

ROMANS 1

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS*				
UBS⁴	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	JB
Salutation	Greetings Salutations	Salutation	Salutation	Address
1:1-7	1:1-7	1:1-6	1:1 1:2-6	1:1-2 1:3-7
		1:7a 1:7b	1:7a 1:7b	
Paul's Desire to Visit Rome	Desire to Visit Rome	Thanksgiving	Prayer of Thanksgiving	Thanksgiving and Prayer
1:8-15	1:8-15	1:8-15	1:8-12 1:13-15	1:8-15
The Power of the Gospel	The Just Live By Faith	The Theme of the Letter	The Power of the Gospel	The Theme Stated
1:16-17	1:16-17	1:16-17	1:16-17	1:16-17
The Guilt of Mankind	God's Wrath on Unrighteousness	God's Judgment Upon Sin	The Guilt of Mankind	God's Anger Against Pagans
1:18-23	1:18-32	1:18-23	1:18-23	1:18-25
1:24-32		1:24-25 1:26-27 1:28-32	1:24-25 1:26-27 1:28-32	1:26-27 1:28-32

READING CYCLE THREE (see p. vii)

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects. Compare your subject divisions with the five modern translations. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph

* Although they are not inspired, paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's intent. Each modern translation has divided and summarized the paragraphs in chapter one. Every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. Each version encapsulates that topic in its own distinct way. As you read the text, which translation fits your understanding of the subject and verse divisions?

In every chapter we must read the Bible first and try to identify its subjects (paragraphs), then compare our understanding with the modern versions. Only when we understand the original author's intent by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers have no right to change or modify the message. Bible readers do have the responsibility of applying the inspired truth to their day and their lives.

Note that all technical terms and abbreviations are explained fully in Appendices One, Two and Three.

2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

- A. Verses 1-7 form the introduction to the letter. It is the longest introduction of any of Paul's letters. He was trying to introduce himself and his theology to a church that did not know him personally.
- B. Verses 8-12 are an opening prayer of thanksgiving. This was characteristic of Greek letters generally and of Paul's writings specifically.
- C. Verses 16-17 state the theme of the book.
- D. Verse 18 through 3:20 form the first literary unit and major point of Paul's gospel; all men are lost and need to be saved.
 1. immoral pagans
 2. moral pagans
 3. Jews
- E. Romans 1:18ff. reflects Gen. 3. Man was created in fellowship with God, in His very image. However, mankind chose enlightenment and the promise of power and preeminence. In effect, humans exchanged God for themselves (atheistic humanism)!

God allowed, possibly even engineered, this crisis. To be in God's image is to be responsible, to be morally accountable, to be volitionally free with consequences. God separates humans by both His choice and theirs! He allows them to choose self with all its consequences. God is grieved (cf. Gen. 6:5-7) but humans are free moral agents with all the rights and responsibilities that brings. The repeated phrase "God gave them over" (cf. 1:24,26,28) is the recognition of that freedom, not a willful rejection by God. This was not God's choice. This is not the world that God intended (cf. Gen. 3:22; 6:5-7,11-13)!
- F. The theological summary of 1:18-3:20 is found in 3:21-31. This is the first premise of the gospel—all humans have sinned and have need of God's forgiveness.
- G. In this first literary unit of Paul's presentation of the gospel it is interesting to note that fallen mankind is held responsible for their rebellion and sin without any reference to Satan or the demonic (cf. Rom. 1:18-3:20). This section certainly reflects the theology of Gen. 3 but without a personal tempter. God will not allow fallen mankind to blame Satan again (cf. Gen. 3:13) or God Himself (cf. Gen. 3:12). Humans are made in God's image (cf. Gen. 1:26; 5:1,3; 9:6). They have the right, power and obligation to choose. They are responsible for their choices both corporately in Adam and individually in personal sin (cf. 3:23)

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:1-6

¹Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, ⁴who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, ⁶among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

1:1 "Paul" Most Jews of Paul's day had two first names, one Jewish, one Roman (cf. Acts 13:9). Paul's Jewish name was Saul. He, like the ancient King of Israel, was of the tribe of Benjamin (cf. Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5). His Roman or Greek name, Paul, meant "little." This referred either (1) to his physical stature which was alluded to in a second century non-canonical book, *The Acts of Paul*, in a chapter about Thessalonica called "Paul and Thekla"; (2) to his personal sense of being least of the saints because he originally persecuted the Church (cf. I Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8; I Tim. 1:15); or (3) simply to the name given by his parents at birth.

▣ **“a bond-servant”** NKJV, NRSV, TEV and JB translations read “servant.” This concept was either (1) antithetical to Jesus as Lord; or (2) an OT honorific title (cf. Moses in Num. 12:7 and Josh. 1:1; Joshua in Josh.; 24:25; and David in Psalm (title), and Isaiah 42:1, 19; 52:13).

▣ **“called as an apostle”** This was God’s choice not his (cf. Gal. 1:15). Paul was asserting his spiritual qualifications and authority to this church he had never met (cf. I Cor. 1:1; II Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; I Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1).

The term “apostle” in Jewish circles meant “one sent as an official representative.” In the NT this term was used in two senses: (1) of the Twelve special disciples and Paul; and (2) of a spiritual gift that continues in the church (cf. I Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11).

▣ **“set apart”** This is a PERFECT PASSIVE PARTICIPLE which implied that he was set apart by God in the past (cf. Jer. 1:5) and this continued as a state of being. This was a possible play on the Aramaic word for “Pharisee.” They were separated to Jewish legalism, he was separated to the gospel.

It is related to the Hebrew word for “holy” which meant “set apart for God’s use” (cf. Ex. 19:6; I Pet. 2:5). The terms “saint,” “sanctify,” and “set apart” all had the same Greek root, “holy” (*hagios*).

▣ **“The gospel”** This was a compound word from “good” (*eu*) and “message” (*angellos*). It became the term that described the doctrines revealed in the New Covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-32), in Jesus the Messiah.

1:2 “He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures” This is an AORIST MIDDLE (deponent) INDICATIVE. The gospel was no afterthought with God, but His eternal, purposeful plan (cf. Gen. 3:15; Mk. 10:45; Lk. 2:22; Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:28). The early sermons in Acts (the *kerygma*) present Jesus as the fulfillment of OT promises and prophecies.

1:3 “concerning His Son” The central message of the Good News is a person, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary. In the OT the nation, the king and the Messiah were called “son” (cf. II Sam. 7:14; Hos. 11:1; Ps. 2:7; Matt. 2:15).

In the OT God spoke through servants and prophets. Jesus was not a servant of God. He was a family member (cf. Heb. 1:1-2; 3:6; 5:8; 7:28). This is the only place in the book where Paul mentions the doctrine of Christology. Romans is not a complete systematic theology.

▣ **“who was born of the seed of David”** This related to the prophecy of II Sam. 7. The Messiah was of the royal line of David (cf. Isa. 9:7; 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5; 30:9; 33:15) from the tribe of Judah (cf. Gen. 49:4-12; Isa. 65:9). In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus was addressed by this title several times (cf. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30) which reflected the Jewish hope of a coming savior.

It is surprising that Paul did not emphasize this aspect of Jesus. He mentioned it only here and in II Tim. 2:8; both passages may have been quotes from an early church’s creed formula.

▣

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV “according to the flesh”

TEV “as to his humanity”

JB “according to human nature”

This was fulfillment of prophecy and an affirmation of Jesus’ humanity which was often denied in the eclectic religious world of the first century (cf. I Jn. 1:1-4; 4:1-3). This verse clearly shows that Paul did not always use the term “flesh” (*sarx*) in a negative sense (cf. 2:28; 9:3). However, usually Paul used “flesh” to contrast “spirit” (cf. 6:19; 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3-9, 12, 13; I Cor. 5:5; II Cor. 1:17; 11:18; Gal. 3:3; 5:13, 16, 17-19, 24; 6:8; Eph. 2:3; Col. 2:11, 13, 18, 23).

1:4 “declared” This is an AORIST PASSIVE PARTICIPLE. God definitively appointed Jesus “the Son of God.”

▣ **“to be the Son of God”** The NT authors did not often refer to Jesus by the title “Son of God” (cf. Matt. 4:3) because of the false implications from Greek mythology (the same is true of the virgin birth). The concept is usually qualified by “unique, one of a kind” (*monogenes*) (cf. Jn. 1:18; 3:16, 18; I Jn. 4:9). Thus the meaning is “Jesus, the only true Son of God.”

The NT has two theological poles related to God the Father and Jesus the Son (1) they are equal; (cf. Jn. 1:1; 5:18; 10:30; 14:9; 20:28; II Cor. 4:4; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), and (2) they are separate personalities, (cf. Mk. 10:18; 14:36; 15:34).

▣ **“by the resurrection”** God the Father affirmed Jesus’ life and message by raising Him from the dead (cf. 4:24; 6:4, 9; 8:11). The deity (cf. Jn. 1:1-14; Phil. 2:6-11) and resurrection of Jesus (cf. I Cor. 15) are twin pillars of Christianity.

▣ This verse was often used to advocate the heresy of “adoptionism” which was awarded to Jesus, by God, for His exemplary life of obedience. The heretics asserted that He was not always (ontologically) deity but became deity when God raised Him from

the dead. Although this is clearly untrue, which is obvious from many texts such as John 1 and 17, something wonderful was conferred on Jesus at His resurrection. It is difficult to express how deity can be rewarded, yet that is what happened. Even though Jesus shared eternal glory with the Father, His status was somehow elevated or enriched by the perfect fulfillment of His assigned redemptive task. The resurrection was the Father's affirmation of the life, example, teachings, and sacrificial death of Jesus of Nazareth; eternally divine, fully human, perfect savior, restored and rewarded, unique Son!

- ▣ **NASB, NKJV** “according to the Spirit of holiness”
- NKJV** “according to the spirit of holiness”
- TEV** “as to his divine holiness”
- JB** “in the order of the spirit, the spirit of holiness”

Some translations capitalize the “S” in Spirit, implying the Holy Spirit, while the lowercase “s” would refer to the human spirit. The ancient Hebrew and Greek texts had no capitalizations, no punctuation, and no chapter or verse divisions, so these are all points of tradition or interpretation by translators.

There are two ways to view verses 3 and 4 (1) as a reference to Jesus' two natures, human and divine or (2) as a reference to two stages in His earthly life, human and resurrected Lord.

- ▣ **“Jesus”** The Aramaic name *Jesus* is the same as the Hebrew name *Joshua*. It was a compound of two words “YHWH” and “salvation.” It can mean “YHWH saves,” “YHWH delivers” or “YHWH is salvation.” The thrust of the meaning can be seen in Matt. 1:21,25.

- ▣ **“Christ”** This was the Greek translation of the Hebrew term *messiah* which meant “an anointed one.” In the OT several groups of leaders (prophets, priests, and kings) were anointed as a sign of God's choice and equipping. Jesus fulfilled all three of these anointed offices (cf. Heb. 1:2-3).

The OT predicted that God would send a special “anointed one” to usher in the New Age of righteousness. Jesus was His special “servant,” “son” and “Messiah.”

- ▣ **“Lord”** In the OT the Covenant name for God, YHWH, became so holy that the rabbis substituted the title “Lord,” (*Adonai*) when reading the Scriptures because they were afraid they might take God's name in vain (cf. Ex.20:7; Deut. 5:11) and thereby break one of the Ten Commandments. When NT authors called Jesus “Lord” (“Kurios”) in theological contexts, they were affirming His deity (cf. Acts 2:36; Rom. 10:9-13; Phil. 2:6-11).

- 1:5**
- NASB, JB** “the obedience of faith”
 - NKJV** “for obedience to the faith”
 - NRSV** “to bring about the obedience of faith”
 - TEV** “to believe and obey”

This is the first usage of the pivotal term, “faith,” in Romans. It was used in three distinct ways in this chapter and book:

(1) Verse 5. It was used of a body of truths or doctrines related to Jesus and the Christian life (cf. Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22; 16:5; Rom. 14:1; 16:26; Gal. 1:23; 6:10; Jude 3, 20).

(2) Verse 8. It was used in the sense of personal trust in Jesus. The English terms “believe,” “faith,” and “trust” all translate one Greek term (*pistis/pisteuo*). The gospel is both conceptual (doctrine) and personal (cf. v.16; John 1:12; 3:16).

(3) Verse 17. It was used in its OT sense of trustworthiness, loyalty, or dependability. This is the meaning of Hab. 2:4. In the OT there was not a developed doctrine of faith but example after example of lives of faith (cf. Abraham in Gen. 15:6); not perfect faith but struggling faith (cf. Heb. 11). The hope of mankind is not in his ability to perform or believe correctly but in God's character. Only God is faithful!

There is a series of acts that can be called the salvation event (1) repentance (cf. Mk. 1:15; Lk. 13:3,5; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21); (2) faith (cf. Jn. 1:12; 3:16; Acts 16:31); (3) obedience (cf. II Cor. 9:13; 10:5; I Pet. 1:2,22), and (4) perseverance (cf. Lk. 18:1; II Cor. 4:1,16; Gal. 6:9; II Thes. 3:13). These are the conditions of the New Covenant. We must receive and continue to receive God's offer in Christ (cf. v. 16; Jn. 1:12).

- ▣ **NASB, NRSV** “among all the Gentiles”
- NKJV** “among all nations”
- TEV** “people of all nations”
- JB** “to all pagan nations”

This is the universal gospel. God's promise of redemption in Gen. 3:15 included all mankind. Jesus' substitutionary death included all of the fallen children of Adam (cf. Jn. 3:16; 4:42; I Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; II Pet. 3:9).

1:6
 NASB, NKJV “the called of Jesus Christ”
 NRSV “who are called to belong to Jesus Christ”
 TEV “whom God has called to belong to Jesus Christ”
 JB “by his call belong to Jesus Christ”

This may be (1) a play on the term “church,” which meant “the called out ones” or “gathered ones”; (2) a reference to divine election (cf. Rom. 8:29-30; 9:1ff; Eph. 1:4, 11; 3:21; 4:1,4); or (3) the Revised English Bible translation of the phrase, “you who have heard the call and belong to Jesus Christ,” as the response of men and women to the gospel.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:7

⁷to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:7 “beloved of God” This phrase was often used of Jesus (cf. Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Now it was used of the church in Rome! This shows the depth of God’s love for those who trust in His Son. This kind of transfer can be seen in Eph. 1:20 (Jesus) and 2:5-6 (believers).

▣ “in Rome” Paul did not start this church. Romans was a letter introducing himself to a church already established. The book of Romans was Paul’s most developed presentation of the gospel. It was least affected by a local situation although there existed tensions between Jewish and Gentile believers to whom he comments throughout the letter.

▣
 NASB “called as saints”
 NKJV, NRSV, JB “called to be saints”
 TEV “called to be his own people”

The term “saints” referred to the believers’ position in Christ, not their sinlessness. It should also describe their progressive Christlikeness. The term was always PLURAL except in Phil. 4:21. However, even in this context it was corporate. To be a Christian is to be part of a community, a family, a body.

Verse 1 indicates that Paul was called to be an apostle. Believers are “the called of Jesus Christ” in verse 6. Believers are also called “saints” in verse 7. This “calling” was a NT way of asserting the truth of the initiating priority of God. No fallen human ever called himself (cf. 3:9-13; Isa. 53:6; I Pet. 2:25). God always takes the initiative (cf. Jn. 6:44,65; 15:16). He always brings the covenant to us. This is true of our salvation (our imputed righteousness or legal standing) but also our giftedness for effective service (cf. I Cor. 12:7,11) and our Christian lives.

▣ “Grace to you and peace from God” This was Paul’s characteristic opening blessing. It was a word play on the traditional Greek term “greetings” (*charein*) and the uniquely Christian term “grace” (*charis*). Paul may have been combining this Greek opening with the traditional Hebrew greeting *Shalom* or “peace.” However, this is only speculation.

▣ “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” Paul used only one PREPOSITION for both names. This was his way of grammatically linking these two Persons of the Trinity. This would emphasize Jesus’ deity!

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:8-15

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. ⁹For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

1:8 “because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world” Romans 16:19 made allusion to the same truth. This was obviously an oriental overstatement (hyperbole) referring to the Roman world.

1:9 “God . . . is my witness” Paul was taking an oath in God’s name (cf. 9:1; II Cor. 1:23; 11:10-11,31; 12:19; Gal. 1:20; I Thes. 2:5). This was his Jewish way of asserting his truthfulness.

1:9,10 “how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers” Paul did not start this church and yet he consistently prayed for them (cf. II Cor. 11:28)!

1:10 “if” This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author’s perspective or for his literary purposes. Paul planned to visit Rome on his way to Spain (cf. 15:22-24). He probably did not plan to stay a long time. Paul always wanted a new field where no other person had worked (cf. 15:20; II Cor. 10:15,16). It is possible that one of the purposes of the Roman letter was to solicit funds for his missionary journey to Spain (cf. 15:24).

1:11 “that I may impart some spiritual gift to you” The phrase “spiritual gift” was used in the sense of spiritual insight or blessing. Paul saw himself as uniquely called to be the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. v. 15).

1:12 This is the purpose of Christian fellowship. The gifts are meant to unite believers into a ministering community. Believers are gifted for the common good (cf. I Cor. 12:7). All gifts are relevant. All the gifts are given by the Spirit at salvation (cf. I Cor. 12:11). All believers are called, gifted, full-time ministers (cf. Eph. 4:11-12).

1:13 “and have been prevented thus far” This is a PASSIVE verb. This same phrase occurs in I Thes. 2:18 where Satan is the agent. Paul believed his life was guided by God but disrupted by Satan. Somehow both are true (cf. Job 1-2; Dan. 10).

▣ **“that I might obtain some fruit among you”** In this context “fruit” may refer to converts but in Jn. 15:1-8 and Gal. 5:22 it referred to Christian maturity. Matthew 7 says “by your fruit you shall be known” but it does not define the term fruit.

1:14 “to Greeks” This referred to the civilized, cultured people around the Mediterranean Sea. Alexander the Great and his followers had Hellenized the known world. The Romans had taken over and assimilated the Greek culture.

▣ **“to Barbarians”** This (*onomatopoeia*) term meant the uneducated or uncultured people groups, usually to the north. It was used of people who did not speak Greek. Their speech sounded like “bar bar bar” to the Greeks and Romans.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:16-17

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “**BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.**”

1:16

NASB, NRSV “I am not ashamed of the gospel”
NKJV “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ”
TEV “I have complete confidence in the gospel”
JB “I am not ashamed of the Good News:”

In I Cor. 1:23 the Jews were ashamed of the gospel because it affirmed a suffering Messiah and the Greeks because it affirmed the resurrection of the body. Verses 16-17 are the theme of the entire book. This theme is amplified and summarized in 3:21-31.

▣ **“salvation”** In the OT, this term (*yasho*) primarily referred to physical deliverance but in the NT (*sōzō*) it referred primarily to spiritual deliverance (cf. I Cor. 1:18, 24).

▣

NASB “to every one who believes”
NKJV “for every one who believes”
NRSV “to everyone who has faith”
TEV “all who believe”
JB “all who have faith”

The gospel is for all humans but believing is one of the conditions for acceptance. The other is repentance (cf. Mk. 1:15; Acts 3:16,19; 20:21). God deals with mankind by means of covenant. He always takes the initiative and sets the agenda. But there are several reciprocal conditions, see note at 1:5.

The Greek term, here translated “believe,” can also be translated in English by the terms “faith” or “trust.” The Greek word has a wider connotation than any one English word. Notice it is a PRESENT PARTICIPLE. Saving faith is continuing faith (cf. I Cor. 1:18; 15:2; I Cor. 2:15; I Thes. 4:14)!

Originally the related Hebrew terms behind this Greek term for “faith” meant a stable stance, a man with his feet apart so that he could not be easily moved. The opposite OT metaphor would be “my feet were in the miry clay” (Ps. 40:2), “my feet almost slipped” (Ps. 73:2). These Hebrew related roots, *emun*, *emunah*, *aman*, came to be used metaphorically of someone who was trustworthy, loyal or dependable. Saving faith does not reflect fallen mankind’s ability to be faithful, but God’s! Believers’ hopes do not reside in their abilities but in God’s character and promises. It is His trustworthiness, His faithfulness, His promises!

▣ **“to the Jews first”** The reason for this is discussed briefly in chapter 3 and fully developed in chapters 9-11. It follows Jesus’ statements of Matt. 10:6; 15:24; Mk. 7:27.

1:17 “the righteousness of God” This phrase in context referred to (1) God’s character, and (2) how He gives that character to sinful mankind. The Jerusalem Bible translation has “this is what reveals the justice of God.” While this does refer to the believer’s moral lifestyle, it primarily concerns his legal standing before the Righteous Judge of Creation. This imputation of the righteousness of God to fallen, sinful mankind, since the Reformation, has been known as “justification by faith” (cf. II Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). This is the very verse that changed Martin Luther’s life and theology! However, the goal of justification is sanctification, Christlikeness, or the righteous character of God (cf. Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 1:4; Gal. 4:19). Righteousness is not only a legal pronouncement, it is a holy life, the image of God in mankind is to be restored!

▣
NASV, NKJV “from faith to faith”
NRSV “through faith for faith”
TEV “it is through faith, from beginning to end”
JB “it shows how faith leads to faith”

There are several possibilities in translating this phrase. The Williams NT translates it as “the Way of faith that leads to greater faith.” The main points are (1) faith comes from God; (2) mankind must respond and continue to respond; and (3) faith must result in a godly life.

▣
NASB “But the righteous man shall live by faith”
NKJV “The just shall live by faith”
NRSV “The one who is righteous will live by faith”
TEV “He who is put right with God through faith shall live”
JB “The upright man finds life through faith”

This was a quote from Hab. 2:4. In the OT “faith” had the expanded metaphorical meaning of “trustworthiness,” “faithfulness,” or “loyalty to.” Saving faith is based on God’s faithfulness. However, human faithfulness is an evidence that one has trusted in God’s provision. This same OT text was quoted in Gal. 3:11 and Heb. 10:38. The next literary unit, Romans 1:18-3:20, reveals the opposite of faithfulness to God. It may be helpful to list how several modern commentators understand this phrase:

1. Vaughan: “begins in faith and ends in faith”
2. Hodge: “by faith alone”
3. Barrett: “on the basis of nothing but faith”
4. Knox: “faith first and last”
5. Stagg: “the upright out of faith shall live”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:18-23

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²²Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

1:18 “God’s anger” Verses 18-23 depict the pagan world of Paul’s day. Paul’s characterization of the pagan world is also found in Jewish literature (cf. *Wisdom of Solomon* 13:1ff. and *Letter of Aristeas*, 134-38) and even in Greek and Roman ethical writings. The same Bible that tells us of God’s love also reveals His anger (cf. vv. 23-32; 2:5,8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4-5).

Both anger and love are human terms which are applied to God. They express the truth that God has a way He wants believers to live. One’s willful rejection of God’s will results in consequences both temporal, as in this verse, and eschatological. However, God must not be viewed as vindictive. Judgment is His “strange work” (cf. Isa. 28:21ff). Love is His character, compare Deut. 5:9 to 5:10; 7:9. In Him justice and mercy predominate. Yet all will give an account to God (cf. Eccl. 12:13-14; Gal. 6:7), even Christians (cf. 14:10-12; II Cor. 5:10).

▣ **“who suppress the truth”** This referred to human willful rejection, not ignorance (cf. vv. 21,32; Jn. 3:17-21). This phrase can mean (1) they know the truth but reject it; (2) their lifestyle shows they reject the truth; or (3) their lives and/or words cause others not to know and receive the truth.

1:19,20 “that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them” All humans know something of God from creation (cf. v. 20 and Ps. 19:1-6). In theology this is called “natural revelation.” It is not complete but it is the basis of God’s holding responsible those who have never been exposed to God’s “special revelation” in the Scriptures or, ultimately, in Jesus (cf. Col. 1:15; 2:9).

The term “know” was used in two senses in the NT (1) its OT sense of intimate personal relationship (cf. Gen. 4:1; Jer. 1:5), and (2) its Greek sense of facts about a subject. The gospel is both a person to be welcomed and trusted and a message to be received and believed! In this verse it was used only in the sense of #2.

1:20 “divine nature” This is seen supremely in Jesus (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:9; II Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3). Jesus uniquely bears the divine image. He is God’s full revelation in human form. The wonderful truth of the gospel is that fallen mankind, through faith, will share Christlikeness (cf. Heb. 12:10; I Jn. 3:2). The image of God has been restored (cf. II Pet. 1:3-4)!

▣ **“so that they are without excuse”** This is literally “no legal defense.” Remember the theological purpose of chapter 1:18-3:20 is to show the spiritual lostness of all mankind. Humans are responsible for the knowledge they do have. God holds humans responsible for that which they know or could know.

1:21 “for even though they knew God” Humans are not progressing religiously—they are slipping. Since the time of the Tower of Babel it has been downhill (cf. Gen. 3-11). The darkness is increasing!

▣ **“they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks”** This is the tragedy of idolatry in vv. 23, 24 (cf. Jer. 2:9-13).

▣ **“but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”** *The New Testament: A New Translation* by Olaf M. Morlie has “rather they busied themselves with silly speculations about Him, and their stupid minds groped about in the dark.” Human religious systems are monuments to spiritual rebellion and pride (cf. v. 22; Col. 2:16-23).

▣ **“heart”** This was used in the OT sense of the entire person. However, it was often a way of referring to the thinking and feeling process.

1:22

NASB, NKJV “Professing to be wise, they became fools”

NRSV “Claiming to be wise, they became fools”

TEV “They say they are wise, but they are fools”

JB “The more they called themselves philosophers, the more stupid they grew”

From the Greek word “fool” we get the English “moron” (cf. I Cor. 1:18-31). The problem is in mankind’s pride and confidence in his own knowledge (cf. I Cor. 1:18-31; Col. 2:8-23). This goes back to Gen. 3. Knowledge brought separation and judgment. It is not that human knowledge is always wrong, it is just not ultimate!

1:23 Humans who were made in God’s image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1,3; 9:6) tried to turn God into earthly images such as (1) animals, (2) forces of nature, or (3) human forms. These are idolatries! Some new forms of this old sin are (1) environmentalism (mother earth), (2) New Age eastern thought (mysticism, spiritualism, and the occult), (3) atheistic humanism (Marxism, utopianism, progressive idealism and ultimate faith in politics or education), (4) holistic medicine, and (5) education.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:24-25

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. ²⁵For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

1:24, 26, 28 “God gave them over” This was the worst possible judgment. It was God saying “let fallen man have his own way” (cf. Ps. 81:12; Hosea 4:17; Acts 7:42). Verses 23-32 describe God’s rejection of the pagan world and its religiosity (and ours)!

1:25 “exchanged the truth of God for a lie” This can be understood in several ways (1) the self-deification of mankind (cf. II Thes. 2:4,11); (2) mankind’s worship of that which he has made—idols (cf. Isa. 44:20; Jer. 13:25; 16:19); or (3) mankind’s rejection of the truth of the gospel (cf. Jn 14:17; I Jn. 2:2 1,27).

▣ **“worshiped and served”** Mankind will always have gods. All humans sense there is someone, some truth, or something beyond themselves.

▣ **“forever”** This is literally the Greek idiomatic phrase, “unto the ages” (cf. Lk. 1:33; Rom. 1:25; 11:36; 16:27; Gal. 1:5; I Tim. 1:17). Other related phrases are “unto the age” (cf. Matt. 21:19 [Mk. 11:14]; Lk. 1:55; Jn. 6:5,58; 8:35; 12:34; 13:8; 14:16; II Cor. 9:9) and “of the age of the ages” (cf. Eph. 3:21). There seems to be no distinction between these idioms for “forever.” The term “ages” may be plural in a figurative sense of the rabbinical grammatical construction called “the plural of majesty” or it may refer to the concept of several “ages” in the Jewish sense of “age of innocence,” “age of wickedness,” “age to come,” or “age of righteousness.”

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:26-27

²⁶For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, ²⁷and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

1:26,27 Homosexuality is one example of life apart from God’s will. It was a sin and a major cultural problem (1) in the OT (cf. Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:18), (2) in the Greco-Roman world (cf. I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:10), and (3) in our day.

Homosexuality is probably listed as one example of the fallen life because of the entire context’s orientation to Gen. 1-3. Mankind was made in God’s image (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1,3; 9:6). Mankind was made male and female (cf. Gen. 1:27). God’s command was to be fruitful and multiply (cf. Gen. 1:28; 9:1,7). Mankind’s fall (cf. Gen. 3) disrupted God’s plan and will. Homosexuality is an obvious violation!

However it must be stated that this is not the only sin mentioned in the context (cf. vv. 29-31). All sins show mankind’s separation from God and their deserved punishment. All sin, especially lifestyle sin, is abhorrent to God.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1:28-32

²⁸And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³²and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

1:28-31 This is one sentence in Greek. It characterized rebellious, fallen, independent mankind (cf. Rom. 13:13; I Cor. 5:11; 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5; I Tim. 1:10; Rev. 21:8).

Mankind’s fall was that he chose life apart from God. Hell is that life made permanent. Independence is the crime! Mankind needs God, he is lost, inadequate and unfulfilled apart from Him. The worst part of an eternal hell is God’s relational absence! God is present in all of creation (cf. Ps. 139:7-12).

1:29 “a depraved mind” What fallen mankind sees as freedom is self-worship: “Anything and everything for me!” The agent of the PASSIVE VOICE is stated as God in 1:24,26,28 but in this context’s relationship to Gen. 1-3 it is mankind’s choice of knowledge and self which caused the problem. God allowed His creation to suffer the consequences of their own choices, their own independence.

▣ **“being filled with”** This is a PERFECT PASSIVE PARTICIPLE. Humans are filled and characterized by what they dwell upon. The rabbis would say that in every human heart is a black (evil *yetzer*) dog and a white (good *yetzer*) dog. The one who is fed the most becomes the largest.

1:29-31 These are the results and symptoms of life without God. They characterize individuals and societies who choose to reject the God of the Bible. This was one of several lists of sins that Paul gave (cf. I Cor. 5:11; 6:9; II Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:31; 5:3-4; Col. 3:5-9).

1:32 “those who practice such things are worthy of death” This statement reflects the Law of Moses. It is summarized in Rom. 6:16,21,23; 8:6,13. Death is the opposite of God’s will and God’s life (cf. Ezek. 18:32; I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9).

▣ **“but also give hearty approval to those who practice them”** Misery loves company. Fallen mankind uses the sins of others as an excuse, “everyone is doing it.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why did Paul write to the Roman church?
2. Why was Romans such an important theological statement of Christianity?
3. Outline 1:18-3:20 in your own words.
4. Will those who have never heard the Gospel be rejected for not trusting Christ?
5. Explain the difference between “natural revelation” and “special revelation.”
6. Describe human life without God.
7. Do verses 24-27 address the issue of homosexuality?