

Study Questions

THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

by William Barclay

The Letter to the Romans:

Lesson **General Introduction to the Letters of Paul** (page xxiii)

1 *up to but not including*

ROMANS: A Call, a Gospel and a Task (page 13)

1. What are the parts of Paul's letter to the Romans and how is it similar to other ancient letters?
2. Why is this letter to the Romans, of all of Paul's letters, closest to being a theological treatise?
3. Why is Romans considered a vaccination of the soul?
4. What is the occasion or purpose of writing to Rome?
5. What does Paul mean when he uses the word "righteous"?
6. Why was Romans circulated as three different letters?

Lesson 2 **A Call, a Gospel and a Task** (page 13)

up to but not including

v. 1:1-17

Wrath of God (page 28)

1. What does the Greek word *kurios* describe? What does Paul mean when he calls himself the *doulos* or "slave" of Jesus Christ? Are we slaves? Should we be?
2. Given Paul's history as a Pharisee, how is the task he has been "set apart" to do, ironic?
3. Why does Paul start the body of his letter by complimenting the Romans?
4. What can we learn about Paul from Barclay's discussion on page 20?
5. What are the three pillars of Paul's thoughts and beliefs?
6. Usually, when we talk about salvation, we refer to being saved from sin. How else are we liberated?
7. When we hear or read a word, we have in our minds our own first choice definition. Which of the five explanations offered on page 25 of our text comes closest to your own in-your head definition of "faith" (before you read Barclay's)?
8. We hear a lot about being "justified". What does Barclay say it means to be justified?

Lesson 3 **Wrath of God** (page 28)
up to but not including

v. 1:18-32

The Responsibility of Privilege (page 47)

1. What does Paul likely mean by the phrase “wrath of God”?
2. According to Paul, what is the essence of sin?
3. What does Paul mean by “God abandoned” in verse 24 (See “*People With Whom God Can Do Nothing*”)?
4. From Barclay’s discussion in “*An Age of Shame*” what are we to understand concerning Roman morals and Paul’s restraint?
5. Paul paints a pretty ugly picture of the Roman Empire in the first half of the 1st century. What did other contemporary writers have to say about the state of affairs in the 1st century A.D.?
6. Why does Paul restrain his words?
7. Which items do you struggle with from the “list of terrible things” on pages 39-47? Were you aware of your struggle with them previously?

Lesson 4 **The Responsibility of Privilege** (page 47)
up to but not including

v. 2:1-3:18

The Only Way to be Right with God (page 66)

1. At the very end of our text’s discussion of Paul’s thoughts addressed to the Jews, it says faith and works are “inextricably bound up together”. Is there a conflict here with some Christian church’s teachings concerning “faith alone”?
2. On page 51, our author discusses Paul’s belief that everyone has an “unwritten law within their hearts”. How can this be when Paul also talks about humans being under the power of sin and the need to fight our very nature?
3. What is the main take away from “*The Unwritten Law*”?
4. How is Romans v2:25-29 similar to Mark v7:1-23?
5. What is the core reason for the Gentiles’ contempt for the Jews? How did Jesus attempt to change this? Hint: Check the Sermon on the Mount.
6. Near the end of this week’s readings there is a discussion about the “tragedy of the Jews”, that they rejected the task of evangelization. Why did most Jews of the time become part of this tragedy?
7. In essence v3:1-8 could be boiled down to: “The Jews were given a great responsibility when God gave them the Ten Commandments. Rather than evangelize the world and lead, many took it as a sign of their right to an exclusive relationship with God. How is this a warning to us vis-à-vis the Gospel?”

The Only Way to be Right with God (page 66)

Lesson 5

up to but not including

v. 3:19-4:25

At Home with God (page 84)

1. Our text says that the “supreme problem” we all face is “how can we get into a right relationship with God”. Do you agree or can you think of other comparable issues we face?
2. What does *dikaion*, the word translated as justification, mean?
3. What is the essential difference between the “old way” and the new way (bottom page 69)?
4. From the discussion on v3:27-31 in “*The End of the Way of Human Achievement*”, how would we break God’s heart?
5. What are the legal works? What did the Jews think that they were meant to do?
6. How does the story about R.L. Steven contrast the legal works with the works of love?
7. According to Paul, what is the way to God?
8. How is God’s love like that of a human father? What other queues from God’s relationship with us can we apply as parents?
9. If there is a moral order to the world that proves the existence of a just God, what can we infer about the “father/children” relationship with God and that of the relationship between parents and their children?

At Home with God (page 84)

Lesson 6

up to but not including

v. 5:1-6:14

The Exclusive Possession (page 103)

1. What two images does Barclay propose Paul may have had in mind when he said “we are in possession of an introduction to this grace in which we stand...”
2. Barclay translates v5:3-4 “trouble produces fortitude and fortitude produces character.” The New American translation of the same verses is, “affliction produces endurance and endurance, character.” Our text provides the Greek meanings behind the three words translated trouble/affliction, fortitude/endurance and proven character. How would you put Paul’s thought in your own words?
3. What do you think of Paul’s assertion in v5:7 that while we would find it difficult to die even for a just person, God proves his love because Jesus died for us (who seem to go out of our way to offend God)?
4. What if anything is the relationship between the Ruin and Rescue section (Paul’s v5:12-21) and Catholicism’s Original Sin, Limbo, etc?
5. On page 93, Barclay provides 4 explanations for what Paul means by “all sinned in Adam.” What are they? Which do you agree with and why?
6. Why shouldn’t we be discouraged or in despair concerning our sin?

Lesson 7 **The Exclusive Possession** (page 103)
up to but not including

v. 6:15 - 8:4

The Two Principles of Life (page 121)

1. Our text on page 105 says, “(Christians) cannot give a part of themselves to God and another part to the world ... they are not really Christians”. Do you believe this? What do you think? By this definition, are you really a Christian?
2. The book describes *hagiasmos* as a process toward *halios*. We know from page 111 and our study of Matthew’s Disciples Prayer – The Our Father, that *halios* means separate or different. Are you, yourself in the process of becoming different or separated?
3. What does sanctification mean?
4. How do we die to the law?
5. Toward the end of our reading this week is the concept that God created humans with a good impulse and a part that responds to or is susceptible to an evil impulse; spirit (*pneuma*) and flesh (*sarx*). What do you think? Did God design in two natures? If so, why?
6. What does Paul mean when he refers to “in the flesh”?
7. How is the awfulness of sin shown?
8. How does Jesus cancel out Adam’s sin?

Lesson 8 **The Two Principles of Life** (page 121)
up to but not including

v. 8:5-39

The Problem of the Jews (page 140)

1. How is a “Spirit –controlled” life like Enoch walking with God?
2. During Barclay’s discussion of “*Entry into the Family of God*”, there is a description of Roman adoption. Did this help you better understand our relationship with God? How?
3. The book discusses how we should not pray for specific things because we do not know what is best. Will this change the way you pray?
4. We were all impacted as little children when we first learn the story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son. Paul uses these same words from Genesis as a proof of God’s love for us. Does this reminder of Abraham’s loyalty help you understand how God feels about us?
5. Why does Barclay say that “...all that we can bring to God is an inarticulate sigh which the Spirit will translate to God for us”?
6. What is the “logos of God”? How is it related to v8:26-30 discussed in “*All is of God*”?
7. What does it mean to “know” someone in the Old Testament sense? How is it mean in relation to God knowing someone?

Lesson 9 **The Problem of the Jews** (page 140)
up to but not including

v. 9:1-29

The Jewish Mistake (page 157)

1. In the “*Tragic Failure*”, Barclay discusses Paul and Moses. How are they alike?
2. We frequently talk about something called the “New Covenant”. Does the description of the four covenants that God has entered into with Man help your understanding of what is meant by “New Covenant”?
3. What two ways has God shown forth his Glory to human kind?
4. This week’s reading starts out saying that God caused the hearts of the Jews to be hard so that the Gentiles could come in. Then over the next several pages the book describes what the Jews did wrong to cause this tragedy. So who really precipitated the tragedy, the Jews themselves or God?
5. Near the end of this week’s text is the statement, “It is easy in this passage to criticize Paul” when referring to his analogy of the potter and clay. Do you agree or disagree?
6. On page 156, Barclay tries to explain why “God deliberately darkened the minds” of the Jewish People in order to open the door to the Gentiles. Does Paul’s position make more sense to you now?

Lesson 10 **The Jewish Mistake** (page 157)
up to but not including

v. 9:30-11:12

The Wild Olive-Privilege and Warning (page 173)

1. In the course of discussing Eleazar’s story from the Fourth Book of Maccabees Barclay seems to make light of dying rather than eating pork. Elsewhere in Barclay’s writings (notably, Revelation) he seems to take a different approach toward dying rather than saying “Caesar is Lord”. What are your thoughts on this apparent disparity?
2. Our book suggests that v10:9-10 is the basis of the first Christian creed and reiterates the three points of that creed. Which, if any, of these three points do you personally find difficult?
3. How, at the end of “*Mistaken Zeal*” does Barclay summarize v10:1-13?
4. Paul speaks of the Jewish remnant “chosen by his (God’s) grace”. Of whom does he speak?
5. The Letter to the Romans was ostensibly written to the Christian community in Rome; Jewish and Gentile believers. Why then does Paul’s letter contain so many attempts to convince Jews that Jesus was the Messiah?
6. Describe, in your own words, the paradox Barclay talks about at the end of “*The Destruction of Excuses*” on page 169.
7. What is the “sense of safety” that has been the “snare and trap” of the Jewish people?
8. According to Paul, does the hardness of the hearts of the Jewish people ever soften?

Lesson 11 **The Wild Olive-Privilege and Warning** (page 173) **v. 11:13-12:8**
up to but not including

The Christian Life in Everyday Action (page 192)

1. What was Paul's hope, prayer and ambition in regards to the Jews and how they saw the Gentiles?
2. Why should Christianity never forget Judaism? (Hint, see page 177)
3. What is God's purpose?
4. What can we learn from Paul based upon Barclay's discussion of v11:33-36 on pages 182-183?
5. We tend to see service and worship as two distinctly different things. It seems that that was not the case for early Christians (see discussion about *latreia*). What are your thoughts? Who was closer to the truth, the early Christians or us?
6. The text discusses the Greek words *schema* and *morphe*. Was the Old Testament Law about *schema* or *morphe*?
7. Many of us participated or heard things about the Charisms Workshop. From what you know was the workshop the same as or somewhat different from v12:3-8?

Lesson 12 **The Christian Life in Everyday Action** (page 192) **v. 12:9-13:14**
up to but not including

Respect for Scruples (page 211)

1. "Give to each other priority in honor" is similar to what passage in John's Gospel? Hint it is read every year.
2. Of the 12 rules Paul provides in v12:9-13, which one strikes you as most important at this time in your life? What is the most difficult for you?
3. If/when the "opportunity" presents itself could you follow v12:14?
4. Look at the remainder of the seven points in 12:14-21 (items 2 through 7). Which do you find the most difficult?
5. Why does Paul go to such great lengths in preaching about obedience to the state?
6. What debt remains with us forever?
7. Barclay gives the Greek meanings of the six sins Paul lists off. Which of these deeper meanings did you find most enlightening?

Lesson 13 **Respect for Scruples** (page 211) **v. 14:1-23**
up to but not including

The Marks of the Fellowship (page 229)

1. Are you "weak in the faith", according to what Paul says?
2. In v14:2-4 Paul deals with the issue of conservative religious understanding conflicting with the more liberal understandings. Do Paul's words have meaning for us today? How?
3. What is the "great principle" that Paul lays down in v14:2-4? How hard is it for you to live by it?
4. What is the terror of sin? How has your sin affected the world?
5. Verse v14:16 deals with that same issue discussed above, where the conservative and liberal understandings are in conflict, but only in reverse. "If your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer conducting yourself according the principle that love lays down". How would we apply Paul's advice today?
6. We read in the scriptures many times "Judge not" or variants on that message. Paul puts a slightly different spin on it. Our text elaborates, "We who (will) stand before God's judgment have no right to judge others who (will) also stand before God's judgment." Does this spin help?

Lesson 14 **The Marks of the Fellowship** (page 229)
up to but not including

v. 15:1-16:2

A Household which was a Church (page 245)

1. Paul urges Christian fellowship through “the encouragement that scripture brings.” Given that this was written about 58 A.D., just 25 years after the cross, what scriptures do you think Paul is urging the Romans to read?
2. Are you able to draw encouragement from scripture in the manner described?
3. What does the Greek word *bastazein* mean? What is the significance of its use in v15:1?
4. Why, according to v15:7-13, must the Church be inclusive?
5. Paul uses an odd word *leitourgos* to describe his work for Christ. Our text talks of the origins of the word, “duties ... voluntarily undertaken by those who loved their country.” Does this civic analogy help you better understand your duties to Jesus?
6. Does it surprise you that Paul’s intention was to go to Spain?

Lesson 15 **A Household which was a Church** (page 245)
up to

v. 16:3-27

The end

1. Do you think Paul had an ulterior motive (other than just being friendly) in sending specific greetings to so many in Rome?
2. Barclay provides some interesting trivia concerning Prisca and Aquila. What are your thoughts about Barclay’s speculation? Does it provide you with any additional insights?
3. What do you think about the story of Rufus and his father? Does it give you a glimpse into the impact of Jesus in person?
4. What do you suppose Paul had specifically in mind when he talked about Christ’s message as veiled, secret and wrapped in silence?