

Lesson 13 at StudyRomans.org

Handout for Lesson 13

The Handout for Lesson 13 includes an excerpt from an early non-Biblical text that was written around AD 95 by a man named Clement, an elder in the church at Rome. This document is the earliest known non-Biblical text mentioning the Apostle Paul, having been written about 30 years after Paul's death. Some believe that this Clement was also the Clement described in Philippians 4:3 as one of Paul's fellow workers.

The most interesting thing that Clement tells us about Paul is that he reached "the farthest bounds of the West" (5:7) — which many believe is a reference to Spain, which was the westernmost Roman province to which Paul intended to go.

If that is correct, then Paul must have eventually been released from the imprisonment that we find at the end of Acts (AD 60-62), which allowed him to then travel to Spain (AD 62-64), as he tells the Romans in this letter that he wants to do. After returning from Spain, Paul must have been imprisoned again (AD 64-67) under the persecution of Nero, which later ended with his martyrdom.

This second imprisonment in Rome would then be the imprisonment described in 2 Timothy, which does sound much worse than the house arrest we read about at the end of Acts.

Romans 1:13

Romans 1:13 — I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Paul told the Roman Christians back in verse 11 that he longed to see them in person. That might have caused some of them to wonder what was taking him so long. If Paul really wanted to travel to Rome that badly, then why not travel to Rome? What was the hold up?

Paul does not tell them here what the hold up was, but he does confirm that there was a hold up of some sort beyond his control. He had often wanted to come, but he had so far been prevented from coming. And Paul wanted them to know that.

And we have two questions — first, what was the hold up, and second, why didn't Paul tell them here what specifically it was that was preventing him from coming?

We have already talked about one possible hold up for Paul — the edict of Claudius. All of the Jews had been kicked out of Rome by Claudius, and that edict while it was in effect would have made it illegal for Paul to visit Rome.

But is that really a good excuse? After all, Jesus commanded that we preach the gospel to everyone (Mark 16:15), and Peter reminds us that we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). So shouldn't Paul have just ignored the emperor's edict and traveled to Rome anyway?

That is a difficult question, and I suggest that we save that difficult question until we get to Romans 13, where Paul will command that

every person be subject to the governing authorities. How does that command from Paul fit in with Peter's command in Acts 5? Let's save that for later.

For now, let's just say that if the edict from Claudius fell under the umbrella of Romans 13 and not under the umbrella of Acts 5, then that edict would have prevented Paul from traveling to Rome.

But there was something else keeping Paul out of Rome, and it was physics! Paul could not do everything and be everywhere all at the same time!

Can anyone read Acts and the epistles and think that Paul was just idly lazing around while living the high life on the Mediterranean Sea? Hardly! Paul was always working; Paul was always teaching; Paul was always traveling. There was nothing lazy about Paul, as Paul himself had told the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 15:10 — But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, **I worked harder than any of them**, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

In fact, one reason why Paul was prevented from going to Rome was that Paul was trying to solve all of the problems in Corinth! That was what Paul was doing when he wrote this letter to Rome.

And I think we know with certainty that Paul's missionary work elsewhere was at least a big reason and possibly the only reason why Paul had not been to Rome earlier. Why? Because Paul will tell us that later in this letter.

In Romans 15:15-21, Paul describes his work for God in teaching the Gentiles “from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum,” and then Paul says this:

Romans 15:22 — **This is the reason** why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.

That verse from Romans 15 certainly seems to answer our question here about this verse in Romans 1.

And as for why Paul didn't list any of those reasons here in Romans 1, it may simply have been because Paul was planning to give the reason later in Romans 15, which he did.

And we must not miss the fact that, here in verse 13, Paul refers to the Christians in Rome as his **brothers**. What does that word mean?

First, let's look at the footnote in the ESV:

In New Testament usage, depending on the context, *adelphoi* (translated “brothers”) may refer either to brothers or to brothers and sisters.

Is that footnote correct, or is that footnote just another example of modern political correctness and gender-inclusiveness run amok?

The answer is that the footnote is correct; the Greek word *adelphoi* can refer either to brothers or to brothers and sisters depending on the context, and we can prove that fact from the text of Romans itself.

In Romans 16:1-16, Paul greets many people in Rome, including many women: Priscilla, Mary, Junia, Julia, and others. And then what does Paul say in the very next verse?

Romans 16:17 — I appeal to you, **brothers**, ...

There the Greek word translated “brothers” certainly includes both the brothers and the sisters Paul had just mentioned by name. And I think the same is true here in Romans 1:13.

This word “brothers” in verse 13 is Paul’s favorite way of addressing his fellow Christians. By one count, Paul uses the word that way 127 times in his epistles.

And isn’t that word a perfect tie-in back to what we said about verse 12? Paul was not stepping down from his majestic mountain-top retreat to teach the poor natives living far beneath him. Instead, Paul was teaching his brothers and his sisters. Paul had not yet met most of these people, and most of them had not yet met Paul — but they were all family! They were brothers and sisters.

And there is a crucial lesson here for us. The moment we in the church quit seeing ourselves as family is the same moment we cease to be effective in our work for God.

We are the children of God. We are the family of God. We are the household of God. And yes, we sometimes have disagreements — but those disagreements are *family* disagreements, and family disagreements always take place on a foundation of love.

Paul will later in this letter have some things to say to Rome about disagreements in the church, and what will Paul say to them? He will remind them that they are brothers.

Romans 14:10 — Why do you pass judgment on your **brother**? Or you, why do you despise your **brother**?

Romans 14:15 — For if your **brother** is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

Romans 14:21 — It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your **brother** to stumble.

I think we sometimes need that same reminder. Yes, we sometimes fight, and yes, we sometimes have disagreements — but those are family fights and family disagreements. We are all members of the same family. No matter how upset we might get with each other, we know that we will all be sitting down to eat dinner together in the same household at the end of the day!

Let's turn our attention next to the end of verse 13: "that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles."

On the surface, that verse sounds like Paul is writing this letter **only** to the Gentiles in Rome. If I said that you can have what is inside my box and that you can also have the rest of the books, you would likely think that my box is full of books. So perhaps a natural conclusion here in verse 13 is for "you" to be the Gentile Christians in Rome and "the rest of the Gentiles" to be all of the other Gentiles in Rome. But, once again, there are some problems with that view.

- First, we know that Paul will specifically address the Jews in this letter, such as, for example, in Romans 7:1. And so if Romans begins with "Dear Gentiles in Rome," why does Paul at times speak only to the Jews?

- Second, if the problem in the church in Rome was tension between the Gentile Christians and the Jewish Christians, how would ignoring the Jewish Christians have helped with that problem? Wouldn't Paul's apparent favoritism have instead made the problem worse?

Perhaps we should start by looking at that pronoun "you" that we find here in verse 13.

"I want **you** to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to **you** (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among **you** as well as among the rest of the Gentiles."

I think the first usage of "you" must be the Christians in Rome, either all Christians in Rome or perhaps only the Gentile Christians in Rome. Why? Because of that word "brothers." Paul says, "I want you to know, brothers,..." Paul is talking to Christians here. (And, yes, Paul will refer to all Jews as his brothers in Romans 9:3, but I think we can safely rule that out here. Verse 13 clearly includes Gentiles. The question is whether it also includes Jews.)

So does that mean the other two uses of "you" in verse 13 must refer to the same group? Perhaps it *likely* means that, but I don't think it *must* mean that. Paul might be using "you" narrowly to refer to the church in Rome and then broadly in the same verse to refer to the city of Rome. "I want **you in the church in Rome** to know that I have often intended to come **to you in the city of Rome** to reap some harvest among all of the people in Rome."

That view is possible, especially given that word "harvest," which is the same word we find in the parable of the sower.

Matthew 13:8 — Other seeds fell on good soil and produced **grain**, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

But what about that phrase “the rest of the Gentiles” in verse 13? Doesn’t that phrase require the pronoun “you” to include **only** Gentiles?

No, it doesn’t. We looked at this issue back in our discussion of verse 5. The Greek word “*ethnos*” that is translated as “nations” in verse 5 is the same Greek word translated “Gentiles” here in verse 13.

And so why do we see two different English words for the same Greek word appearing only 8 verses apart? Because the ESV translators were not sure whether that word in verse 5 included the Jews, but they apparently were sure about that same word in verse 13.

But I am not so sure. I see the same problems with the translation “Gentiles” here in verse 13 that we talked about back in verse 5. I do not think Paul began this letter by saying, “Dear *Gentile* Christians in Rome.” Instead, I think Paul began this letter by saying, “Dear Christians in Rome.”

So, if the Greek word *ethnos* can mean “nations” rather than “Gentiles,” then what would that change in translation do here in verse 13?

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the **nations**.

I like that translation better than the ESV. It is certainly more consistent in that it uses the same English word for the same Greek word in the same context. But I also like it because it immediately solves the problems that arise if we view this letter as being addressed only to Gentiles.

And, we should add, there is another way of looking at verse 13 even if we use the translation “Gentile.” Out of all the nations of the world, there was only one Jewish nation.

John 11:48 — If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and **our nation.**”

All of the other nations of the world were Gentile nations. Were there any Jews living in those Gentile nations? Yes, we know there were.

Acts 2:5 — Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men **from every nation under heaven.**

And so, could *ethnos* include Jews even if *ethnos* meant Gentile nations? Yes, it could. It certainly does in the verse we just read from Acts 2.

So, where are we? I think we have at least two possibilities:

- Paul is telling the church in Rome that he wants to reap a harvest in Rome as well as among the other nations of the world.
- Paul is telling the Christians in Rome (both Jew and Gentile) that he wants to reap a harvest among them as well as among Christians (both Jew and Gentile) living in the other Gentile nations of the world.

I favor the first view, although either view could be correct.

But why does Paul mention other areas of the world here? I think Paul will answer that question when we get to Romans 15.

Romans 15:24 — I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Paul wanted to go to Spain after he went to Rome, and Paul wanted the church in Rome to support him in that journey to Spain. (And, based on what we see on the Handout for Lesson 13, Paul may have made it to Spain after his first imprisonment in Rome.) I think Paul is setting the stage here in Romans 1 for the request he will make in Romans 15. The city of Rome was not the only Gentile area that Paul was longing to visit — he also wanted to visit Spain.

But what if all of that is wrong? What if Paul is, in fact, talking only about the Gentiles here at the end of verse 13? Could we make sense of that? Yes, I think we could.

In that case, Paul could be saying here that he wanted to reap a harvest among the **Christians** in Rome as well as among the rest of the **Gentiles** in Rome. That is, Paul wanted to reap a harvest among the **Jewish and Gentile** Christians who had already obeyed the gospel, and among the **Gentiles** who had not already obeyed the gospel.

But why would Paul leave out the Jews who had not obeyed the gospel? Perhaps because Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13), or perhaps because the last time the Jewish Christians and the unbelieving Jews in Rome had gotten into a big fight over Christ, they had all been kicked out of the city!

That view is possible, but I don't much like it — especially in view of Romans 9:3, where Paul tells us he would give up his own salvation for the sake of his fellow Jews. That verse from Romans 9 makes it very hard for me to believe that Paul would leave out the unbelieving Jews here in Romans 1.

I favor the first view, which is simply that Paul is telling the church in Rome that he wants to reap a harvest in Rome as well as among the other nations of the world.

Romans 1:14

Romans 1:14 — I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

At first glance, verse 14 seems a bit out of place given both its lack of a connecting phrase and its seeming change of subject. What does verse 14 mean? Who are these various groups of people? Why does Paul say this? Why does Paul say this here?

Let's start with the identity of the groups, and then look at Paul's obligation to the groups. In verse 14, we find four groups in two pairs: we have the Greeks and the barbarians, and we have the wise and the foolish.

Who are the Greeks and the barbarians?

High School English pop quiz: what is onomatopoeia? It is a word that phonetically imitates, resembles, or suggests the sound that it describes. Think hiss or sizzle or meow.

The word “barbarian” in Greek is an example of onomatopoeia. To the Greek ear, the word “barbarian” mimicked the sound of a non-Greek speaker — “bar! bar! bar!”

And the modern definition of that word “barbarian” as an uncultured or brutish person lets us know what the Greeks thought about those who did not speak Greek! And, yes, as far as the Greeks were concerned, the Jews were barbarians — although the Jews themselves sometimes used that same word to refer to those who were neither Greek nor Jewish.

And so who are the Greeks and the barbarians? I think if we asked a Greek-speaking person in Paul’s day, the answer would have been people who spoke Greek versus people who did not speak Greek.

In this sense, the term “Greek” is not an ethnic grouping but is instead a cultural or linguistic grouping. Educated Romans, for example, were not *ethnically* Greek but they were *culturally* and *linguistically* Greek. Yes, they spoke Latin, but they also spoke Greek, which was the language of philosophy, literature, higher education, and business.

And there is something we can say about everyone on earth when it comes to the Greek language — either you speak it or you do not. And that means, to a first century Roman, either you are a Greek or you are a barbarian. Everyone falls into one of those two buckets. In short, the Greeks and the barbarians included everyone.

Who are the wise and the foolish?

When we see these two groups, we likely want to be numbered among the wise. But is that the right choice?

Yes, Paul does criticize the foolish later in this same chapter:

Romans 1:22-23 — **Claiming to be wise, they became fools**, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

But elsewhere Paul also criticizes the wise:

1 Corinthians 1:20-21,25 — Where is the one who is **wise**? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made **foolish** the **wisdom** of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through **wisdom**, it pleased God through **the folly of what we preach** to save those who believe. ... **For the foolishness of God is wiser than men**, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

So which group is better — the wise or the foolish? That answer is simple. Wisdom is better than foolishness when wisdom and foolishness are defined by God. But wisdom is worse than foolishness when wisdom and foolishness are defined by the world. In fact, that is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians. "Has not God made **foolish** the **wisdom** of the world?"

So who is defining the terms here in verse 14? God or the world? The answer is that it doesn't matter — our view of this verse is the same either way. Why? Because either way the phrase "the wise and the foolish" includes everyone in the world.

Whether we define these terms as God defines them or as the world defines them, everyone falls into one or the other category. If we let God define them, then we in the church are the wise and those in the world are the foolish. But if we let the world define them, then we in

the church are the foolish and those outside the church are the wise. Either way, the phrase includes everybody.

And I think that is Paul's purpose here. I think Paul is just using some common figures of speech to describe all of humanity. We are each either Greek speaking or not. We are each either wise or not.

Elsewhere Paul will divide the world differently — as Gentile or Jew, as male or female, as slave or free — but here Paul divides the world as Greek or barbarian or as wise or foolish.

Those who think verse 13 is focused on the Gentiles like to argue that verse 14 is dividing up only the Gentile world, but I think their reasoning is circular — they say that verse 13 is about the Gentiles because verse 14 is about the Gentiles, and they say verse 14 is about the Gentiles because verse 13 is about the Gentiles. That is not a good argument!

I think the better view is that verses 13 and 14 are about everyone who needed to hear the gospel of Christ — and that is the entire world: whether Gentile or Jew, whether male or female, whether slave or free, whether Greek or barbarian, or whether wise or foolish.

And, yes, that is true whether or not we have already obeyed the gospel. We all need to hear the gospel, and we all need to keep hearing the gospel. Is there anyone who no longer needs to keep hearing the good news of Christ?

What was Paul's obligation to the Greeks and the barbarians and to the wise and the foolish?

I think we just answered that question. Paul's obligation was to preach the gospel to them. And where did Paul get that obligation? Paul got that obligation from Jesus.

Acts 9:15-16 — But the Lord said to him (Ananias), “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name **before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel**. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

The Gentiles and the children of Israel — that's everybody. Paul's obligation from Jesus was to carry his name before everybody.

And, yes, Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, but that focus on the Gentiles did not change his obligation. And I think we will see that in this letter itself when, in Romans 9:3, Paul says that he would give up his own salvation for the sake of his fellow Jews. Paul's obligation was to everyone, which I think is the point of verse 14.

But why did Paul say this here? I think verse 15 will answer that question.