

Romans Study Part 1: Background, Introduction, Thesis (1:1-17)

Covenant Presbyterian Church

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“Romans has probably been the object of more intense study by more highly intelligent and motivated individuals than any document in human history.” - James Montgomery Boice

I. Background

A. Provenance

1. Written by Paul (1:1) in the winter of 57-58 AD while he is in Corinth during his 3rd missionary journey
2. Discerning location
 - a) Phoebe, a member of the church in Cenchreae (one of the Corinthian port cities) has carried the letter to Rome for Paul (Rom. 16:1-2). Gaius, whom Paul baptized in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14), is now hosting Paul while he writes this letter (16:23).
 - b) This situates Paul in Corinth at the time that he was composing the letter.
3. Discerning timing
 - a) We know for sure that Paul visited Corinth twice: for 18 months during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18), and for three months on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-3). We also know that Paul intended to travel to Rome by way of Corinth and Jerusalem on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:21); he tells the Romans that he plans to visit them on his way to Spain after traveling to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:24-28).
 - b) This indicates that Paul wrote the letter to the Romans during his second stay in Corinth as part of the third missionary journey.

B. Founding of the Church in Rome

1. The church in Rome was **not** founded by Paul (1:13) and there's no historical evidence that Peter founded the church in Rome
2. The best guess is that the church in Rome was founded by a group of people who had visited Jerusalem during Pentecost, and heard the Gospel from Peter (Acts 2:5-41)
 - a) This would mean the founders were Christians of Jewish descent
3. In AD 49 the Roman Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2) because of “constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus” (Suetonius, *Twelve Caesars*)
 - a) At this point the church in Rome would have consisted primarily (if not exclusively) of Christians of Gentile descent
4. The expulsion of the Jews most likely ended in AD 53, at which point the Christians of Jewish descent would have returned to the church in Rome

5. This explains some of the tension between the Jews and Gentiles that is alluded to throughout the letter
6. It also explains the emphasis that Paul puts on relationships among believers in the church (e.g. 12:3-13; 14:1-15:21)

II. Outline

- A. Introduction and Thesis (1:1-17)
 1. Greetings (1:1-7)
 2. Paul's desire to go to Rome (1:8-15)
 3. Thesis: Gospel is the power of God for salvation (1:16-17)
- B. The Unrighteousness of Humanity (1:18-3:20)
 1. Judgment on the Gentiles (1:18-32)
 2. Judgment on the Jewish people (2:1-3:8)
 3. Judgment on all humanity (3:9-20)
- C. The Gift of Righteousness (3:21-8:39)
 1. Justification (3:21-5:21)
 - a) Justification by grace through faith (3:21-4:25)
 - b) Basis for our assurance: the new Adam (5:1-21)
 2. Sanctification and Glorification (6:1-8:39)
 - a) Dead to sin, alive to Christ (6)
 - b) The struggle with indwelling sin (7)
 - c) Assurance of future glory (8)
- D. A Challenge to the Righteousness of God (9-11)
 1. The word of God has not failed (9:1-29)
 2. Israel's rejection of the Gospel brings the Gospel to the Gentiles (9:30-10:21)
 3. Israel's rejection of the Gospel is not total (11:1-10)
 4. Israel's rejection of the Gospel is not final (11:11-36)
- E. Living in Light of Righteousness: Christian Ethics (12:1-15:13)
 1. Guiding principle (12:1-2)
 2. A life of love (12:3-13:14)
 3. The Weak and the Strong (14:1-15:13)
- F. Closing Remarks (15:4-16:27)

III. Greetings (1:1-7)

- A. In one sense a typical start to an ancient letter: Paul identifies himself (1:1), his audience (1:7a), and greets his audience (1:7b)
 1. Paul is an apostle called and set apart by God
 2. He is writing to believers in Rome
- B. In another sense it is quite unique both for its length and theological depth
 1. Something important is being conveyed; major themes are introduced
 2. "...the gospel...promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (vv.1-2)
 - a) The gospel is the fulfillment of God's redemptive promises
 - b) It ushers in a new era of redemptive history; it further reveals God's redemptive plan

- c) But it is not new (at least not in the sense of being unprecedented or having a recent origin)
3. Parallelism in vv.3-4

Romans 1:3 - Humiliation	Romans 1:4 - Exaltation ¹
"was descended"	"was declared"
"from David"	"by his resurrection from the dead"
"according to the flesh"	"according to the Spirit of holiness"

- a) The parallelism concerns the two states of Christ, not the two natures of Christ
 - (1) Humiliation = incarnation, death
 - (2) Exaltation = resurrection, second advent, New Heavens and New Earth
 - b) "That is to say, the resurrection ushered Jesus into a new and powerful phase of his Davidic sonship. At Jesus's resurrection, the humanity of the Son of God was raised, transformed, and empowered by the Spirit of God. This present phase of his sonship is characterized by the power and life of the Holy Spirit. It is precisely these resources that the crucified and risen Christ graciously bestows upon and shares with his people for their salvation"²
4. "...obedience of faith...among all the nations" (1:5)
- a) This phrase bookends the letter: 1:5 and 16:26
 - (1) Shows that this is crucial to Paul's understanding of his apostleship
 - b) The faith that is the obedient response to the gospel *and* the obedience that comes from having genuine faith are probably both in mind here (i.e. justification and sanctification)
 - c) It is all for the sake of the name of Christ (v.5)

IV. Longing to go to Rome (1:8-15)

- A. A lengthy thanksgiving section
- B. Confirms that Paul did not found the church and does not have close ties to it (vv. 10, 13)
- C. Affirms the church in Rome is a strong church (vv.8, 12)
 - 1. It certainly has some troubles, which Paul addresses in the more pastoral sections of the letter (chs. 12, 14-15)

¹ Table is modified from Guy Prentiss Waters, "Romans," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*, ed. by Michael J. Kruger (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 177.

² Ibid, 178.

2. But it does not seem to have the same level of sinful dysfunction as other churches that Paul addresses (e.g. church in Corinth)
 3. The letter is mostly an extended theological treatise that serves to introduce Paul to the church in preparation for his future visit to Rome
 - D. Establishes that Paul's ministry is primarily to the Gentiles (vv.13-14)
- V. Thesis (1:16-17)
- A. "For" (v.16) refers back to vv.14-15; the message of a crucified savior/hero is foolishness to the Greeks (c.f. 1 Cor. 1:23)
 - B. But Paul is not ashamed to preach the gospel because **it is not foolishness, but the very power of God for salvation** (v.16)
 1. The gospel is both the *message* and the *means* of salvation
 - C. The gospel is salvation **for all who believe** - Jew and Gentile, male and female, young and old, wise and foolish, rich and poor, etc. (v.16)
 1. There is a redemptive-historical priority placed on the Jews, which will come up later in the letter (esp. chs 9-11), but this does **not** mean that the gospel is exclusively for the Jews or that they have access to it that others do not have
 - D. In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed
 1. Here, the righteousness of God refers to the righteousness that God imputes to the sinner in order that he may be declared righteous. It does not refer to righteousness as an attribute of God (i.e. his justice).
 - a) "It is what God gives to the sinner in the divine courtroom and thereby alone grounds God's legal or forensic declaring the sinner to be 'righteous.'"³
 - b) 'Paul speaks here not of an attribute of God, but of an act of God.'⁴
 2. This righteousness comes to us through faith from start to finish (v.17)

³ Ibid, 181.

⁴ Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, our Righteousness: Paul's theology of justification*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 46.