



Volume 2, Issue 18

# ZWTF

Saturday, October 5, 2013 Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

## ROMANS<sup>Part 1</sup>

INTRODUCTION



**H**ello, everyone. This edition of the ZWTF begins a series on the book of Romans, based on A.E. Knoch's *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament*.

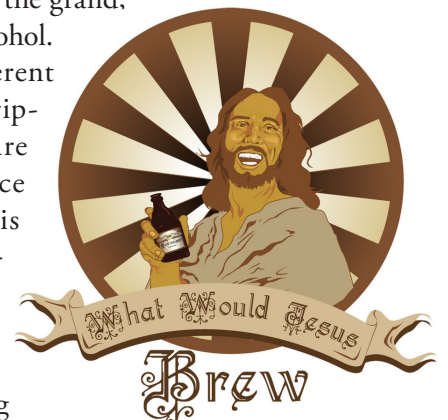
Are there any sinners out there? Ah ha. I thought so. Do you want to know how God can look you straight in the eye and think well of you? *Read Romans*. Or maybe you want it to work the other way. That is, you want to be at peace with God, even though He comes across at times like a raving lunatic. The prescription is the same. *Read Romans*.

Not only is God not a raving lunatic, but He likes you. It's all in Romans. I swear it is.

A lot of famous people became acquainted with God by reading the book of Romans. (Kim Kardashian is not one of them. She became acquainted with Prada by reading *Elle*.) Martin Luther was one of these famous people. He studied Romans while spending large amounts of time on the toilet. This is a true story. The man had digestive and theological problems simultaneously. (Some believe these maladies were related; I am one of them.) Martin Luther's mind tortured him about whether or not God liked him, or whether God deep down thought he was fat and ugly. (With Luther, there was no middle ground; he was a man of extremes.) *Romans* settled the issue for Martin Luther forever, and it can do the same for you *and* for Kim Kardashian, should she ever choose to read it. The book of Romans allowed Martin Luther to enjoy beer for the rest of his life without feeling guilty.

Tastes great. Less Filling. No guilt. It did make him fat, however. Being pronounced non-guilty by God doesn't alter what sin does to our bodies. Luther's tub o' lard proportions failed to frighten the Luther-loving Deity. If Jesus were on earth today, He would definitely drink beer. Unlike Luther, He would know to stop before becoming fat and sassy. Jesus would drink enough to make Him happy and sand the edge off life's horrors. This is the grand, beneficent design of alcohol.

Romans is different than the rest of Scripture. All other Scripture falls short of the grace unveiled by Paul in this letter. All other Scripture—besides Paul's letters—were penned to Israel and pertain to law. The best thing



a sinner can hope for under law? A probationary pardon based on repentance. Three things. Did you get them? Here they are in proper order:

- a) **repentance**
- b) **pardon**
- c) **probation**

Israelites had to a) feel sorry for their sins, analyze their walks constantly, and confess their sins to God every other second. Repentance involves all this. If an Israelite did this sincerely and with proper reverence (no gum chewing during repentance, please), God granted him or her a b) pardon. A pardon means, “You sinned by drinking too much beer and chewing gum while repenting, but since you confessed it, I am going to overlook the penalty.” The problem with a pardon is that it is c) probationary, that is, God keeps dropping by your house to make sure you’re still drinking normal-sized flagons of beer, and chewing gum only at the proper times. If you aren’t, then the pardon is revoked and you have to start over with a) repentance.

You know the drill.

Sin is not at all treated this way in Romans. In fact, the book of Romans slaps pardon in the face. Don’t feel bad for those Scriptures teaching nothing but pardon.



These Scriptures don’t mind. Why would they? They’re not really slapped in the face, just left in the dust. These Scriptures don’t teach justification. All they *want* to do is pardon. They don’t know anything *but* pardon. Your cat doesn’t mind when you bathe the dog, because the cat doesn’t want to be bathed. Leviticus doesn’t *want*

unlimited grace. It doesn’t know anything about it. It’s not in its nature to look at people and say, “You’re right no matter what.” Leviticus throws stones instead. It doesn’t look over at Romans and envy it. Leviticus does its thing, Romans does its thing. Since the other Scriptures don’t intrude on Romans and Romans doesn’t intrude on other Scriptures, I want you to stay away from pushing these books into places neither of them want to go. Stop trying to make them mingle at the same dinner party. It’s like adding chocolate syrup to the pâté de foie gras. When you mix Romans with the other Scriptures, you create an unpalatable mush. You read about grace in Romans on Friday, but then on Saturday you kill a goat. Well now. This sort of activity will eventually give you more lower bowel trouble than Luther.

In Romans, we have complete vindication before God. It is as though God is looking down from His judge’s bench and saying, “Not guilty!” Wouldn’t you love to hear that? What if you were dragged before a judge, having been accused of hundreds of crimes that you actually did commit? Let’s say you

habitually stole hubcaps, robbed liquor stores, murdered people, and chewed gum at the wrong time. You come up before the judge, and you’re naturally

**“Stop trying to make these books of Scripture mingle at the same dinner party.”**

worried. You’re defenseless. Everyone knows you’re guilty. In fact, you’ve admitted as much. The bailiff drags you in by your ear. You eventually dare to look up at the judge, and there sits your Father, smiling from the bench, winking at you.

What I just said may make some people mad. This hypothetical criminal ought to be punished. In our legal system, he would be. But in the legal system described in Romans (that is, in God’s legal system), there is no punishment for these sins, no, not even the sin of chewing gum at the wrong time. Is this because Jesus Christ was punished for our sins? No. It is because God took all of our sins and put them on Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ died, He took our sins with Him. When He rose from the dead, He arose without them. Now they’re all gone. God didn’t punish Christ, He sent Him to us as a love letter to take away our sins.

It’s that simple. It’s that unbelievable (which is why most people can’t believe it.)

This is what Romans is here to say.

How can sin be gone—just like that? Don't people have to pay for their sins? Why doesn't God enact revenge? Isn't He upset? Why doesn't He make people pay, pay, pay! At least with a pardon, God initially blames the person and saddles them with guilt. At least in the Israel gospel, God says, "You're guilty as a rotten pomegranate, but if you confess your sin, cry a lot, and promise not to do it again, I will let you off the hook."

None of that in Romans. Romans is radical. If you're not radical, you will not like the book of Romans. It's going to be hard for some of you to believe that your past, present, and future sins are gone. (This juicy treat is known as Justification.) That's why, for the next several weeks, I am going to take you step-by-step through the entire book of Romans. Why? Because Romans is an entire book. Beside that, you are only going to get this great news concerning sin *from* the book of Romans. And for some of you, you are only going to get this great news from Romans, from me. That's fine. I got it from somebody, too.

I dare you to find the phrase "God says you're righteous" anywhere else in Scripture. I'm not really daring you. Don't try. You won't find it. It will be like looking for the thirteenth Easter egg, when the Easter Bunny only hid twelve.

## FRAMEWORK OF ROMANS

The book of Romans has a framework. It's another hard-to-believe thing, I know. Romans seems like a random hodgepodge of words, as though Paul were disgorging all he knew, unconcerned with paragraphing, participles, or basic outlining skills. It's like Paul is just spraying words out of a can and losing control of the can.



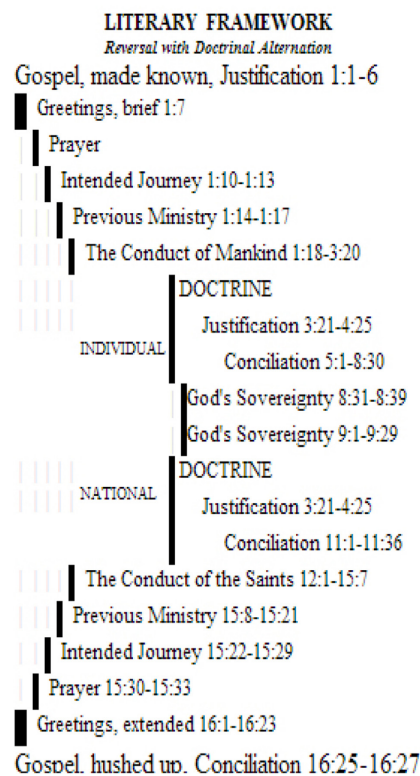
Not so. Paul knows exactly what he's doing. Or at least, the holy spirit knew what Paul was doing. Paul wrote this letter under the inspiration of the holy spirit. This means that another power directed his words. Did Paul realize this was happening? I'm not sure. I think he did. But like any writer, he became unconscious of it in the heat of trying to explain

this stuff to his friends in Rome. That's what this is: a letter to friends. God gave Paul every single word of this letter. Paul dictated every word to his scribe, Tertius, who wrote like crazy trying to keep up. I believe Paul wrote Romans in one or two days, perhaps in one sitting. I see so much stream-of-consciousness style writing here that it's hard to believe Paul spent months, or even a week at it. Paul is disgorging thoughts as they come; the holy spirit, I believe, is adding the supernatural order and structure.

Romans is dominated by three great themes, or teachings: 1) Justification, 2) Conciliation, and 3) Sovereignty. Justification is God's own righteousness which He shares with you and me, the sinners. Conciliation is

God's own peace, which He gives to everyone bold enough to believe God means it when He says He has no problems with us. (It makes us peaceful to contemplate that.) Sovereignty is God's own unencumbered will making all the blessings of Romans happen.

If God is not sovereign, that is, if He doesn't have the power, smarts or will to do everything just as He pleases, none of these blessings



are dependable. They can all be derailed. What would Justification be if God couldn't make sure Jesus died on the cross? What if God wanted to put a particular sin on Christ, but the sin refused to go? What if the Romans soldiers went on strike, and refused to crucify Christ at just the right time? None of that. Everything goes as planned, because God planned everything. God planned it, and has the power and smarts to enact His plan. As Jesus Christ (Ted Neely) sings to His Father in *Jesus Christ Superstar*: "You hold every card."

## HERE COME DA SERIES

Why is it important that I begin this series? Because every one of these vast and vital themes is either denied or degraded by the Christian Religion which—in case you haven’t noticed—is the most popular religion on earth, full of the most self-righteous people. For instance, who believes Justification? No Christian I know catches a whiff of it. These people talk about it, but when pressed they can’t define it. They don’t know what it is. They throw the term around to sound theological and smart, but they’re neither.

Christians can only think in terms of forgiveness. They can’t get their heads around God not reckoning sin. Just listen to their songs. Find me a Christian song that doesn’t have the word “forgiveness” in it. Or, “He has cleansed me like snow.” Or, “He has topped my soiled package with a beautiful red bow.” He hasn’t done any of these things. None of these things is Justification. If you’re cleansed, you must have been dirty. If the red bow is such a shock, you must really be soiled. But no. A righteous man doesn’t need a beautiful red bow to help sell purity in the sight of God. How could a man to whom sin is not reckoned need cleansed? See? It’s hard to think the new way.



What about Conciliation? Forget it. Christians still try to please God so that God will continue to like them. This can’t bring peace (conciliation) because there are thousands of ways to gall a still-grouchy God. Sovereignty? Ha-ha. Christians believe in free will. Thus, they believe in their own sovereignty, rather than God’s. Just a slight problem there.



## THIS AIN'T GOD

I write so that these great truths can grab you and give you some practical help in life. This is just what they are meant to do, and what they will do. But first you have to know about them.

Take a look at that structure again. It’s not as complicated as it looks. Every major teaching in the doctrinal section of Romans (chapters 3 through 11; not all of Romans is doctrine) is talked about twice: first from the viewpoint of the individual, and then again—later in the book—from the larger viewpoint of the nation Israel. The second half of the third and fourth chapters prove that God likes you and can’t do anything *but* like you. The second half of the ninth and the tenth chapters explains how this blessing affects the nations (God likes the nations) through Israel’s screw-ups with the law. See? The same truth (Justification) is seen to be personal as well as national. (Paul loves teaching the individual Roman believers great things, but he’s still concerned about Israel and her Circumcision calling.)

This repetition happens as well with the great truth that God is now at peace with everyone, including Joel Osteen (Conciliation). This truth is explained to the individual in chapters five, six, seven, and part of eight. Paul takes up the national aspect of this truth in chapter eleven.

That God is running the show for the sake of His people (Sovereignty) is discussed at the end of the eighth chapter. That God works His will not only among Israel but with all other nations (He moves them like chess pieces), is discussed in chapter nine. This is Sovereignty at the national level.

## NATIONAL SCOPE

It’s important to recognize the national scope of chapters nine through eleven. If you try taking things Paul says about Israel and the nations in chapter 11, for instance, and apply them to you personally, you’ll

lose your peace. When you read about those branches being lopped off, you'll imagine God has changed His mind about thinking kindly of you, through Christ (elaborated upon in chapters three and four), and is ready to lop you out of Himself. God hardened the hearts of neither Paul, nor the saints in Rome, but He did harden Israel's *national* heart. Nationally, Israel has blown it via unbelief. In the meantime, individuals of the Roman ecclesia get freighted with boatloads of the stuff (belief). Not one thing in the national chapters (refer to the chart), applies to either Paul, personally, or to you and me as individual believers. There. I just saved you tons of angst. All because of a simple chart.

### DE-WORRIED

I know. You were worried about being broken off the olive tree like those branches described in Romans, chapter 11. Now you know: this is national, not individual. Whenever you hear "olive tree," you should think Israel. Stop wringing your hands over the national di-



saster *Israel* has become. The unbelieving majority of Israel are broken off; they are not good boys and girls. The nations as a whole (the wild olive tree), are grafted into the natural tree. In other words, the other nations run

the world now while Israel just sits there scratching dirt like a bunch of gnatty unbelievers living next to Syria, which is what they are. But now that the nations are misbehaving as badly as Israel, God will cut *them* off. Not individual believers, but nations. We'll talk more about this when we get to Romans, chapter 11. In the meantime, stop seeing yourself in the analogy of the olive tree. **YOU CAN'T GET CHOPPED OUT OF CHRIST!** Romans, chapter 11 is not about you, but about Israel and the other nations.

Look at the other things on the chart. Look at the balance. Later in the letter, Paul rehashes themes already mentioned earlier, but with different twists and from different perspectives. He didn't know he was doing this. This is where the holy spirit kicked in. Every letter contains this structure, or one like it. I think Paul was aware of the immediate context, but not this larger scheme. He knew all the trees, but was unaware he was building a forest. It is evidence of divine inspiration.

See how helpful this series promises to be? You haven't seen anything yet. I'm just getting warmed up. In two weeks: CHAPTER 1!

## THANKS FOR YOUR LOVE

The recent hiatus from the Martin Zender Internet show was due to an emotional mess I get into after visiting my sons for the weekend in Ohio. It returned me afresh to the horror of my wife of 25 years abandoning our marriage. I can't believe how long it takes humans to heal. I've been angry at God over it. Very angry. Then the 20th anniversary of this ministry arrived (October 1), and all the trials of this job (emotional, spiritual) came to call. I hid in this room for four days and could not even face or speak to my Pennsylvania family. I was ready to chuck the work completely. I have gotten this way only four times in the past 20 years. Teaching this message in the midst of suffering (there is lots of it) is the hardest thing I've ever done. It is sometimes too much pressure. This, too, shall pass. I pray to be able to endure to the end—and may the end come soon. Thank you for your abiding love and patience. I need both. ■