

# Paul's Letter to the Romans

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*Paul wrote his letter to the Romans to promote unity between Jews and Gentiles.*

## Part 1

Of all the epistles Paul wrote, many people consider his letter to the Romans to be the most important—and it probably is. Unfortunately, some people have taken parts of Romans out of context and twisted them to support false doctrines, particularly Cheap Grace and Predestination. But if you read the whole letter in one sitting, it is clear that it wasn't Paul's intention to promote these false doctrines. In this broadcast we will look at the whole letter and follow the consistent theme Paul used throughout it.

It is important to remember the historical reason why Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. The Biblical book of Acts sets the stage for Paul's letter by giving us the history of the early Christian church. Acts Chapter 2 tells us that there were many God-fearing Jews from all over the world in Jerusalem who had come to attend the Pentecost festival. Peter preached a powerful sermon, which they all miraculously heard simultaneously in their own native languages, and about 3,000 accepted Jesus as their Messiah as a result. Acts Chapter 10 says it wasn't until Peter saw a vision of unclean animals, about 14 years after Jesus' resurrection, that Gentiles (that is, Greeks, or other non-Jews) were accepted into Christian fellowship. Acts Chapter 15 tells us that about 10 years after Gentiles were accepted into fellowship there was a serious problem that the Council in Jerusalem had to deal with. Specifically, the issue was whether or not Gentile believers had to be circumcised and become Jews before they could join the church. The Council decided they didn't; but Gentiles did need to keep the kosher food laws and abstain from pagan sexual practices.

Apparently the decision of the Council at Jerusalem wasn't universally accepted, because about 6 years later the issue of circumcision was still causing disunity in the Christian churches. That's why Paul wrote his letter to the Romans (and a similar one to the Galatians). With that introduction, let's look at what Paul wrote to the Romans.

Paul realized that he had been promising to come to Rome to preach for a long time, and had not yet kept that promise. Since his goal is to convince the non-Jewish believers that they aren't second-class Christians because they haven't been circumcised, and he doesn't want them to think that he has not yet visited them because they are less important, he begins with an apology.

**First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.**

**I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.**

**I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.**

**For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” [Romans 1:8-17]**

What does Paul mean when he says, “The righteous will live by faith”? And just what is the Gospel? Some people say Paul’s gospel is that “the law was nailed to the cross,” so all you have to do is say that you have faith in Jesus and you will be saved. That’s not what Paul says. The next three verses are:

**The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. [Romans 1:18-20]**

Paul ends Chapter 1 by explaining in graphic detail the wickedness that is provoking God to wrath. Since little ears might be listening to this broadcast we will skip the details, and just say God hates sin.

He then goes on to explain that the Jews, who have the written Law of Moses, are not excused from obeying it because they have heard the law. The non-Jews, who do not have the written Law of Moses, are not excused from obeying the law because they haven’t heard it. Those are my words. Here are Paul’s words:

**All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) This will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. [Romans 2:12-16]**

Paul’s gospel declares that everybody will be judged according to what they have done, whether they have heard the law or not. Knowing what God demands of you, and not doing it, is just as fatal as not knowing what God demands of you, and not doing it.

Paul says this to the Jewish Christians in Rome, but it applies to all Christians today.

**... if you rely on the law and boast in God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” [Romans 2:17-24]**

If Paul really believed “the law was nailed to the cross,” why would he say this? Paul knew some people were twisting his words, claiming that Paul was saying that Jesus freed us from the law because we can’t keep it, and God’s forgiveness of our sin glorifies God, so he tried to put that argument to rest in Chapter 3.

**Someone might argue, “If my falsehood enhances God’s truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?” Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—“Let us do evil that good may result”? Their condemnation is just! [Romans 3:7-8]**

Despite this, many people have skipped verses 9 and 10 and twisted verses 11 and 12 to justify their continuing sins. Let’s read all four verses together.

**What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written:**

**“There is no one righteous, not even one;  
there is no one who understands;  
there is no one who seeks God.  
All have turned away,  
they have together become worthless;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one.” [Romans 3:9-12]**

Paul’s point was that “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin,” and he quoted Psalm 14 to do it. Some people try to twist Paul’s quote that “there is no one righteous, not even one” to prove that it is pointless to obey the law. We can’t be righteous, so there is no need to try. If we try to be righteous, we are denying salvation by grace. But we just heard Paul say in the previous verse, “Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—“Let us do evil that good may result”? Their condemnation is just!”

Paul quoted Psalm 14, which begins,

**The fool says in his heart,  
“There is no God.”  
They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;  
there is no one who does good.  
The Lord looks down from heaven  
on all mankind  
to see if there are any who understand,  
any who seek God.  
All have turned away, all have become corrupt;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one. [Psalms 14:1-3]**

King David says all who believe “There is no God” are corrupt, and none of them does good, not even one. Although evildoers can’t be righteous, that doesn’t mean nobody can be righteous. We know that because in the next two verses David says,

**Do all these evildoers know nothing?  
They devour my people as though eating bread;  
they never call on the Lord.  
But there they are, overwhelmed with dread,  
for God is present in the company of the righteous. [Psalms 14:4-5]**

If nobody is righteous, how can God be “present in the company of the righteous”?

Paul’s point is exactly the same as David’s point, which is why Paul quoted David. David’s point was that evildoers will be judged and punished for their evil deeds against the righteous because God is on the side of the righteous. David ended Psalm 14 by saying,

**You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor,  
but the Lord is their refuge.  
Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!  
When the Lord restores his people,  
let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad! [Psalm 14:6-7]**

The point that Paul makes over and over in his letter to the Romans is that there is no difference between circumcised evildoers who have the law and uncircumcised evildoers who don’t have the law. All are condemned. On judgment day, the Lord will be the refuge of all His followers, whether they are circumcised or not. That’s the good news. That’s the gospel. God will save all His followers, whether they are circumcised or not, baptized or not. We are saved by grace, not a magic ceremony performed by a man.

Paul ends Chapter 3 by saying that the law has not been replaced by faith.

**... there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. [Romans 3:20-31]**

## **Part 2**

In Chapter 4, Paul made the point that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised. It is an argument that was compelling to the Jews of Paul’s day, but is generally lost on today’s Christians who are not familiar with Jewish history. So, let’s move on to Chapter 5, which contains some very comforting words. The chapter begins,

**Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. [Romans 5:1-5]**

Because we know that God loves us, whether we have been circumcised or not, we can have peace even when we suffer.

**You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

**Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. [Romans 5:6-11]**

Later in Chapter 5, Paul makes an important point comparing Adam and Jesus, the Second Adam.

**Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—**

**To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. [Romans 5:12-14]**

Sin and death came to all people, circumcised or not, through Adam.

**Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. [Romans 5:18-19]**

Salvation is granted to all people, circumcised or not, through Christ, the Second Adam.

Paul's argument is based on the fact that the creation story in Genesis is literally true. Adam really existed and caused death to come into the world through sin.

But there are some people, even some Christians, who say Genesis isn't meant to be taken literally. They claim Genesis is just poetic allegory. Adam didn't really cause death through sin. Instead, they say, death caused man through natural selection and millions of years of evolution.

If what they say is true, and Adam's sin did not actually cause death, then Christ's death did not actually pay the penalty for sin. Let me repeat that. If what Paul said about Adam is just an allegorical, and not really true, then what Paul said about Jesus' death paying the penalty for our sins is just allegorical, and not really true.

Thank God that Genesis is literally true, and Jesus' death really does ransom us from the grave! It isn't just a story. Paul was sure of it, and you can be sure of it, too!

In Chapter 6, Paul says that everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, can (and must) have victory over sin.

**What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

**For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. [Romans 6:1-7]**

We have been set free from sin—not set free from the law. The law is still binding; but we are free because the law doesn't imprison us after we have been united with Christ and stop breaking the law. We are slaves to righteousness, not slaves to sin.

**Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.**

**In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. [Romans 6:8-13]**

Some people pounce on that last phrase, “you are not under the law, but under grace” as an excuse to ignore the law. Clearly that is not what Paul means. He means that by grace you are obeying the law, and not breaking the law by obeying the desires of the sinful nature. He makes that perfectly clear in the next four verses.

**What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. [Romans 6:15-18]**

It just doesn't get any clearer than that. Nothing more needs to be said, so let's just skip down to the end of Chapter 7 where Paul anticipates an objection.

Paul knows that some people will say, “That's easy for you to say. You don't know what it is like to be trapped in sin. You didn't grow up in a gang-infested neighborhood. You are a Roman citizen who had all the benefits of rich parents and an excellent education.” Paul counters these objections with a long explanation which ends with these words:

**We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the**

**desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.**

**So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? [Romans 7:14-24]**

Although Paul writes this in the present tense, he is clearly talking about something that happened in the past, just as I am using the present tense right now to describe what Paul is saying.

Paul has just devoted all of Chapter 6 to telling the Romans that when they die to sin they become slaves to righteousness. Paul is not a slave to sin any more. He is not a wretched man who is wondering who will rescue him from this body that is subject to death. He knows Jesus has already rescued him. Paul is about to spend all of Chapter 8 telling the Romans that they can, and must, get the victory over sin in their lives right now.

But here in Chapter 7 he is trying to identify with his readers. He wants the Romans, and you, to realize that Paul knows what it is like to struggle with sin. He knows the how frustrating it can be to fall short.

Unfortunately, some people use Chapter 7 as an excuse for sin. They rationalize their behavior by saying that if Paul could not overcome his temptation to sin, it is unreasonable to think they can overcome sin. They want to believe they can go right on sinning, and their sins will be covered by grace.

That’s why Paul immediately follows the story of his personal struggle with sin by saying this:

**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. [Romans 8:1-4]**

Let me repeat those last 14 words again. “...us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Paul is no longer living according to the flesh, and continuing to sin; and you should not, either. Paul continues,

**Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.**

**You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. [Romans 8:5-9]**

### Part 3

If you read the whole letter to the Romans, not just a verse here and there taken out of context, it is clear that Paul is not saying that law has been replaced by grace. He is saying that because Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, the Spirit of God will live in you, and you will obey, and you will be saved, whether you are circumcised or not.

He ends Chapter 8 with these inspiring verses which often appear on lists of favorite Bible texts.

**What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:**

**“For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”**

**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:31-39]**

That leads Paul into a short digression in chapters 9, 10, and 11, in which he anticipates, and refutes, another potential objection. He knows people might misunderstand him when he says, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?” It sounds like predestination.

Paul has been hammering home the point that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to obedience and salvation. So, one might reasonably ask, “If there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, why did God make a distinction in the first place?” and “Didn’t He predestine Jews to be saved, and Gentiles to be lost? Then, when the Jews rejected Him, didn’t he change His mind and predestine Jews to be lost and Gentiles to be saved?”

Paul answers these questions in detail in chapters 9 and 10, and then ends Chapter 11 with this summary:

**Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!**

**I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.**

**If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider**

**yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.**

**Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! [Romans 11:11-24]**

Paul would not say this if God has chosen who will be lost and who will be saved, and there is nothing we can do about it. Yes, God is guiding history, but every individual makes a choice about how to respond to God’s actions.

Paul has urged the Romans to be “slaves to righteousness,” but what does that really mean? He tells them in Chapter 12 and Chapter 13.

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. [Romans 12:1-2]**

He goes on to list specific spiritual gifts that believers should employ, if they have them. He talks about how to behave, and says to obey the civil laws, pay taxes, keep the 10 Commandments, love neighbors, and says not to engage in a list of list of disgusting behaviors, which you can read for yourself in chapters 12 and 13. We won’t discuss Paul’s list of do’s and don’t in detail because this broadcast is an overview of Paul’s letter to the Romans. We merely mention that Paul emphasizes the necessity of doing good works, which might surprise some people who think Paul said we are free from the law.

**And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. [Romans 13:11-13]**

Chapter 14 reminds us that the letter was written because of the controversy over how Jewish the Gentile believers have to be. The main point of friction was circumcision; but there also was a problem with the diet of Gentile converts. They were eating forbidden food and had to be made to stop it.

There are three basic ways to change behavior: You can pull rank, negotiate, or use diplomacy. Jesus pulled rank. He warned the Christians in Pergamum,

**Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. [Revelation 2:14-16]**

To the Christians in Thyatira Jesus said,

**Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. [Revelation 2:20-23]**

You can only pull rank if you have rank to pull. Unlike Jesus, the Council at Jerusalem could not take away the salvation of anyone who did not obey God's commandments regarding food, so they negotiated a compromise. They decided Gentile converts don't have to adopt all the distinctly Jewish customs and traditions, as long as they obey God's commandments, including the Sabbath and kosher food laws.

**“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.” [Acts 15:19-21]**

Paul could not pull rank, as Jesus did, nor did he have the authority to arbitrate a compromise, as the Council did, so he used diplomacy when dealing with the dietary sins of the Corinthians and Romans. The key to diplomacy is allowing the other person to admit they were wrong without “losing face” (to use a Japanese expression).

Paul had already taken this approach in Chapter 8 of his first letter to the Corinthians. He said that they really aren't doing anything wrong—BUT

**Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall. [1 Corinthians 8:13]**

In the same way, Paul told the Romans,

**I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.**

**Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall. [Romans 14:14-21]**

Paul is splitting hairs to allow the Gentiles to repent without having to admit they were wrong. Food isn't intrinsically unclean—it is the disobedience shown by eating food God said not to eat that makes the food unclean. It is sinful for Gentile believers to disregard God's will in regards to what they should not eat.

Paul proposed a way for Gentiles to stop sinning without embarrassing them by condemning their behavior. He encouraged the Gentiles to obey God's dietary restrictions out of love, as a show of unity with their Jewish brethren.

Jesus, the Council, and Paul all agreed that it is a sin to eat things God has forbidden to be eaten. The difference is that Jesus threatened the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira with punishment if they kept eating those things, while Paul just politely and diplomatically asked them to reform their diet.

Paul's lengthy conclusion begins in Chapter 15, when he says it was necessary for him to boldly warn them that they will be judged for their unacceptable actions.

**I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. [Romans 15:14-16]**

He repeats his promise to visit them soon, and ends with many personal greetings in Chapter 16.

That was Paul's message to the Romans; but what is his message to us? It is exactly the same.

Salvation does not depend upon whether you are Jew or Gentile, Black or White, Male or Female. When it comes to salvation, there is no difference. When it comes to gifts, however, there are differences. Everyone should use the gifts God gives him or her in service to God, and not try to claim gifts God has not given them.

Salvation is not based on circumcision, baptism, penance, or any other ceremony performed by man. It is available to everyone, by God's grace, through faith. Salvation comes from God, not a church.

You have no choice but to be a slave—but you can choose your master. Will you be a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness? God wants to, can, and will, free you from Satan and give you victory over sin. All you have to do is allow God's Holy Spirit to control you and become a slave to righteousness by faith.

If God's Holy Spirit is controlling your life, if you have the righteousness that comes from faith, you will free from the law because you will not break the law. Your love for God will be evident by your obedience to His commandments.