

Jews, Gentiles, and God's Purposes

Message 1 of 6 in the series: "Romans: Christianity 101 (Part 2)"

A. In AD 57, Paul wrote a lengthy "Christianity 101" letter to Christians living in the wicked city of ancient Rome to help them grow strong in the Lord.

"This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News... I am writing to all of you in Rome who are **loved by God and are called to be his own holy people**... I long to visit you so I can... **help you grow strong in the Lord.**" Romans 1:1, 7a, & 11 (NLT)

1. First, Paul gave the Christians in Rome the bad news: Jews and Gentiles alike are all hopelessly mired in sin and deserving of God's wrath. "...all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin. As the Scriptures say, '**No one is righteous—not even one.**'" Romans 3:9b-10 (NLT)
2. Then, Paul gave the Christians in Rome the good news: Through faith in Jesus, not trying harder, undeserving sinners can be made right with God. "For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. **The law simply shows us how sinful we are.** But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. **We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.** And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For **everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.** For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood." Romans 3:20-25a (NLT)

B. Paul was deeply grieved that most of his fellow Jews refused to trust in Jesus.

"With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it. **My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters.** I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them. **They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's adopted children.** God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen." Romans 9:1-5 (NLT) (see *Exodus 32:31-32*)

IMPORTANT! Jesus took the curse for the sins of the whole world upon himself. "But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. **When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing.** For it is written in the Scriptures, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" Galatians 3:13 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! God chose the Israelites to be His people because He loved them and wanted them to be a kingdom of priests, set apart to proclaim His goodness to the whole world. "**The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you** because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! Rather, **it was simply that the Lord loves you,** and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors." Deuteronomy 7:7-8a (NLT) "Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And **you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.**" Exodus 19:5-6a (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Jesus died on the cross for us because He loves us and has set us apart to be a kingdom of priests to proclaim His goodness to the whole world. "...for **you are a chosen people. You are royal priests,** a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, **you can show others the goodness of God,** for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9b (NLT)

C. Since the vast majority of people coming to faith in Christ in ancient Rome were Gentiles, Paul addressed some important questions about God's relationship with the people of Israel.

Q: "Well then, has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel?" Romans 9:6a (NLT)

A: "No, for not all who are born into the nation of Israel are truly members of God's people! Being descendants of Abraham doesn't make them truly Abraham's children. For the Scriptures say, 'Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted,' though Abraham had other children, too. This means that **Abraham's physical descendants are not necessarily children of God. Only the children of the promise are considered to be Abraham's children.** For God had promised, 'I will

return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.' This son was our ancestor Isaac. When he married Rebekah, she gave birth to twins. But before they were born, before they had done anything good or bad, she received a message from God. (This message shows that **God chooses people according to his own purposes**; he calls people, but not according to their good or bad works.) She was told, 'Your older son will serve your younger son.' In the words of the Scriptures, 'I loved Jacob, but I rejected Esau.'" Romans 9:6b-13 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! God only has children, NOT grandchildren. "For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. No, **a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God**. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, **it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit**. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people." Romans 2:28-29 (NLT)

Q: "Are we saying, then, that God was unfair?" Romans 9:14a (NLT)

A: "Of course not! For God said to Moses, 'I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.' **So it is God who decides to show mercy**. We can neither choose it nor work for it. For the Scriptures say that God told Pharaoh, '**I have appointed you for the very purpose of displaying my power in you and to spread my fame throughout the earth.**'"

Romans 9:14b-17 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! God is always just and fair in how He carries out His purposes. "I will proclaim the name of the Lord; how glorious is our God! He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. **Everything he does is just and fair**. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is!" Deuteronomy 32:3-4 (NLT)

"So you see, God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others, so they refuse to listen. Well then, you might say, 'Why does God blame people for not responding? Haven't they simply done what he makes them do?' **No, don't say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, 'Why have you made me like this?'** When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into? In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction. He does this to make the riches of his glory shine even brighter on those to whom he shows mercy, who were prepared in advance for glory. And **we are among those whom he selected, both from the Jews and from the Gentiles.**" Romans 9:18-24 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! We are in no position to criticize anything God does. "Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! **How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!** For who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice?"

Romans 11:33-34 (NLT) (*Isaiah 40:13*)

Q: "What does all this mean?" Romans 9:30a (NLT)

A: "Even though the Gentiles were not trying to follow God's standards, they were made right with God. And it was by faith that this took place. But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. Why not? **Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him**. They stumbled over the great rock in their path. God warned them of this in the Scriptures when he said, '**I am placing a stone in Jerusalem that makes people stumble**, a rock that makes them fall. But anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.'"

Romans 9:30b-33 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved**. As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.' For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him..." Romans 10:9-12 (NIV)

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Connect Group Questions:

1. Why do you think it was important to Paul to deliver the bad news to the Christians in Rome before he delivered the Good News? (Romans 3:9-25)

2. How does it make you feel to hear that Paul and Moses were both willing to allow themselves to be cursed forever in place of the Israelites? (Romans 9:1-3, Exodus 32:31-32) Would you be willing to do this for anyone?
3. How does it make you feel to hear that Jesus became cursed for you? (Galatians 3:13)
4. Why did God choose the Israelites to be His people? (Deuteronomy 7:7-8, Exodus 19:5-6)
5. Why did Jesus die for us on the cross? (John 3:16, 1 Peter 2:9)
6. Discuss the following questions Paul addressed with the Christians in Rome:
 - “Has God failed to fulfill his promise to Israel?” (Romans 2:28-29 & 9:4-13)
 - “Was God unfair to the Israelites?” (Romans 9:14-24, Deuteronomy 32:3-4, Romans 11:33-34)
 - “What does all this mean?” (Romans 9:30-33 & 10:9-13)
7. Discuss the following reasons Jesus became a stumbling block to the Jewish people. How many of these reasons still apply to people today?
 - Jesus didn’t meet their expectations for the Messiah.
 - Salvation by faith didn’t make sense to them. They believed they could earn right standing with God.
 - Jesus’ values are the opposite of the world’s values.
 - Jesus asked for humility, and they were unwilling to humble themselves before him.
 - Jesus required obedience, and they refused to surrender their wills to him.