

Introduction and Survey of Romans

The church at Rome

As the capital of the empire, Rome was the great city around which Paul's missionary strategy was planned. The book of Acts concludes with Paul's arrival in Rome and his preaching the gospel there. The city already contained a flourishing church, apparently founded very early after Christ's resurrection (cf. Acts 2:10). By Paul's time the church was large and well known (Rom 1:8; 15:23; names in ch. 16); there were several congregations there, probably meeting in homes (Rom 16:5). A majority of the church were Gentiles (Rom 1:5-6; 11:13, 28-31), but apparently a substantial minority were Jewish (Rom 2:17; 3:1; 4:1; ch. 9-11; Aquila and Priscilla in 16:3; cf. Acts 18:2).

The church there undoubtedly suffered serious disruption when Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49. This decree affected both Christian and non-Christian Jews (Acts 18:2). The Roman historian Suetonius states: "Since the Jews were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome" (*Life of Claudius* 25:4). Probably Suetonius confused the rather common name of "Chrestus" with the title for Jesus, "Christus." It seems that the non-Christian Jews in Rome were leading in riots against the believing Jews, a practice quite frequent in Paul's experience. Claudius, not knowing the details, simply expelled all the Jews, assuming that some fellow named "Chrestus" was at the bottom of the trouble. By the time Paul wrote Romans, the Jews were permitted back in Rome, and Aquila and Priscilla had already moved back there.

Peter in Rome

There is some discussion as to the time that Peter was in Rome. Although frequently found in Jerusalem and once in Antioch, Peter is not mentioned in Acts or in the Pauline epistles as being in Rome. But 1 Pet 5:13, "She [the church?] who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings," generally is understood to indicate Rome, "Babylon" being a metonymy indicating the wickedness of Rome and its oppressing of the Jews. It appears that 1 Peter was written ca. A.D. 65, sometime near the deaths of Peter and Paul.

The church fathers wrote that Peter was martyred in Rome, and there is little reason to doubt their testimony.

Clement of Rome (ca. A.D. 97) wrote to the Corinthians, mentioning the ministries and deaths of Peter and Paul, in such a way as might suggest that they were martyred there in Rome (*1 Clement* 5, *ANF* 1:6). Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3:1:1) said that "Matthew among the Hebrews published a gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were

preaching the gospel at Rome and founding the church there.” Peter and Paul’s labors and martyrdoms under Nero are explicitly connected to Rome by Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200; *Scorpiace* 15, *ANF* 3:648; *On Prescription Against Heretics* 36, *ANF* 3:260). Following the tradition, Eusebius, the early fourth century church historian, places their deaths in Rome at the hands of Nero (*Ecclesiastical History* 2:25).

However, since there is no convincing evidence that Peter was in Rome prior to Paul’s third missionary journey, we can assume that he did not come to Rome until after Paul wrote Romans.

Occasion of writing

Near the end of his third missionary journey, Paul remained in Corinth during the winter/spring of A.D. 54 (Acts 20:3-4). Paul was staying with his host Gaius, whom he had baptized when he started the church on his second missionary journey (1 Cor 1:14; Rom 16:23). Paul sent the letter to the Roman church by Phoebe, who is called a “deaconess.” She probably was traveling from Cenchrea to Rome on business (Rom 16:1-2). Assuming that Phoebe and Paul both left Corinth about the same time, the letter probably arrived in Rome when Paul was en route to Jerusalem.

There were two main purposes in writing:

1) Practical purpose

Paul was planning to first travel to Jerusalem with the offering (Rom 15:25-26), and then travel to Rome and on to Spain (Rom 1:9-15; 15:23-29). This letter was to prepare for his visit, so that the church in Rome would receive him and aid him on his continuing journey to the west.

2) Doctrinal purpose

In this epistle Paul laid out the doctrinal groundwork for his visit. This included encouraging the church, clearing up difficulties, and solving some of the practical problems they faced. If he had written Galatians during this missionary journey, the doctrines of salvation would have been on his mind, and he would have desired to inoculate the Roman church against the heresies attacking his churches. The best defense is a good offense, and in Romans Paul set out clearly and magnificently the whole scope of God’s salvation.

Points of interest in Romans

- Lengthy introduction
- Many names in conclusion (26 names in Rome)

- Most treatise-like epistle
- Luther's conversion verse, Rom 1:17
- Classic natural theology passage, 1:18-32
- Abraham and David justified by faith alone, ch. 4
- Federal headships of Adam and Christ, 5:12-21
- Baptism, symbol of death, 6:1-10
- Anti-perfectionism passage, 7:14-25
- Assurance by the Holy Spirit, ch. 8
- Missionary passage, 10:13-17
- All Israel to be saved, 11:26-32
- Classic government passage, 13:1-7
- True Christian liberty, ch. 14
- Paul's missionary strategy, 15:14-22
- Separation from heretics, 16:17
- Excellent salvation verses (the "Romans Road"), 1:16; 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 8:1; 10:9-10

Outline of Romans

I. Introduction, 1:1-17

Paul begins with a warm greeting, emphasizing his place as an apostle of the gospel of God, the theme of the book. He explains how he desires to visit the Romans, especially since he is commissioned by God to carry the gospel to all people, Gentile as well as Jew.

The gospel is the power of God, since it reveals the righteousness of God, which saves as well as judges. This salvation comes through faith. The rest of the book expounds this great theme.

II. Mankind guilty before God, 1:18 - 3:20

Before showing the way of salvation, Paul proves the universal need of salvation. The gospel is truly for Jew and Gentile. We are lost in sin and condemned without the righteousness of God.

1. The Gentiles guilty, 1:18-32

God's wrath against the Gentiles who are idolaters is shown by his judicial hardening of their hearts. They do not even live up to the truths revealed in nature and in their consciences; they "suppress" these truths. Nature reveals the power and divinity of God, yet they construct their own gods which are weaker than themselves; thus they actually worship themselves.

Apostasy in theology brings apostasy in morals. The result of idolatry is unbridled sinfulness, including all sorts of perversions, which are self-evidently harmful as well as immoral. In spite of their knowledge of God's law, they insist on disobedience and rebellion.

2. The Jews guilty, ch. 2 - 3:8

The Jews should not look down on the Gentiles as great sinners. The Jews are sinners as well. They have spurned God's mercy, and by their pride and disobedience to the law are themselves treasuring up God's wrath.

God's requirements are greater for the Jews, who have his law. While the Gentiles will be judged on the basis of their conscience, the Jews will have a stricter standard. Gentiles who are saved have God's law written on their hearts, as promised by the new covenant; they will be received instead of unconverted Jews.

While Jews rely on their standing and knowledge of the law, their lives reveal an unbelieving and disobedient heart. Circumcision must be spiritual, not just physical. A true believer in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, is a true Jew; for he is circumcised in the heart.

No one should complain that God is unfair to the Jews, for he has given them many precious privileges. He has ordained that many Jews would not believe, in order that his righteousness might be revealed to both the Gentiles and the Jews. His justice and mercy are shown in this way. (This theme is expanded later in the epistle, ch. 9-11.)

3. All the world guilty, 3:9-20

Paul concludes this section with a chain of OT quotations, showing the depravity of the unregenerate heart, "There is no one righteous, not even one." Therefore, he concludes, the whole world is guilty before God.

III. Justification by faith alone, 3:21 - ch. 4

Major contrast from previous section, introduced by *νυνὶ δέ nuni de*, “but now”

Having shown the need for a divine work of salvation, Paul devotes the heart of this epistle to showing how God himself provides salvation: his righteousness will stand for that of the sinner. How is this righteousness of God to be obtained? Only through faith; no deeds of the law can merit this salvation. Paul shows how God’s salvation has always been obtained by faith alone, especially using the OT examples of Abraham and David.

1. God’s righteousness by faith, 3:21-31

The great divide in Romans is between verses 20 and 21. Where man has failed, God has provided a way; through Christ’s atonement he will supply his own righteousness to those who rely on him, who have “faith in his blood.”

Since God himself brings salvation, there can be no boasting on our part. We can never live up to the law’s expectations; we are justified (declared righteous in God’s sight; cf. Prov 17:15; Isa 5:23) by faith. Faith does not deny the law; rather, it establishes the law in its perfection.

2. Abraham and David justified by faith, ch. 4

Paul shows that this truth is proved by the OT. Abraham received God’s justification because of his faith (vv. 3 and 22, quoting Gen 15:6). Abraham was not justified because he submitted to the law of circumcision; he exercised this faith and was declared justified before he was circumcised. In this passage, Paul concentrates on the time in Abraham’s life when he believed God’s promise made to him and Sarah, when he was about 100 years old (Gen 17). Incidentally, Rom. 4 adds light to the story told in Genesis, showing that Abraham did after all believe God’s promise.

Likewise David, who sinned and broke God’s law, still rejoiced to know that he was justified by faith. Paul proves this by reference to Psalm 32 (Rom 4:6-8). He obviously was not saved by his works, but through faith.

The way of salvation through faith was just the same in the OT as it is in the NT.

IV. The fruits of justification, ch. 5-8

The truth of justification has many wonderful benefits for the believer. It brings peace with God, victory over sin, and assurance of God’s favor. These truths

enable the Christian to live confidently in the world, and to live a holy life which will bless him and others.

1. Justification and peace with God, 5:1-11

Since we are justified by our faith, we have peace with God. All that happens in our lives, even evil things, we know come from God's love, not his judgment. This peace has been purchased by Christ's blood, and therefore there is no fear that God's wrath will again be directed against us. We have been reconciled to him.

2. Jesus, our federal head, 5:12-21

Justification brings us into a new relationship with Christ. Instead of being a condemning judge, he is our substitute, our federal head.

This important theological passage compares and contrasts Christ and Adam. Just as Adam is the federal head of all mankind, so Jesus is the federal head of his people. This headship is based on the covenants of God (called by theologians the covenant of works and the covenant of redemption or of grace).

There are similarities between the two heads. Each of them is one man, doing one great deed, standing for all his people, bringing the consequences on all his people. An important point of comparison is shown by the use of the word "made" in verse 19; in each case, the person is "made," or "constituted" a sinner or righteous; in this passage it refers not to his actual deeds but to his standing before God. This explains how God can declare righteous someone who actually is a sinner (cf. 4:5).

On the other hand, there are important differences. Adam brings death through sin; Christ brings life through obedience. Adam's work is powerful, but Christ's is more powerful, reversing the consequences of Adam's. Adam brings not only guilt on his offspring, but the sinful nature which leads to actual sins; Christ brings not only justification, but new spiritual life which leads in the way of holiness.

3. Justification and holiness of life, ch. 6 – 7:6

Some may think that the doctrine of justification by faith would lead to sinfulness of life. If we are not saved by good works, then why not enjoy a sinful life? Paul strongly answers this antinomianism (denial of law).

Receiving God's righteousness by faith, the Christian must recognize himself to be dead to his old sinful nature, and now alive to his new nature. In baptism the Christian symbolizes his death to sin, and his spiritual resurrection to new life. True faith will always include this change of heart. Calvin has said, "We are

saved by faith alone; but faith that saves never is alone.” The Christian is someone who reckons himself to be dead to sin and alive unto Christ.

Paul uses two illustrations to show the profound effect justification brings to our life.

(1) A slave changing masters (6:15-23)

Sin was our old master; now we have been purchased by a new master, Christ. We must serve him, not the old master.

(2) A wife whose husband dies (7:1-6)

A wife is bound to her husband while he lives; but if he dies she is released from that bond, and may marry another. Likewise we have died to sin; so there is nothing binding us to continue under its dominion.

4. The struggle with sin, 7:7-25

Paul does not discount the power of sin in the life of people, both before and after salvation. He recognizes that justifying faith comes from an awareness of one’s sin, and still does not totally eliminate sin. He uses himself as an example.

The verb tenses in this section change from past to present between verses 13 and 14, showing his own experience in two stages: before he was saved, and after he was saved.

a. Paul before his conversion, 7:7-13

Sin was powerful in his life, but he was not aware of its power until confronted by the law. The law not only exposed his sin to his eyes, it also produced an amazing reaction: it caused him to sin even more! Knowing that it was a sin against God just made him want to do it again. (Augustine points out this root of sinfulness in his own *Confessions*. As a boy he stole pears, not because he was hungry, but because it was forbidden.) The particular sin Paul mentions was covetousness, forbidden in the tenth commandment. Many have seen in this section a parallel with the account of Adam and Eve’s fall in Gen 3.

b. Paul after his conversion, 7:14-25

Paul sees a difference now: he has the law of God in his heart and genuinely desires to keep it (vv. 15, 16, 18, 19, 22, 25); an unregenerate person can never have this heart desire (cf. 8:5-7). On the other hand, he finds his old nature, his “members,” “body,” etc., warring against his

heart. His old sinful habits and attitudes die hard, and Paul despairs that in this life he will ever be able to extinguish his sin. Only in the resurrection will he find relief from this battle (vv. 24-25).

Sanctification is a process. This passage is a strong antidote to those who claim “Christian perfection.” It is encouraging to us all that even Paul had to struggle against his old nature.

5. From justification to glory, ch. 8

Paul does not conclude on a negative note. While sin does continue to exert its power, we have a greater power within us, and we shall finally overcome totally.

The believer comes to faith by the Holy Spirit, given in regeneration. The Holy Spirit (mentioned many times in Rom 8) indwells us, overcoming the sinful nature more and more. This is the power that raised Jesus from the dead, and will raise us too (v. 11). The Spirit assures us that we are God’s children, heirs of eternal life.

The glory that is coming far surpasses present sufferings. The whole creation awaits the new age, inaugurated when Christ returns to earth.

Meanwhile, we are sure of God’s care, protection, and preserving power. If we have been chosen to salvation and have been justified, we shall certainly be glorified. This assurance gives us blessed peace in this world filled with enemies and trials. We are always and will always be in the love of God.

V. Israel’s relation to the church, ch. 9-11

This section of the book is an important link in the chain of Paul’s argument. It has been anticipated in chapter 1, but now is called for by the end of chapter 8. If God promises to preserve his elect people, how is it that most of the Jewish nation has departed from God, has rejected Christ, and is lost? Have they been separated from God’s love? Paul answers this question magnificently and elegantly in these chapters.

1. God’s sovereignty in election, 9:1-21

Paul begins by asserting God’s sovereignty to choose whomever he will for salvation. The OT clearly shows that he did not elect all of Abraham’s descendants; the line of Ishmael was excluded, likewise that of Esau. God narrowed down the elect ones without regard to their actions, but simply to further his own purpose.

Paul offers the illustration of Pharaoh, whom God raised up, not to save, but to harden his heart and to condemn, showing God's power over him. Pharaoh was created for God's glory.

We cannot escape responsibility by blaming God or complaining. God is the potter, we are the clay; he can do as he wills with us.

2. Israel's fall, and the remnant, 9:22 - 11:10

Most of chapters 9-11 is taken up describing the way God is dealing with his chosen nation of Israel.

Paul first explains why the nation as a whole has not been faithful to the Lord. The prophets predicted a time when Israel would not be "God's people" (9:22-29). Israel sought to be accepted by God by her own merit, not by simple loyalty to God and faith in him; this is shown by their failure to receive Christ (9:30-33).

Israel has many privileges (cf. 9:1-5), yet they are zealous for a law that reflects their own pride; they are not humble before God. The way of salvation is plain before them, but they have not heeded it (ch. 10).

But Paul recognizes that a remnant of the nation does believe in the Lord, as he promised (11:1-10).

3. God's plan for salvation for Jew and Gentile, 11:11-36

Paul shows in this section the purpose of God in the fall of the Jews, the salvation of the remnant, the salvation of many Gentiles, and the final restoration of the Jews. The purpose is to display God's wisdom and power.

The Jews have fallen from their place of privilege in order to open the way for God to bring in the Gentiles. Yet God will not leave the Jews in unbelief. His covenants with them promise that the nation will be restored, and Paul insists that this time of unbelief is temporary (vv. 11-12, 15, 23-24, 25-27, 28, 31). God has promised; he will restore the nation and bring them to repentance and salvation.

In the meantime, their unbelief has opened the way for the Gentiles to receive the promises made to the Jews (cf. Matt 21:43). Paul compares them to an olive tree. The roots and sap are the patriarchs and the promises. The natural branches are broken off for unbelief (the Jews, hardened by God), and wild branches are grafted in (the Gentiles, given faith by God). Thus the Gentile church is one body with the OT saints, and shares the same covenants. In time, God will graft in again the natural branches as well. Thus, in this manner ("And so"), "the fullness of the Gentiles" and "all Israel" will be saved (vv. 25-26).

This unforeseen path of salvation reveals the great wisdom and glory of God, as Paul indicates in the magnificent doxology which closes the section (vv. 33-36).

VI. Practical Christian living, ch. 12 - 15:13

The practical section of Romans begins with 12:1, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” This new attitude will reveal itself in the various relationships the Christian will have. In this epistle Paul emphasizes the relationships with each other in the church and in the state.

1. Personal associations, ch. 12

One of the first areas of Christian transformation will be one’s attitude toward others. Paul warns us to think of ourselves as members of the body, with certain gifts, in need of the gifts of others as well. We must show love to others, even to those who persecute us. We thus can overcome evil with good.

2. The Christian and the state, 13:1-7

Since rulers are established by God for the proper ordering of society, and are ministers of God’s laws, they are entitled to the respect, taxes, and dues of the Christians. On the other hand, they are responsible to praise the good and bring God’s vengeance on the wicked.

3. Love and God’s commandments, 13:8-14

Some put a difference between keeping God’s commandments and loving one’s fellow men. Paul shows that love is the fulfilling of the law, and that the law defines what love is. The Christian life is a life of love, ordered by God’s Ten Commandments (summarized by Christ in the two Great Commandments).

4. Weak and strong brothers, ch. 14 - 15:13

Much of the trouble in the churches was caused by the varying understanding of the Christians. Some were strong, recognizing what God required and the freedom he has granted, especially in external matters. Others were weak, thinking that God has imposed external regulations besides those of the moral law; for them to do what the strong Christians were doing would be sin, for they thought those things were wrong; the weak brothers might easily return to their former sinful life.

The particular issues that troubled the church were eating food offered to idols, and keeping certain religious days.

Paul enjoins both groups to tolerate one another in brotherly love and acceptance. Let each person have his conviction, and live by it. Let not the weak judge the strong, nor the strong look down on the weak. On the other hand, the strong were in a position to sacrifice much of their own freedom in order to protect the weak (14:15-21).

To love one another above the exercise of one's own freedom, requires the grace of God, which he will bestow (15:5).

VII. Paul's missionary plans, 15:14-33

Paul compares his missionary work to that of a priest, bringing God's salvation to the people. He desires to bring God's salvation to the Gentiles, as God has commissioned him. He especially desires to take the gospel to areas not before evangelized, all around the Mediterranean (15:19-20).

An important part of that plan is his planned trip to Rome. He tells them to prepare for his arrival, and to aid his planned trip to Spain (vv. 23-29). In the meantime, he asks their prayers for a successful trip to Jerusalem and a good reception of his offering there (vv. 30-32).

VIII. Greetings and conclusion, ch. 16

After introducing Phoebe (vv. 1-2) Paul sends his greetings to many of the Christians in Rome known to him (vv. 3-16; there are 26 names plus 2 others—mother and sister). This long list proves the substantial size of the church, and the ease of travel in the Roman empire at the time.

Paul does not conclude the letter before warning the Roman Christians about heretics who will seek to divide the church and lead it astray; they must be avoided (vv. 17-19).

Paul concludes the epistle with greetings from Timothy and others. The amanuensis Tertius adds his own greeting (v. 22). The fulsome doxology at the end repeats many of the main themes of the epistle.