

Unit Article

Glossary of Terms Used in Romans*

Paul was a skillful communicator and used a wide variety of terminology. An understanding of some of the primary words he used regularly will increase your efficiency in Bible study. Come join me as we stretch our minds around some of Paul's major ideas in Romans!

Righteousness

Paul's concept of righteousness flows directly from a profound understanding of the Old Testament. Paul saw God as a Judge and Lawgiver who demands obedience. The righteous or upright are those who conform to the demands of the Lawgiver. That conformity, however, is not simply legal, but includes a right relationship with the Lawgiver.

One of Paul's favorite Old Testament texts is Habakkuk 2:4, "the righteous live by their faith" (NRSV; see Romans 1:17). The righteous are those who faithfully trust in a totally trustworthy (faithful) God.

The key section of Romans 1:16-18 clearly indicates that God's righteousness is the core of the gospel. It is the relationship of sustenance to the obedient believer—the opposite is God's wrath, which is equally clearly revealed.

The righteousness that God gives flows from Him to the trusting person. It is far more than mere conformity to a given standard.

Sin

Paul uses a wide variety of words for sin in an attempt to describe the monster for what it really is. He uses terms like ungodly (meaning anti-God), wicked (meaning anti-conformity), missing the mark, transgressing (deliberate violation of known law), lawlessness (anti-law), trespass (individual violations), and disobedience.

Note that the whole series highlights the deliberate refusal to respond obediently to the requirements of a holy God. The root of sin is found in a perverted and rebellious will that dominates and controls.

In Romans 5—7, Paul describes humanity under the bondage of the flesh. This hostile power imprisons and destroys us. The essential nature of original sin is vividly described in 8:7 as a set of the mind (flow and direction of the whole being) that is clearly anti-God and refuses to submit to God. Only the cleansing of that perverse and studied rebellion against God can open the door to the Spirit-filled life of true freedom to God.

Grace

Romans 3:24 contrasts the condemnation that sin deserves with

the gift of God's grace. The familiar "unmerited favor" definition accurately reflects the primary meaning of grace, for the whole process of salvation flows from the wonderful mercy of a holy and loving God (Titus 2:11).

The actualization of grace is visible in the Cross. Grace is not simply a theoretical element in the nature of God, but the poured-out love of God lavished upon people who do not deserve it (Romans 5:5).

In Romans 5:20-21, Paul further describes grace as the power operating in our lives to bring victory over sin. The fact that it is a gift does not entitle us to misuse it (6:1-2, 15), nor to boast in the victories that grace supplies as if we had accomplished it by our own strength (Eph. 2:8-9).

Paul understood his appointment as an apostle to be an evidence of grace (1 Corinthians 15:9-10). The assignment of individual believers to special service is a form of the word grace transliterated into English as *charismata*—gifts of grace (Romans 12:6-8).

Justification

Justification comes from the same Old Testament root as righteousness. The primary emphasis, however, is on the process by which conformity to the demands of the holy God is achieved. In some way, the demands of the Sovereign must be met in order to reestablish a relationship between the two parties—sinful human beings and God. Thus, justification means that the guilty party has been acquitted—found not guilty—both now and in preparation for final judgment.

The message of Romans is that the love of God displayed in the death of Christ has paid the penalty, purchased atonement, and made propitiation, so that in Christ, believers can officially be declared righteous (in conformity). Justification is the exact opposite of the condemnation that sin earns.

The classic passage of Romans 5:1 highlights the benefits of the purchased justification—peace with God (relationship), access (entrance and introduction to God's presence) to the grace in which we stand, and hope for participation in the future glory of God.

Closely related to the essentially legal metaphor of justification is the concept of reconciliation. The Cross has paid the full penalty so that God and people may be fully reconciled (v. 10—note that God is always the Initiator of justification and reconciliation).

Sanctification

The New Testament words holy and sanctification developed

from the same Old Testament family of words. The primary content of the terms designates one who is wholly dedicated to God's service and made holy by His presence. In the Old Testament, the term is used of objects and persons who derive their holiness in relation to a holy God.

The specific appearances of these terms in Romans reflect this background. Sanctification is the completion of the work begun in justification. Not only are believers declared righteous before God; they are actually made righteous (brought into conformity with God's demands).

In Romans 6:19ff., sanctification is the complete contrast to sin. The old lifestyle was oriented toward sin and led to increasing impurity. The new life in Christ calls for total dedication and unqualified service to righteousness with the goal of sanctification or holiness. It is a lifestyle dedicated to pleasing God.

Faith

In powerful contrast to the righteousness earned by the keeping of the law (legalistic righteousness), Paul calls for righteousness by faith alone. Faith in noun and verb form appears more than 50 times in Romans.

"The one who is righteous will live by faith" (Romans 1:17, NRSV). The great example of such unqualified trust in God is the patriarch Abraham, who lived prior to both the giving of the Mosaic law and the cross of Christ (4:16). The believer receives justification by faith and faith alone. Faith is the union with Christ through which we are buried with Him in baptism and resurrected with Him to walk in newness of life (8:11ff.). Faith is the complete and utter reliance upon God for the salvation that He alone can provide. Faith is walking according to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (v. 2). Faith is allowing nothing to separate us from the love of God in Christ (w. 31ff.).

The opposite of faith is not indifference, but refusal to believe or trust. The opposite of faith in Romans is the hopelessly frustrating task pictured in chapter 7 of earning one's own standing before God.

Wrath

The wrath of God in Romans is not the petty, vindictive attempt of God to retaliate against sinful humanity. Instead, God's wrath is the normal and just operation of a holy God who cannot tolerate impurity. God's wrath flows from His love and is completely just. When rebellious human beings reject God's love, the penalty is the "privilege" of receiving the normal destructive results of a life of sin. God abandons them to their impurities. Wrath is the condemnation of the laws of God in operation.

Law

Paul uses the word law in several different ways in differing contexts. Frequently, he uses law to refer to the Mosaic law, as in Romans 3:19. Sometimes, he uses it to mean law in general—any

system of laws from whatever source—as in 6:19. Occasionally, law is used to mean a regulative principle, as in 7:23. The law is an expression of God's permanent will, which can be fulfilled only by the person indwelt by the Spirit and energized by love.

Flesh

Paul uses this term with differing meanings in different contexts. Sometimes, flesh refers to the bodily tissues (Romans 2:28). Sometimes, it is a synonym for body (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:3 and Colossians 2:5). Flesh is also used to speak of the source or origin of human beings (Romans 1:3 and 9:3). Such usages refer to the total human setting and are well illustrated in the contrast of 2 Corinthians 5:16.

The other major usage is commonly called the ethical usage. It refers to those who are unregenerate, those who trust in their own strength to earn salvation. The clearest illustration is Romans 8:8-9, where "in the flesh" is the complete contrast to "in the Spirit."

Sovereignty

Paul has no questions about the ultimate control of God over the whole creation, including evil. The implications of that concept are many and difficult. Paul himself acknowledges this in Romans 11:33-36. When we have come to the end of our understanding, the power of God goes on to His honor and glory.

The difficult side of this concept is verbalized in 9:18—God has mercy on and hardens whom He will. In order to understand this idea, it is vitally important to remember that Romans 9—11 is primarily concerned with the election and salvation of a nation (Israel), not with individual salvation. Paul points out in chapters 1—8 that the Spirit of God frees a person to make an essential choice with reference to serving sin to earn death or serving God to receive life as a gift. In chapters 9—11, Paul defends the justice and integrity of God with reference to Israel in the flesh. He shows that God has worked their rejection into blessing for the Gentiles. God has once again demonstrated the assurance of His ultimate and final triumph.

It is that same sovereignty that brings the death of Jesus to provide atonement for those who have faith, as well as assurance of the witness of the Spirit and the promise of final victory (8:31ff.).

Sovereignty, election, and predestination are a problem only when we look at one verse or paragraph at a time. Romans provides a total picture of the operation of God that brings balance and perspective and assurance.

The New English Bible captures the overall picture well in 11:36: "Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is—to him be glory for ever! Amen."

*Consider going to FoundryLeader.com, under the "Free Resources" tab, and print out a copy to use as a reference throughout this study on Romans.

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