Greeting from the Apostle of the Gospel of God (1:1-7)*

Paul identifies himself as the Apostle of the “Gospel of God,” the good news that Jesus Christ has been declared Lord of the Universe. Although Paul has been sent with this gospel especially to the Gentiles, he greets all the believers in Rome, that is, Jews and Gentiles alike.

B *Self-introduction (1:8-15)*

Paul attempts to establish rapport with the Roman church by telling them of his interest and concern and of his desire that he, too, may be blessed by them as he hopes to be a blessing to them.

C *Thesis: the Power of the Gospel (1:16-17)*

The power of Paul’s gospel of the universal lordship of Christ is that in Christ, God has received and united all peoples of the world, Jew and Gentile alike.

II The Gentiles, like the Jews, are made part of God’s people by faith (1:18-8:39)

A *Righteousness is by faith in Christ for Jew and Greek (1:18-5:21)*

Paul eliminates every escape from the wrath of God but one: His mercy.

1 Under the law, all people are condemned (1:18-3:20)

(a) All humanity is condemned for its rebellion (1:18-32)

In particular, God shows his wrath by giving over humanity to do as it pleases.

(b) Even the Jews are fully condemned (2:1-3:20)

While the Jews may regard themselves privileged as opposed to the rest of humanity, Paul includes them in the whole as also fully condemned for an arrogance and independence inimical to the grace and mercy of God. Under the Law, the Jews' chosen mark of belonging to God, there is no escape—even for them—from the wrath of God.

2 Under grace, all people are made righteous (3:21-5:21)

(a) Righteousness comes by faith (3:21-4:25)

(1) Apart from the law (3:21-31)

All humanity, Jews and Gentiles alike, having been condemned under the Law, are completely dependent upon God's mercy, which he offers apart from the Law through faith in Christ. Far from nullifying the Law, this in fact upholds it and is upheld by it.

(2) Confirmed in the law: Abraham's faith (4:1-25)

Jews, who may find this arrangement hardest to accept, will be surprised to see that their most revered patriarch himself is the prime example of the principle of righteousness by faith.

(b) Righteousness comes through Jesus Christ (5:1-21)

(1) Peace and reconciliation (5:1-11)

Peace and reconciliation with God, along with attendant blessings, have come to us through the righteousness we have in Jesus Christ, provided for us even when we were still God's enemies.

(2) Through one person to all people (5:12-21)

This reconciliation comes to all humanity through just one person. God's primary means of dealing with humanity is one of federal representation. All humanity is condemned in Adam, and all humanity is restored in Christ—whether anyone knows it or not.

B *Grace, law, and libertinism (6:1-8:30)*

How does this doctrine of universal righteousness by faith square with the obvious necessity to be obedient to the Law of God? Paul argues that there is no conflict.

1 Grace is not an excuse to sin (6:1-7:6)

(a) Can those identified with Christ continue in sin? (6:1-14)

Baptized into union with Christ, we share in all that is his, including his having died to this world and his having been raised to a new life free from the power of sin.

(b) Must the liberated still be enslaved? (6:15-23)

It is not possible simply to be free from sin; we must submit to righteousness as our new master or be enslaved to sin again. Christ has made it possible to be enslaved to righteousness.

(c) Are the widowed still married (7:1-6)

In Christ, our fatal marriage to the Law, which provokes our sin, is over. The worst the Law can inflict upon us is death; once dead we are out of reach of the authority of Law. But Christ has died under the Law, and we are in Christ; consequently we too have died under (and therefore to) the Law.

2 The law is not sinful (7:7-25)

(a) Sin, not the law, is the culprit (7:7-12)

While not itself sinful, the Law has been used by sin to produce sin and death.

(b) The law is powerless against sin (7:13-25)

The Law is holy, just, and good, yet helpless to keep the Christian from sinning. However, although in one respect the Christian does sin, in another all-important sense it is no longer the believer that does it but his or her sinful old nature, which of course has already been condemned. The Christian's new nature is no longer subject to the Law.

3 The invading Spirit changes everything (8:1-30)

(a) The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus leads to suffering (8:1-17)

(i) The mind of the Spirit—the mind of the “flesh” (8:1-11)

Paul contrasts the disobedient old nature and the obedient new nature in terms of the “flesh” and the Spirit. The believer, renewed in the Spirit, abides by the Law of the Spirit.

(ii) Suffering death to the “flesh” through being led by the Spirit (8:12-17)

We are thus no longer debtors to the flesh, to obey it. Instead we are God’s children and heirs, just like Christ. And with Christ, led by the Spirit and reassured by the Spirit, we suffer through putting to death the deeds of the (fleshly) body, in order to be glorified with Christ, our fellow heir.

(b) The Spirit aids us in our suffering (8:18-30)

Being led by the Spirit means suffering in this world, just as it did for Christ. But the indwelling Spirit supports us in this suffering by his perfect prayers for us and by encouraging us with the hope and secure knowledge of future glory, the full manifestation of God’s “Shekinah Glory” presence with us, already here in part.

C Conclusion: God’s love is the assurance of victory (8:31-39)

Absolutely nothing in all of creation can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ.

III The Jews remain God’s people despite the addition of the Gentiles (9:1-11:36)

How does the apparent failure of the promises that God made to Israel square with the message Paul has been preaching?

A Introduction: Paul’s sorrow for Israel (9:1-5)

For all his seemingly hard words for Israel, Paul is not unaware of her rich heritage and privileges; indeed through her lineage has come the Christ himself. Thus Paul's sorrow for her in her stubbornness is profound.

B However, God's promise is not itself a privilege (9:6-29)

1 God's promise is an exercise of his sovereignty (9:6-13)

God's covenant with Abraham in no way guaranteed that every descendant of Abraham would be automatically included in Israel.

2 God's sovereignty includes both mercy and wrath (9:14-29)

God is merciful to whomever he pleases to be and is not bound to be unmerciful to any. Moreover, he consigns to wrath whoever rejects him, no matter who it may be.

C Israel has misunderstood the purpose of the law (9:30-10:13)

Israel has taken the Law to be her privileged set of instructions for the maintenance of righteousness before God, whereas its real purpose is to engender an attitude of trustful dependence, not boastful independence.

D Israel's rejection is her own choice (10:14-21)

Israel has deliberately chosen to establish herself on her own righteousness and not on the righteousness of God, and for this reason she rejects and is rejected. Yet that very righteousness of God, which alone justifies human beings, is as close as one's confession of dependence on God alone, something available to all human beings, even to rejected Israel.

E God in fact has not rejected his people (11:1-32)

1 Even now there is a remnant (11:1-10)

Paul himself is an Israelite, as are many others who have not rejected the righteousness of God. And if that is so, then while many of God's people Israel have rejected him, he has not rejected Israel.

2 Israel's fall has led to the Gentiles' salvation (11:11-24)

The salvation experienced now by the Gentiles is the same salvation provided for Israel, but rejected by them. Thus, the Gentiles are grafted into the tree from which disobedient Israel was broken off. While this is good news for the Gentiles, it also has another purpose: to draw Israel back to her own roots.

3 The salvation of the Gentiles will lead to Israel's restoration (11:25-32)

God's call is irrevocable. When Israel has seen her sin and responds to God's call, he will have mercy. For all people must see their sinful disobedience before they may find mercy, yet mercy is always there for the repentant.

F Conclusion: doxology on God's wisdom and sovereignty (11:33-36)

IV This uniting and receiving of all people in Christ has implications for Christian behavior (12:1-15:13)

What has been taught in the first eleven chapters is now applied to the way in which Christians treat each other in the Church and conduct themselves in the world.

A Introduction: human transformation (12:1-2)

Christians are urged to let their renewed inward life transform their outward life into a living sacrifice to God and his will. Concrete ways in which this is to take place are outlined in the following sections.

B Life in the body of Christ (12:3-8)

The make-up of the Church, Christ's Body on earth, is such that every member has a place to occupy and a role to play, all for the general good of the entire group.

C Walking in love (12:9-21)

Genuine love involves holding fast to what is good and hating what is evil, all in the context of interpersonal relationships, both in the Church and abroad in the world.

D *Believers and the state (13:1-7)*

God has approved (indeed, instituted) structures of human society for the maintenance of order and peace. Believers faithful to God will be submissive to these human institutions.

E *Love and the law (13:8-10)*

Loving one's neighbor fulfills the Law of God.

F *Love and the last day (13:11-14)*

Anticipation of the "Last Day" is a further motivation to the kind of Christlike behavior which love characterizes.

G *Mutual care: the weak and the strong (14:1-15:13)*

The Kingdom of God is not a matter of the freedom to do what we like or to eat and drink what we want. It is a matter of the freedom to watch out for the welfare of each other, even when this means the curtailment of what we are otherwise fully free to do. In this, the burden lies most heavily on those who feel more freedom in a particular affair than others do.

V *Conclusion (15:14-16:27)*

A *Travel plans of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (15:14-33)*

Paul lays out his plan to return to Jerusalem with an offering from the Gentile churches to the Jewish Christians, who are under economic stress. Then he hopes to visit Rome before continuing on to Spain.

B *Greetings to some of the saints in Rome (16:1-24)*

Paul greets some twenty-six believers especially by name, indicating in the process his awareness of the house-church setup in Rome, and showing us that many of his earlier coworkers and acquaintances have returned to the City.

C *Benediction (16:25-27)*