

INTRODUCTION AND ROM. 1:1-17

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INTRODUCTION

I. General Remarks

A. Romans has played a profound role in church history. The book was instrumental in the conversion of Augustine, the influential theologian of the late fourth and early 5th centuries.

B. Romans played a major role in the Protestant Reformation. Frederic Godet, an NT scholar from the 19th century, wrote in his commentary on Romans that "the Reformation was undoubtedly the work of the Epistle to the Romans."

1. Indeed, Romans played a pivotal role in the life of Martin Luther, a Catholic priest who was one of the leading voices of the Reformation. It was with regard to insight he received while studying Romans that he wrote, "I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates."

2. Romans likewise had a profound effect on the English reformer William Tyndale and on John Calvin, a Frenchman who led the Reformation in Geneva.

C. Modern scholars and expositors are effusive in their praise of the book. They call it "the cathedral of the Christian faith" and describe it as one of "the most important pieces of literature in the intellectual history of Western man." To study Romans is to study one of the deepest and richest revelations of God. If we are not blessed through this study, the fault lies with you or me or both of us but certainly not with the Book of Romans.

II. Authorship

A. Romans was written by the Apostle Paul (1:1) through the hand of Tertius (16:22), Paul's amanuensis or scribe (secretary). We know nothing else about Tertius, as this is the only time his name occurs in the New Testament. Ancient authors gave their scribes varying degrees of responsibility in the composition of their works. Since the language and style of Romans is very similar to Paul's other letters, and since there is no evidence that Tertius was involved with those letters, it makes more sense to think Paul pretty much dictated Romans to Tertius.

B. Clearly Paul is the author, so even if Tertius contributed to the wording, the letter is Paul's by approval and adoption. In that case, the process of divine inspiration incorporated Tertius's input. Note that Tertius included a personal greeting to the readers (16:22), which could mean he knew some of them, or perhaps he just felt a bond with them as fellow Christians.

III. Date – around A.D. 57

A. Written as Paul is concluding his third missionary journey

1. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem (15:25) at a time when he felt his missionary work in the eastern provinces had been completed (15:9, 23).

2. He is taking to Jerusalem the collection from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia for the poor among the saints (15:25-27). This corresponds with Acts 24:17 where, after completing his third missionary journey, Paul says he arrived in Jerusalem with gifts for the poor.

3. After delivering the gift to the saints in Jerusalem, he plans to head for Spain and to visit Rome on the way (15:23-24, 28).

B. Written from Corinth

1. 16:1-2 commends Phoebe, the servant of the church in Cenchræ, Corinth's eastern port (she is presumably carrying the letter).

2. 16:23 has a greeting from Gaius in whose house Paul is staying. This fits with Gaius of 1 Cor. 1:14.

3. 16:23 has a greeting from Erastus, who in the later letter of 2 Timothy (4:20) is said to have stayed in Corinth. Paul describes him as the "treasurer" of the city, and a Latin inscription has been found in Corinth referring to Erastus as "aedile" (commissioner of public works) of the city. That is why NIV translates "treasurer" in 16:23 as "director of public works." The Greek term may be broad enough to refer to the Latin office "aedile," or Erastus may have moved up to that after Romans was written.

4. 16:21 has greetings from Timothy and Sosipater, both of whom are included in Acts 20:4 as being with Paul when he left Greece in route to Jerusalem (Sopater being a shortened form of Sosipater).

C. All of this fits Acts 20:2-3 as the time of writing. Paul is concluding his third missionary journey and is staying in Greece for three months, which almost certainly means Corinth. It was the capital of the province and he had a deep connection with the church there.

D. Acts 20:2-3 can be dated from Acts 18:12, which has Paul in Corinth "[w]hile Gallio was proconsul of Achaia," and an inscription at Delphi from which one can calculate that Gallio held that office from the last half of A.D. 51 through the first half of 52. Working forward to Acts 20:2-3 gives an approximate date of A.D. 57, though some would date it a year later or one to three years earlier.

E. This date falls within what is known as "the five-year period of Nero," the first five years of Nero's reign as emperor, between 54 and 59.

1. Barry Smith states (<http://www.mycrandall.ca/courses/NTIntro/Rom.htm>), "This period in Roman history was considered the best period of the Roman Empire since the time of Augustus, unlike the latter part of Nero's reign (when the church was persecuted). This may explain why Paul makes no reference to any problems between the Roman believers and the civil authorities."

2. Though Nero was not yet persecuting Christians, his gross immorality was on display. Andreas Köstenberger, Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles write in their introduction to the New Testament (*The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 519-520):

Even early in his reign, however, the emperor was known to "practice every kind of obscenity." Suetonius described in vivid detail Nero's sins with mistresses and prostitutes and his unthinkable perversion. Nero raped one of Rome's Vestal Virgins [priestesses of the goddess Vesta]. He emasculated [castrated] and then publicly wed a boy named Sporus. Rome joked that the world would have been a happier place if Nero's father had married such a wife. Nero made himself the bride of his freedman Doryphorus. This was Rome's noble leader, and his conduct was undoubtedly a reflection, though perhaps an exaggerated one, of the immoral culture in which he lived.

IV. Church at Rome

A. Its founding

1. We do not know when or by whom the church in Rome was founded. Paul had not yet been to Rome (1:10, 13, 15:22). Peter is very unlikely because he was still in Jerusalem at the time of Acts 15 (A.D. 49), and there's evidence the church was in Rome by that time (Emperor Claudius's expulsion of Jews over disruption instigated by "Chrestus" was in A.D. 49). Moreover, it is impossible to think that Paul, who in 15:20 states that he will "not build on another person's foundation," would have written this letter or planned the kind of visit he describes in 1:8-15 to a church that was founded by Peter.

2. The most likely scenario for the founding of the church in Rome is that Jews, who were converted on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:10), brought their faith in Jesus back with them to their home synagogues. This squares with the assessment of the fourth-century church leader Ambrosiaster who wrote that the Romans "have embraced the faith of Christ, albeit according to the Jewish rite, without seeing any sign of mighty works or any of the apostles."

B. Its composition

1. There were both Jewish and Gentile elements in the church. It seems likely, however, that the Gentile Christians were in a majority large enough to justify Paul including the Christian community in Rome within the sphere of those Gentiles to whom his apostleship was especially directed (1:5-6, 13; 15:15-16).

2. If Christianity in Rome began among the Jews, how did this shift to a Gentile complexion occur?

a. What probably happened is that "God fearers," Gentiles who were interested in Judaism and attended the synagogue without becoming Jews, were the first Gentiles to be attracted to the faith. This would be in keeping with the pattern of Paul's mission.

b. This shift would have been greatly accelerated by Claudius's expulsion of Jews from Rome in A.D. 49.

(1) Roman historian Suetonius (A.D. 69-140) reports that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of "Chrestus." Most scholars agree that "Chrestus" is a misspelling of the Greek "Christos" and that the reference is probably to disputes within the Jewish community over the claims of Jesus to be "Christos," the Messiah. This expulsion is referred to in Acts 18:2 (Priscilla and Aquila expelled).

(2) Roman authorities would not have distinguished between Jews and Jewish Christians, so the Gentile element of the various house churches would have come to prominence with the eviction of all or virtually all of the Jews.

(3) As with similar expulsions of specific groups from Rome, this one did not stay in force long. Soon after Claudius's death in A.D. 54, Jews, like Priscilla and Aquila (16:3), were able to return. Jewish Christians who returned would probably be in a minority and were perhaps viewed with some condescension by the now-dominant Gentile wing.

V. Purpose of Letter

A. The general circumstance of the writing is that Paul has completed his pioneer missionary work in the east and now, after delivering the collections, plans to go to Spain to preach. He hopes to visit Rome and then continue on his way west with their blessing, interest, and support. It is thus perfectly natural that he would write to the church in Rome.

B. What is harder to understand is why Paul writes the things he writes. How is the content, which is so deeply theological, related to his purpose in writing? There are probably several reasons behind his writing of this letter.

1. The place and relationship of Jews and Gentiles within Christianity was a "hot" issue among Christians outside of Rome, and there is no reason to think the Christians in Rome were isolated from that debate. Paul had battled Judaizers in Galatia and Corinth and was concerned

as he wrote Romans about how the gift from the Gentile churches would be received in Jerusalem (15:25-31).

2. Paul wanted to secure a missionary base for his work in Spain, so he wanted the Roman Christians to know the truth about the gospel he preached. For some Jewish Christians, he needed to correct the false impression that his gospel was anti-law or perhaps even anti-Jewish (3:8). At the same time, he needed to change the thinking of those Jewish Christians who overemphasized the law and their Jewish prerogatives and to change the thinking of those Gentile Christians who tended to scorn everything Jewish. In other words, he wanted to unite Jew and Gentile around the truth of the gospel that they might as one support his work in Spain. He was no doubt aware that the church in Rome needed the kind of instruction he provided.

3. But perhaps most importantly (Kruse, 10-11), Paul views the predominantly Gentile church in Rome as being among those to whom his apostleship was especially directed (1:5-6, 13; 15:15-16). As he says in 15:15-16, he writes the things he does because in his role as a minister among the Gentiles he wants them to be an acceptable offering to God, meaning he wants them to be grounded in the truth of the gospel. In their specific context, that required him to address the particular matters about which he wrote, which would also serve his interest in securing a missionary base for his work in Spain.

ROM. 1:1-17

I. Opening (1:1-17)

A. Salutation (1:1-7) – Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, having been set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning his Son, who came from the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴who was appointed Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness from the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵Through him we received grace and apostleship for [bringing about] the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶among whom you also are, those called to belong to Jesus Christ. ⁷To all the beloved of God who are in Rome, those called to be saints: grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Paul refers to himself as a servant (slave) of Christ Jesus, one who has been specially called by God to serve in the cause of God's gospel. He *is* on a mission from God – to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus and the consequent amnesty and liberation that men and women may enjoy through faith in him.

2. This gospel, which concerns God's Son Jesus, was promised in advance through the prophets in the Old Testament. These "prophets" include men like Moses (Acts 3:21-23) and David (Acts 2:30), as well as those we would ordinarily classify as "prophets" per se. In 3:21 Paul insists that the law and prophets testify to the righteousness made known through the gospel, and in

16:26 he says the gospel had been made known through the prophetic scriptures. There is continuity between the OT and NT; the gospel is foreshadowed in the OT.

3. There is a parallel structure in vv. 3-4 that some translations obscure. In these verses Paul may well be quoting or drawing upon an early Christian creed to summarize the content of the gospel of God mentioned in v. 2.

Concerning his Son,
Who came
From the seed of David
According to the flesh
Who was appointed Son of God in power
According to the Spirit of holiness
From the resurrection from the dead
Jesus Christ our Lord

4. The preexistent Son of God came into human existence in the lineage of David. In Rom. 15:12 Paul applies to Jesus Isaiah's statement that "He will be the shoot of Jesse," and in 2 Tim. 2:8 he again describes Jesus as "from the seed of David."

a. This is a clear reference to the fact Jesus is the awaited Messiah. The promise to David that his seed would have eternal reign (2 Sam. 7:12-16) became the prime focus of messianic expectation in the OT (e.g., Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5-6, 30:9, 33:14-18; Ezek. 34:23-24, 37:24-25) and in Judaism (e.g., Jn. 7:42; Mat. 9:27). That Jesus was the fulfillment of this promise is all over the NT (Mat. 1:1-16; Lk. 1:27, 32, 69; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 5:5, 22:16).

b. As an aside, the fact some who were not from David's line temporarily ruled Israel is not contrary to God's promise to David because, as 2 Sam. 7 and Psalm 89 make clear, the promise contained a punitive clause. If David's children rebelled against God, they would be punished. This punishment could result in a temporary Davidic vacancy, but the *right to rule* would always remain with David's line.

5. The eternal Son of God, Jesus the Christ, was *appointed* (same word translated "appointed" in Acts 10:42 and 17:31) "Son of God in power" *from* (ἐκ) the resurrection, meaning at the time of or on the basis of the resurrection. In other words, before the resurrection he was the Son of God in the weakness and lowliness of his earthly existence.

a. As Paul spells out in Phil. 2:5-11, the Son chose to forego certain prerogatives of his divinity in obedience to the will of the Father, only to have bestowed on him through his faithfulness the supremely powerful position of Lord of lords. With the resurrection, Jesus entered a new state or stage of his messianic career; he was exalted to a new position.

b. Ben Witherington remarks in *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 32-33:

v. 4 is not about what Christ is according to this divine nature but rather about what happened to Jesus at the resurrection, when God's Spirit raised him from the dead and designated or marked him out as Son of God in power. . . . Paul means here that at the resurrection Jesus enters a phase of his career where he becomes Son of God *in power*. Previously, he was Son of God in weakness. He did not assume the role of glorified and exalted and all-powerful Lord until after the resurrection (so also Philippians 2), when he was appointed to such a role.

6. Whereas his birth in David's lineage was "according to" or "in relation to" the flesh, his resurrection-based appointment as Son of God in power was "in relation to" the Spirit of holiness.

a. His human birth was related to the flesh – not just that it involved human flesh but that it came about in the old order of reality that is passing away, the realm of the flesh. His exaltation was related to the Spirit of holiness in that it was related to the coming of the new order of reality that is characterized by the complete holiness, complete purifying, that is the work of the Spirit.

b. With Christ's exaltation, the transformation (or "heavenization") of this reality has fully begun – the revolution is fully underway – to be finalized or consummated at his return. The kingdom of God, the heavenly, has invaded this reality, but until the Lord's return, it coexists with the old age that is characterized by things contrary to God's ultimate purpose, things like sin, death, mourning, crying, and pain.

7. Paul (and anyone else similarly called) received the special gift of being an apostle for the purpose of bringing about the "obedience of faith" among all the Gentiles.

a. "Obedience of faith" speaks of true conversion to Jesus Christ. As Douglas Moo remarks:

[W]e understand the words "obedience" and "faith" to be mutually interpreting: obedience always involves faith, and faith always involves obedience. They should not be equated, compartmentalized, or made into separate stages of the Christian experience. Paul called men and women to a faith that was always inseparable from obedience – for the Savior in whom we believe is nothing less than our Lord – and to an obedience that could never be divorced from faith – for we can obey Jesus as Lord only when we have given ourselves to him in faith.

b. Paul's particular call was to minister to Gentiles in distinction from Jews (see, Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:7). This does not mean he was meant to preach *exclusively* to Gentiles, just *primarily* to them (see, e.g., Acts 9:15). This ministering was done for "the sake of his name," meaning for the glory and praise of Jesus Christ.

8. I believe, with many commentators, that v. 6 is best punctuated "among whom you also are, those called to belong to [*lit.* "of"] Jesus Christ." The Roman Christians are included in the category of people to whom Paul was especially sent, meaning they are predominantly Gentiles, and as such, there should be no question as to his authority regarding them. These (predominantly) Gentiles have responded to God's call to enter into a saving relationship with Jesus.

9. Paul describes the Roman Christians as "the beloved of God who are in Rome, those called to be saints." God loves all people, but he has a special love for those who open their hearts to respond to his call (e.g., Jn. 14:21). Christians are "saints," which means "holy ones." We have been "set apart" in a special relationship with God. We've been separated from the "dominion of darkness" (Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9) and from "the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4), and we have been placed by God's grace within his kingdom (Col. 1:13) and family (2 Cor. 6:17-18). We are saints, and therefore we should live like it.

B. Thanksgiving and Occasion (1:8-15) – **⁸First, I give thanks to my God through Jesus Christ concerning all of you because your faith is being proclaimed in all the world. ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, how constantly I make mention of you, ¹⁰always in my prayers asking if somehow now at last I will be given, by God's will, an open road to come to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened, ¹²or rather to be encouraged together with you through each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that often I purposed to come to you (yet I was hindered up till now) so that I might have some fruit even among you, as also among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴To both Greeks and barbarians, to both wise and foolish, I am a debtor, ¹⁵hence my eagerness to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.**

1. Paul gives thanks to God for all the Roman Christians. He is aware of them because their existence was reported in the Christian communities throughout the "world." This is hyperbole, an exaggeration designed to emphasize how widely the news that the church was in Rome had spread, no doubt facilitated by Claudius's expulsion of Jews for rioting at the instigation of "Chrestos." The fact Jesus was acknowledged as Lord even in Rome, the capital of the empire, was big news among the saints.

2. Paul, who wholeheartedly serves God in the preaching of the gospel of Christ, regularly mentions them in his prayers, asking that God will give him an open road to come to them. He longs to see them that he might impart to them some gift or blessing from the Spirit that would strengthen them, probably meaning that he desired to exercise among them some Spirit-given insight or ability that was tailored to specific needs he observed when in Rome. (For now, however, he must be content to bless them from afar through his letter.) Paul recognized that their faith also would be an encouragement to him.

a. As a footnote, I was struck some years ago by the way in which God granted Paul's prayer to come to Rome. Let's just say that I doubt it was what Paul had in mind. After writing that he had been praying regularly for God to give him an open road to come to Rome,

Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, avoided a plot to kill him, spent two years in prison in Caesarea and then was shipwrecked on the way to Rome.

b. This helps me to appreciate how God's working often is beyond my very limited vision. I want the Lord just to transport me to Rome right now, but he has other things in mind.

3. Paul wants them to know that he had often intended to visit them but had so far been kept from doing so, probably by more pressing responsibilities. He had wanted to visit that he might "have some fruit among them," as he had among the rest of the Gentiles. I think Paul here is saying, at least primarily, that he wanted to visit that he might convert Gentiles from within their community, but he also wanted to strengthen those already converted in the faith.

4. He feels a sense of *obligation* to all Gentiles: those with Greek language and culture and those without, those who were accomplished intellectually and those who were not. It is that sense of obligation that explains his eagerness to preach the gospel to those in Rome.

C. Theme of the Letter (1:16-17) – ¹⁶**For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to the Jew first and to the Greek.** ¹⁷**For in it the righteousness of God is being revealed, [a righteousness] from faith to faith, just as it is written, "But the righteous from faith shall live."**

1. Some apparently saw Paul's absence from Rome as an indication that he was ashamed of the gospel he preached (or he was concerned they might see it that way). Maybe they thought he was embarrassed to preach it in such a sophisticated city. As Paul noted in 1 Cor. 1:23, Christ crucified is "foolishness" to Gentiles.

a. Martin Hengel expressed this perspective in his little book *Crucifixion* (p. 6-7): "[T]o believe that the one pre-existent Son of the one true God, the mediator at creation and the redeemer of the world, had appeared in very recent times in out-of-the-way Galilee, as a member of the obscure people of the Jews, and even worse, had died the death of a common criminal on the cross, could only be regarded as a sign of madness."

b. The resurrection, which is the rest of Christ's crucifixion story, was considered absurd. Recall that the philosophers in Athens called Paul a "babbler" in Acts 17:18 and sneered at him in 17:32 for preaching the resurrection.

2. Or maybe they thought Paul was embarrassed to preach the gospel in a Christian community where elements suspected it was anti-law or anti-Jewish. That would be a tough argument to make in light of the old-covenant Scriptures, so maybe some thought Paul was unwilling to face close questioning on those particular issues.

3. Whatever lay behind the suspicion (or possible suspicion) that Paul's absence from Rome reflected a sense of shame or intellectual intimidation regarding the gospel, Paul flatly

declares that he is *not* ashamed of the gospel he preaches. And the reason he is not ashamed of that gospel, the true gospel, is that, however it may appear to the world, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to the Jew (first) and to the Gentile (Greek).

a. God's saving power is exercised through the message of His saving work in Christ. That message, which was given by God, is the seed through which lost humanity receives the new birth (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

b. This salvation, however, is only for those who believe, for those who in both mind and will surrender themselves to the Christ presented in the gospel. Saving faith is more than mental assent, more than simply believing that something is true. It is the "yes" of the total person. It includes believing the facts about God's work in Christ, but it also includes surrendering to those facts, a decision to live in accordance with them.

(1) According to Jas. 2:14-26, faith that is mere mental assent is insufficient to receive the gift of salvation. That's why Paul referred in 1:5 to the "obedience of faith."

(2) This is why Jesus told the parables of the tower-builder and the king going to war in Lk. 14:28-33. We often say at weddings that marriage is not to be entered into lightly or unadvisedly. In these parables Jesus makes that point about Christian discipleship. "Discipleship changes allegiances with family, requires the willingness to die, shifts the focus off self-centeredness, places one at the disposal of another, and changes the way one handles financial resources" (Snodgrass, *Parables*, 385-386). Becoming a Christian is a radical, life-changing commitment, not merely an intellectual exercise, and one must weigh carefully whether one has the commitment to see it through.

c. Since in the first century faith in Christ invariably was expressed in submission to baptism (e.g., 6:1-4), Paul's failure to mention baptism doesn't mean that baptism is not part of conversion. It simply was understood that coming to faith included submitting to baptism. If one said that being president is for whoever wins the election, one would not mean that a person could serve as president without being sworn into office. It is just understood and assumed that those who win elections are sworn into office.

d. Though salvation is by faith in Christ for both Jew and Gentile, there is a sense in which the Jew has priority over the Gentile. God chose the Jews as the people through whom Christ was brought into the world. So it is not surprising that the gospel was promised in advance to the Jews through the prophets (1:2, 3:2) and that they were the first to have it preached to them by Jesus and the Apostles.

4. The gospel is "the power of God for salvation" for in it the "righteousness of God" is being revealed.

a. When righteousness is attributed to God in the OT, it frequently has reference to his saving activity. That is the form that his righteousness takes. E.g., Isa. 46:13 God promises through the prophet (ESV): "I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay." Ps. 98:2 says (ESV), "The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations." See also, Ps. 35:26-28, 40:10, 51:14, 71:15-16, 71:24, 88:12, 119:123; Isa. 51:5-6, 51:8.

b. In the preaching of the gospel, God's saving action is taking place (being "revealed" in history), and the way it is taking place is through his bestowing a righteous status on those who believe. In other words, the "righteousness of God" here includes *both* God's activity of "making right" – saving, vindicating – *and* the status of those who are made right. It is the act by which God brings people into a right relationship with himself. This saving work of "righteousing" people is, of course, based on the atoning death of Jesus, which is the heart of the gospel.

5. This saving work of God, this rescuing bestowal of righteousness, is "from faith to faith" in that it expands with the spreading of faith; it tracks the expansion of faith because faith is the means of God's saving work. *No one* earns a right relationship with God. Hab. 2:4 points out that the righteous are characterized by faith ("The righteous shall live by faith"). Paul's inspired application of this text develops this point by making clear that faith not only characterizes the righteous but is the means through which they are made righteous by the grace of God ("The righteous from faith shall live").