

ROMANS

Session_1_Introduction & 1:1-3

Author and Time of Writing

Paul is the clear author of this epistle written to the church in Rome. He is the most prolific writer of the New Testament. Born in Tarsus (Ac 9:11) around the same time of the birth of Jesus, he spent most of his life, to the point of his conversion, in Jerusalem where he was a dedicated student of the Rabbi Gamaliel (Ac 22:3). He was following his father's footsteps in the pursuit of absolute religious zeal as a Pharisee (Ac 23:6). He was a "Jew of Jews" according to his own resume:

"though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless." [Phl 3:4-6 ESV]

His extensive background immersed in the scriptures and customs of the Sanhedrin gave him an incredible depth of knowledge concerning God's chosen people, God's sovereignty over all creation including the affairs of men and most of all God's law. Yet by his own testimony he counted his accomplishments as "rubbish" next to the knowledge of the crucified and risen Savior:

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." [Phl 3:7-11 ESV]

Paul's ability to connect the entire Old Testament to the person and work of Jesus Christ didn't come from further academic pursuits, rather after his miraculous conversion (Ac 9) he was personally taught by Christ the depths and riches of the gospel.

"For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus." [Gal 1:11-17 ESV]

Paul was without a doubt the biggest mover of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire in his lifetime.

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Not only did Paul know the law of the Jews, but he also understood the laws of Rome as a Roman citizen and utilized his rights as a citizen in order to hold lawless magistrates accountable and gain an audience with governors and kings for the opportunity to further spread the gospel. Through many trials and tribulations on a total of three missionary journeys, Paul eventually suffered the ultimate cost of martyrdom in Rome around 65-67 A.D. (2Ti 4:6).

Paul most likely wrote the letter from Corinth as indicated by several references to individuals with him that were associated with the church there. It would have been around 56 A.D. just prior to his leaving to go to Jerusalem with a love offering for the poor believers there (Ro 15:25). As indicated in Ro 16:1,2, Pheobe was the one who brought the letter to the church in Rome.

Background

As indicated in the opening of the letter, Paul to this point had not been able to visit this church. It was most likely founded by Jews who had been in Jerusalem to witness Pentecost and received the gospel there before returning to their homes in Rome. Paul never had the chance to labor among them, invest in them and, most importantly to him, teach them personally the doctrines concerning sin and salvation. Based on his experience of the constant assault against him and the gospel by both Judaisers and pagan idol worshipers, he wrote the letter to the Roman church with the deepest desire for them to be equipped to stand for the truth.

The church at Rome had not yet received any apostolic instruction and while there is no direct mention of any particular false belief or sinful behavior, Paul's desire was to know that they were firmly grounded in the doctrines of the gospel. In his desire to bring his ministry into Spain (15:5), Paul was most likely hoping to also gain fellow laborers in his mission. His desire was for them to preach the gospel (1:15), and to become personally familiar with them so that he could encourage them as well as be encouraged through prayer by them (1:12; 15:30 - 32).

The fact that there was nothing to correct or rebuke combined with his commendation of them on their reputation throughout the "whole world" (1:8) for being a faithful and fruitful body, tells every believer who reads this letter that the doctrines of the gospel are always to be meditated upon' even when our spiritual progress is going well. The profound truths of the gospel bring hope, peace and assurance to every believer who meditates upon them.

Theological Themes

The central theme of the letter to the Romans is that God alone is righteous and for an individual to be found righteous in God's eyes, they must acknowledge their unrighteousness and trust in Christ alone and His completed work on the cross for salvation. Chapters 1-11 cover all of the doctrinal truths of that salvation and then Paul moves to the practical outworking of that understanding in the lives of believers in chapters 12-16.

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Paul writes many of the core doctrinal truths of this letter in a polemic style anticipating the resistance of human understanding to the spiritual truths related within. Such truths discussed are:

- God's wrath revealed against sinful humanity (1:18-32)
- God's righteous judgment against all mankind who are convicted by the law; from natural to revealed law (1:18-32).
- The universality of sin (3:9-20).
- Justification can only be obtained through faith, not through works (3:21-4:25).
- The believers' security in salvation (5:1-11; 8:31-39).
- Two federal heads of humanity (5:12-21).
- The process of sanctification (6-8).
- God's sovereign election (9).
- God's sovereign plan for national Israel (11).
- Spiritual gifts and practical living for true believers (12).
- Truths of Christian liberty (14:1-15:12).

Challenges of Interpretation

Romans contains some of the most concentrated doctrinal work in the NT and there are many challenges to work through. Some of which are:

The fallenness of man - Paul explains how Adam's sin has been passed to all humanity (5:12-21). This is the depravity of man and he evidences its certainty with tracing death back to Adam; even before there was any revealed law. The extent to which mankind is depraved and separated from God has always been a subject of great debate, however Paul leaves no room for debate in 3:9-23 which he quotes from several OT passages just to settle the point.

The believers battle with the flesh - Another difficult passage is 7:7-25 where Paul reflects on the battle that he waged within himself between the new man and the flesh. How could a Christian face this kind of struggle? It must be before he was saved is one view while another is that Paul was writing it as a literary device and not really describing any personal struggle.

The sovereignty of God and His elective purposes - From chapter 8:28 through 9:29 Paul gives the most articulated explanation of how salvation of each individual has its origin in the will of God from before the foundation of the world and explains how those elective purposes become reality in time. He leaves no room for criticism or doubt as to what he is explaining. Election is woven throughout the fabric of scripture and is probably the most contested doctrine amongst men found in scripture.

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The future of national Israel - from 9:30-11 Paul seamlessly moves into the subject of Israel while considering God's elective purposes and works out the question of Israel's future in light of the fact that the Messiah has already appeared; how can the nation as a whole be in such a state of rejection in light of God's promises? Paul again wrestles through the fact that despite appearances and the reasoning of man, God's plans are never frustrated.

OUTLINE

- I. Greetings and Introduction (1:1-15)
- II. Theme (1:16,17)
- III. Condemnation: The Need of God's Righteousness (1:18-3:20)
 - A. Unrighteous Gentiles (1:18-32)
 - B. Unrighteous Jews (2:1-3:8)
 - C. Unrighteous Mankind (3:9-20)
- IV. Justification: The Provision of God's Righteousness (3:21-5:21)
 - A. The Source of Righteousness (3:21-31)
 - B. The Example of Righteousness (4:1-25)
 - C. The Blessings of Righteousness (5:1-11)
 - D. The Imputation of Righteousness (5:12-21)
- IV. Sanctification: God's Righteousness Demonstrated (6:1-8:39)
- VI. Restoration: Israel's Reception of God's Righteousness (9:1-11:36)
- VII. Application: The Behavior of God's Righteousness (12:1-15:13)
- VII. Conclusion, Greetings, and Benediction (15:14-16:27)

GREETING

1:1) *"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,"*

A servant of Christ Jesus - "doulos" or servant in Greek culture most often referred to the permanent involuntary servitude of a slave. In the Hebrew (as its used) the term describes one who has bound himself to his master in voluntary service with devotion based on admiration of and devotion to the master.

Apostle - "one who is sent" which in the NT is specifically referring to the specific 12 called by Jesus. Their qualifications to be an apostle were that they personally witnessed and were part of Jesus' ministry and were called by Him to be an apostle. Matthias was selected through the apostles casting lots when they knew they had to fill the lost office of Judas (Ac 1:15-26). Paul was one "born out of due time" (1Cor 15:8) in as much as while he was not part of Jesus' 3 year ministry prior to His ascension, he none the less was - 1) called by Jesus to be an apostle - 2) was personally visited by the resurrected Christ and 3) was personally taught by Jesus.

Apostles were empowered by Jesus with authority and miraculous gifts that would validate their ministry in the places they went. Every NT book was written by an apostle or one who was instructed by an apostle.

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Called / set apart - both terms that are referring to God's sovereign choice of and power to enact or mobilize His plan in an individual; in this case His choice of Paul to be an apostle and minister of the gospel. This calling or being set apart is something determined in eternity as Paul states it in Galatians:

"But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace," [Gal 1:15 ESV]

Isaiah describes his calling the same way:

"Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name." [Isa 49:1 ESV]

Gospel of God - the Greek word "good news" used 60 times in this letter was used by Rome in emperor worship. It was used when good news concerning the emperor was announced such as a birth. Paul's good news comes from God, not just another earthly proclamation with mere temporary implications.

1:2-3)*"which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh"*

Promised beforehand - This good news was not a new or revolutionary thought, rather it was promised by God to mankind from the very beginning. Where was the very first promise given to man concerning God's good news?

"The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel. " " [Gen 3:14-15 NASB95]

Through His prophets and in the holy Scriptures- From Moses to Malachi there are ample clear promises given by God concerning good news of future restoration for His people that would also be good news for the world. But this good news wasn't vague; God never is!

Concerning His Son- Paul now gets specific and moves the spotlight to where it needs to be; on Jesus. The good news isn't good if its not about Jesus Christ. Without the incarnation of the Son, there would be no good news. When Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves before God, He demonstrated that it was He who had to cover them through a sacrifice (Gen 3:21).

Gods promise concerning the seed of the woman would become more articulated through time. God called out Abram from the Chaldeans to set him apart unto the Lord as recorded in Genesis 12:

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"Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. " " [Gen 12:1-3 ESV]

God's promise to make Abraham a "great nation" and "a blessing" is extended to the "families of the earth". This covenant is expounded on and ratified later when God put Abram into a deep sleep and yet allowed him to witness the unilateral actions of God in "cutting" the covenant with Abram in a blood sacrifice (Gen 15).

God reaffirmed this covenant with Abraham once more (Gen 17:1-21) and then renewed it with Isaac (Gen 26:2-5) and also with Jacob (Gen 28:10-17) who went on to wrestle with the angel of the Lord and become "Israel" (Gen 32:24-29).

Who was descended from David according to the flesh - Although many hundreds of years passed by God articulated His unfolding plan concerning His unconditional covenants with Israel even further through David's line in 2 Samuel chapter 7:

"Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.' " " [2Sa 7:8-13, 16 ESV]

It is through this covenant with David that we see the unconditional covenants God made with Israel linked to an "eternal king" who would be from David's line. At the same time if He is eternal He must also be God and this understanding of the incarnate God is further expounded on in the OT through additional prophets the most notorious given being from Isaiah:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." [Isa 9:6-7 ESV]

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The final unconditional covenant given to Israel by God through the prophet Jeremiah is the New Covenant (Jer 31: 31-40) which, when ratified by Jesus's blood makes the other unconditional covenants able to be fulfilled. Jesus at the last supper explained that He was paying for the New Covenant with His blood (Lk 22:20). After recording the New Covenant, Jeremiah goes on to reiterate God's promises to Israel (Jer 33) and her future and again links their fulfillment to David's descendant:

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' "For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever." The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: "Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers." [Jer 33:14-21 ESV]

After the last written message from a prophet is given (Malachi) some 400 years passed by until God sent Gabriel to visit Mary to bring the announcement of the arrival of this promise branch of David:

"And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy--the Son of God." [Luk 1:30-35 ESV]

Luke goes on to record the many witness statements at the birth of Christ that reflect on God's unconditional covenants with Israel in light of the virgin - born child while at the same time Simeon recognized that Jesus would be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (Lk 2:32). While Matthew's gospel emphasizes the Davidic, kingly pedigree of Jesus, the gospel of John emphasizes his eternal pedigree as the pre-existing One. The gospel's give full account to the testimony of the Son; His ministry, death and resurrection and its implications.

In just a few short sentences in the opening to his letter to the church at Rome Paul links the "good news of God" to thousands of years of history and the unconditional promises made to Israel (and the world) throughout that cannot be ignored. It is an important point to be made in the opening as this letter will emphasize God's promises and power in salvation against the backdrop of man's total darkness and hopelessness without God's intervention.