

Romans

Authorship

Romans begins and ends with reference to Paul either by name (1:1) or unmistakable circumstance (cf. 5:14-19, 26; 16:21). External testimony attributes the letter to Paul. There are obvious points of contact with the record of Acts (cf. Acts 24:17; 19:21; 20:22, 23). Internal evidence is strongly in favor of Pauline authorship, especially language and theology.

Date

From the reference to Paul's intention to deliver the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, it is clear that Romans was written after 2 Corinthians. At writing Paul is ready to begin his trip to Jerusalem (cf. 15:25). This corresponds with the record of Acts (cf. Acts 20:3), thus putting him in Corinth. This would be the winter of A.D. 56-57.¹

Historical Setting

Paul is writing Romans after some twenty-three years of ministry in the gospel of Jesus Christ. His ministry to the Gentiles has been authenticated by the Jerusalem church and carried out extensively throughout Asia Minor and Achaia as well as Syria and Cilicia. The church at Rome is already well established. However, Paul apparently thinks it suitable to deliver a complete theological treatise on the doctrine of salvation.

Original Readers

It is clear that the letter is addressed to believers of the church at Rome. It is unclear just exactly what the makeup of the church is with respect to Jewish and Gentile Christians. It is likely that the church had been planted early on, perhaps as a result of those present at Pentecost from Rome (cf. Acts 2:10). As elsewhere, the church would have been almost exclusively Jewish at first. However, references in Romans itself seem to indicate that by the time Paul wrote, Gentiles had become a significant, if not the dominant, element (cf. 1:5-6, 13; 15:16, 18). Thus, Paul's interest in them would be in keeping with his apostleship to the Gentiles. As elsewhere, though, there is always a need to counsel harmony, especially with respect to various background issues, such as are surfaced in chapters 14 and 15.

¹ See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* 4th ed. revised (Downers Grove: IL, 1990), 406-08 for a summary of the evidence for this Corinthian visit as the occasion of the writing of Romans.

Occasion

There is nothing in the book itself that indicates a compelling reason for Paul to write when he did or what he did. His thwarted intentions to visit the church are mentioned (1:13; 15:22) but without any explanation as to why he had so intended, except for the general goal of their further establishment in the faith (cf. 1:11-13). His desire to be helped by the church on his way to Spain (15:24) hardly serves as a reason for such an extensive undertaking as Romans. Paul had received a commission to preach the mystery—Christ’s specially revealed will for the age—to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:18; Gal. 2:9). The writing of Romans could well be considered the literary fulfillment of this task, for in this letter Paul is setting forth in an orderly manner the complete teaching of what it means to live as a Christian. In light of the universal intent of the gospel proclamation, such a letter to the church in the capital of the Roman empire could more easily be disseminated to the far reaches of the world.

Special Issues

Ending chapters and position of doxology. According to textual evidence a shorter recension of Romans was in circulation at some point, concluding at chapter 14.² In addition, the doxology is variously located, usually at the end of chapter 16 or chapter 14. This has led to a number of possible explanations, including questioning their authenticity and the possibility of Romans being originally intended as a circular letter. It is most probable that chapter 16 is original, that is, that the letter really was intended for Rome and that these really were people that Paul was greeting. The doxology is more problematic. A majority of manuscripts place it at the end of chapter 14, which seems preemptive, given the content of chapter 15. However, Hodges thinks it was designed “as a doxology extolling God’s power to establish believers, despite the spiritual weakness in ‘doubtful’ things which some exhibit Those who are thus established ought then to bear the weaknesses of others—15:1ff.”³ If the doxology belongs at the end of chapter 16 it serves as a double-doxology (cf. 16:21-24) which has its own set of problems.

² For a full discussion see *ibid.*, 412-27.

³ Zane C. Hodges, “Romans” (unpublished tape transcript, Dallas, Texas, n.d.).

Message

The gospel is the power of salvation because it provides the experience of the righteousness of God through the principle of faith.

Outline⁴

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⁴ This outline is based on the work of Hodges, *ibid.*

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Message

The gospel is the power of salvation because it provides the experience of the righteousness of God through the principle of faith.

Argument

Romans answers the question How can a person experience righteous living instead of a life characterized by the consequences of sin. The answer is that one must do so by faith in Christ who justifies from the eternal penalty of sin and who provides sanctification so that the justified one might live free from the dominating power of sin. It is the complete teaching on entering into spiritual life and then living that life.

I. Introduction: Paul identifies himself and his purpose for writing (1:1-17).

Paul is a divinely commissioned servant of Jesus Christ, who, as the God-Man has visited earth in order to restore all people to an acceptable and blessed relationship with God the Father. Paul writes to the church at Rome in order to establish them in the full experience of Christ's salvation. He writes as one who has the authority to communicate such truth and as one who is personally constrained to share it with all men (1:14).

II. Thematic Statement: Paul affirms his commitment to the gospel (1:16-17).

Paul is openly loyal to the gospel because it is the power of God to salvation. In Romans the term “gospel” entails sanctification as well as justification (cf. 5:9-10). Through this gospel a person can come into a realization of God’s righteousness both positionally and experientially, both in time and for eternity. Such an experience begins by faith (which secures justification) and leads to faith as the operational principle of life (issuing in “sanctification”).

III. Problem: Man lives under God’s wrath (1:18-32).

The reason that such a salvation is needed, and that Jesus came to provide it, is that all people are under God’s ever present displeasure with their sin which is manifested by his turning them over to reap sin’s consequences. God’s wrath is not just a future prospect, it is also a present reality with respect to the consequences of sin. God is just in this reaction because all people willfully suppress that truth which is knowable about Him, thereby becoming futile in their thinking and darkened in their hearts. The present manifestation of God’s wrath is demonstrable in the degradation into which man sinks as revealed in his defiled spirit (1:24-25), debauched passions (1:26-27), and disapproved mind (1:28-32).

IV. Solution: Jesus Christ made provision for escaping God’s wrath (2:1–8:39).

The problem of sin is solved by Jesus Christ, with respect both to its eternal consequences (2:1–4:25) and to its present incursion into the believer’s life (5:1–8:39). However, not all people admit to the problem of sin, at least in truth as God views it. As the first step, Paul systematically prosecutes the whole human race with respect to the guilt of sin and its eternal penalty. He then moves on to show how sin’s temporal power can be countered.

A. Christ, by his death, validated God’s righteousness in removing his wrath by paying for the eternal penalty of sin (2:1–4:25).

Because not all people will admit to some degree of degradation (as depicted in 1:18-32) Paul systematically shows that all are guilty of sin in the most fundamental sense (2:1–3:20). The moralistic person convicts himself of sin by means of his propensity to judge others in areas of his own failing (2:1). Rather than being vindicated by sanctimoniousness he is actually storing up wrath and judgment (2:3-10) and this whether he has the law or not (2:11-16). The Jew, as the supreme moralist, is no better off, despite his confidence in the law (2:17-29) and the privileges granted him by God (3:1-8). The result of Paul’s prosecution

of the whole human race is that all are in a position of guilt before God with no hope of attaining a position of acceptability in and of oneself (3:9-19). The law, rather than being the way of attainment, merely serves to drive a person to a sense of his need of the righteousness of Christ (3:20).

Whereas God's wrath has been continually being revealed because of sin, now, because of Christ's righteous act of redemption, the righteousness of God can be revealed (3:21-22). This is available for all but is only actually appropriated by those who believe (3:22). As a result of Christ's satisfactory sacrifice for sin, God's holiness has been satisfied with the result that there is no hint of divine injustice in declaring guilty sinners to be not guilty (3:25-26). The witness of the Law and prophets mentioned in 3:21 is now elaborated upon with respect to Abraham and David (4:1-25). By resorting to two of the greatest believers in the Old Testament, Paul underscores the truth of righteousness by faith, and its experienced blessedness (4:1-25). Righteousness, imputed and experienced, is to be found in Christ alone.

B. Christ, in his life, makes provision for overcoming the temporal power of sin (5:1-8:39).

The first part of the solution to the problem of sin has been concluded, namely the imputation of righteousness in overcoming the guilt of sin, with its penalty of eternal separation from God. Now Paul takes up the experience of that righteousness on a day to day basis.

1. Those justified through Christ are qualified to reign in life (5:1-21). The believer is at peace with God and possesses a new standing in His favor, with new hope in facing the trying demands of life through the Holy Spirit (5:1-5). God's love in Christ has produced this new position (5:6-8). Now that justification and reconciliation have taken place, it is possible to also do something about the ravages of sin in daily experience. The death of Christ has secured justification. It is the resurrection life of Christ that will deliver from the continual experiencing of God's displeasure with sin (5:9-10). When the believer sins there are still temporal consequences. But the old reign of sin, inherited from Adam, has been broken so that "grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (5:12-21). Eternal life is something the believer possesses as well as something he or she may, to a greater or lesser degree, enjoy. It is the enjoyment of eternal

life that is at issue in Romans 5–8. Chapter 5 sets forth the basis for living the Christian life. Chapters 6–8 set forth the actual *modus operandi* of reigning by grace in life.

2. As baptized in Christ, believers have been freed from sin’s domain (6:1-23).

Continuing to use the technique of the hypothetical objector, Paul raises the issue of the believer’s continuance in sin with respect to God’s intention for our lives (6:1).

Though the believer may choose to sin, he is not obligated to respond to sin’s beck and call since our death to sin’s dominion has occurred by virtue of our union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection (6:2-10). Recollection and reconfirmation of this truth will support the believer in saying “no” to sin and “yes” to specific acts of righteousness (6:11-14). The past, irresistible servitude to sin has been broken so that the believer may serve righteousness in accordance with his true nature (6:15-23).

3. As in-lawed to Christ, believers have been liberated from law’s dominion (7:1-25). Changing the metaphor from slavery to marriage, Paul deals next with the place of law in the believer’s living experience. When wedded to law, a person can only sin since that is what law, as a master, invokes (7:8). No matter how much effort a believer makes to perform righteousness through a focus on law, it always results in failure (7:13-21). It is only through a focus on Jesus Christ as his or her lawfully wedded Husband that the believer can experience the performance of the law’s intent (7:1-6; 24-25).

4. When Spirit-minded, believers are empowered to experience resurrection life (8:1-13). Since this section is not dealing with the subject of justification, it is doubtful that *katakrima* has the idea of “condemnation” (8:1). In fact, according to Deissmann it means “judicial servitude” which captures the imagery of Paul’s miserable experience in chapter 7 under the hostile takeover of sin.⁵ Rather, this chapter looks at the empowerment of the Spirit to live a life that is free from the enslaving domination of sin (cf. 7:14, 23). When we focus on Jesus Christ as our model for living and as the one who enables us to follow his example (8:3), then the Holy Spirit energizes the power of Christ’s resurrection life so that our, otherwise, dead bodies may actually manifest his life (8:10-13). The key, then is in walking according to the Spirit, that is, in cooperating with the Spirit’s desire to reproduce in the believer the life of Christ. The flesh—that perverted capacity of self-interest in humanity—

⁵ See “*katakrima*” in James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 327-28.

will always welcome sin's incursion. However, the spirit is able to resist such an incursion through an abiding faith in Jesus Christ.

5. As Spirit-led, believers are allowed to experience son-life (8:14-25). Living out from under the wrath of God is not the sole purpose of the believer's salvation. We are meant to experience a restored fellowship with God the Father. The Holy Spirit desires to aid the believer in the full experience of sonship so that no matter what one may experience in this life, glory may accrue to God.

6. As Spirit-aided, believers are confident in every experience of life (8:26-39). Indeed, the Holy Spirit will aid the believer in every way necessary in order to see him conformed to the image of Christ. Life will be lived in confidence and joy. No conceivable circumstance will be able to rob the believer of a sense of God's presence and love.

V. Motivation: Israel provides an example of squandered opportunity to live apart from God's wrath (9:1-11:36).

A. Israel's Past: The Privilege of Election Squandered (9:1-33).

The Lord had chosen Israel and brought it into existence to serve Him as a unique Priest-Nation, as a dear Son (cf. Ex. 4:22-23; 19:5-6). He had granted them special privilege and resource (9:4-5) and yet they had failed. As a result, Israel had often experienced God's displeasure. How was this to be explained in terms of God's righteous desires for his people? How did this impact his desires and program for the new people, the church? Paul uses the experience of Israel as both a negative and positive object lesson. God has not failed. Rather he has clearly displayed his mercy. God prepares vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy; and he sovereignly uses each in accordance with his own purposes. The tragedy is when vessels of mercy fail to enjoy the full benefit of their position, as is the case with Israel.

B. Israel's Present: Restoration to blessing is being rejected (10:1-21).

Though Israel's hardened and fallen condition is an expression of divine wrath (ch. 9), there is a salvation available if it will be accepted (cf. 10:13). If Israel is to escape her plight of rebellion she must replace her ignorant zeal for law righteousness with faith in Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can accomplish that which is presently so far away from Israel's grasp (10:6-8). Israel is under God's wrath in a special way, due to its denial of and then hostile suppression of the truth (cf. 1:18). For Israel to get out from under God's wrath, it must believe in the resurrection of Jesus and all that it stood for, which would result in justification, and then confess openly to the world that Jesus is Lord, which would remove

her temporal condition of judgment (10:9-10). Likewise, all people, in order to experience the full blessing of God in the present, must believe in Christ unto justification (that is, deliverance from the eternal penalty of sin) and confess Him as Lord for “salvation” (that is, deliverance from the temporal consequences of suppressing the truth). Thus, in Romans, the term “salvation” and its cognates encompass the full experience of justification and discipleship, not simply justification, as is often taught.⁶ How important that Israel hears this message, which Paul affirms has indeed happened (10:14-18). How unfortunate that Israel has remained as a disobedient and contrary people (10:21).

C. Israel’s Future: The sovereign purposes of God will not be frustrated (11:1-36).

Despite Israel’s unbelief, God has not cast her away. There is a believing remnant according to the election of grace (11:5) by virtue of the justification apart from works provided in Christ (11:6). However, though Israel as a whole has missed the obtaining of righteousness through its spiritual blindness, the nation will one day be restored (11:11-27). In the meantime the Gentiles have become the primary recipients of salvation (11:11) and, therefore the main agents of gospel proclamation. This should not result in prideful boasting since it is Israel (specifically, the Abrahamic covenant) who bears the Gentiles, as the root of the tree into which they have been grafted (11:17-21). Rather, the Gentile church should take heed to the dangers of failure through unbelief (11:22-25).⁷ We are vessels of mercy

⁶ A concordance study of *sozo* (“save”) and its cognates in Romans will reveal that they occur only in the sections dealing with Christian living (sanctification) and never the justification sections (i.e., ch. 2–4).

⁷ Zane Hodges summarizes the theology of this passage as it pertains to the issue of salvation and eternal security when he writes: “Some of the Jewish branches, Paul affirms, have been broken off. The plural is used here to recall the truth stated earlier . . . that God has not wholly cast away his people but has preserved for Himself a remnant according to the election of grace (11:1–2, 5–6). But it is to be noted that in referring to Gentile privilege here and in the following verses no plurals occur. The Jewish branches that are broken off obviously refer to the portion of Israel which has lost special standing before God . . . The broken branches . . . clearly do not refer to formerly regenerate Israelites who have lost their personal salvation. They obviously refer to Israelites who lost their special place and privilege because they never were saved at all. In like manner, the engrafted Gentiles may be seen collectively as the Gentile world which has been made the focus of God’s program in salvation and thus partakes of the root and fatness of the good olive tree. That is, the Gentile world has now tasted the salvation blessing which flows up from the root; that is, the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant, the Jewish fathers being the source of this blessing on an earthly level since the covenant was confirmed and ordained to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . . Paul’s warning here is that such privilege should not be an occasion for Gentile disdain of the fallen Jews . . . This should lead to a holy fear rather than to haughtiness. What Paul had in mind here is not so much the faith of an individual but the observable phenomena that it is the Gentile world that is responding in largest measure to the call of faith in the gospel while the Jews, for the most part, are unbelieving. Hence, the present privilege of Gentile humanity is directly tied to its responsiveness to the gospel, just as the loss of privilege by the Jews is tied to their unresponsiveness . . . It follows from this that a loss of responsiveness among Gentiles can have the same calamitous effect on them that it did on the Jews . . . What is in view here is not individual, personal salvation

through the disobedience of Israel (11:26-36). This should lead to a devotion of service, a subject that Paul takes up in chapter 12.

VI. Application: Vessels of mercy are called to live in service to God (12:1–15:33).

Finally, on the basis of those mercies of God, Paul comes to the application section, specific activities and duties that should flow from life in Christ. Just as Israel had been called to serve (cf. Ex. 4:22-23) so has the church (12:1-2). A number of areas in which our “reasonable service” should be rendered are spelled out in this last section. These include service to the body of Christ according to spiritual gift and not human conceit (12:3-8) and service within the Christian community as we minister to one another in the humility of Christ (12:9-21). The life of Christ should be manifested in society as a whole especially as regards our attitude to governing authorities (13:1-7). Our private relationships should also model Christ (13:8-10) since we have been placed in a dark world to cast a beacon of light (13:11-14). With respect to personal convictions—those things that are neither prescribed nor prohibited by the Lord—the laws of liberty and love ought to prevail since the activities themselves are of no eternal consequence (14:1-23). In general the Christian ought to have as his chief aim the glory of God (15:1-13). Being filled with all joy and peace in believing, and abounding in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit are apt ways of summarizing what life in Christ is all about—the life that Paul has presented in Romans (15:13). In fact this is the model of service that Paul exemplifies in his own life, demonstrated in his effort on behalf of the readership and his desire to aid the poor believers in Jerusalem (15:22-33).

VII. Concluding Greeting (16:1-24).

The extent of these concluding greetings, a characteristic feature of Paul’s letters, perhaps serves to underscore the importance of penning such a composition to the church in Rome. A body of so many commendable disciples, should be in a position to heed and spread Paul’s gospel, provided they are able to avoid divisions and offenses (16:17-20).

VIII. Benediction: Glory to the God who is able to establish according to the gospel (16:25-27).

which, of course cannot be lost. Paul is discussing the relative positions of the Jew and Gentile in the program of God.” Hodges, “Romans,” n.p.

Whether this benediction belongs here or after chapter 14, it serves to remind the readership that ultimately it is God alone who is able to establish them in obedience to the faith through Jesus Christ.

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