

Introduction:

- When we think of the Book of Romans, many students of the Bible think of doctrine. But what we have to remember is that Romans is a letter written in specific circumstances with specific purposes. It is not a systematic theology.
- Many who begin reading the Book of Romans stop reading before they are done because it is so hard to understand. *"...our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved. This is what our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him—¹⁶ speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters to mean something quite different, just as they do with other parts of Scripture.* (2 Pe 3:15-16). NLT. Even Peter seemed to think that Paul's revelation of the Gospel at times was hard to understand.
- It is difficult because we are asking, "Who is he talking to? What does he mean by the law? What is this first Adam second Adam all about? Where do all of these big words come from and what do they mean? Justification, reconciliation, confession, faith, sin and salvation.
- We begin tonight by looking at the background of the book itself.

I. Author

- A. Romans is authored by the Apostle Paul but actually written by a man named Tertius, his scribe.
 1. *"This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News."* (Romans 1:1, NLT) Sent out to do what? Preach Good News. So the Gospel stands out in the very first verse.
 2. *"I, Tertius, the one writing this letter for Paul, send my greetings, too, as one of the Lord's followers."* (Romans 16:22, NLT)
- B. Paul is writing while on his way to Jerusalem. His plans are to deliver an offering to Jerusalem, go to Rome briefly and be sent out to Spain from there. Ro 15:22-29
 1. This offering was important to Paul. In fact it is mentioned in every letter he writes while on his third missionary journey. (1 Cor.16:1-4 and 2 Cor 8-9)
 2. Its importance is not just for relief of the suffering church in Jerusalem but its overall purpose to be used to connect Jew and Gentiles, to connect the Church in Jerusalem with the Gentile Church scattered across Asian.
 3. *"As soon as I have delivered this money and completed this good deed of theirs, I will come to see you on my way to Spain."* (Romans 15:28, NLT) Paul sees Rome as a mere stopping point on his way to Spain. His concern is getting the Gospel to the unreached people groups of the world. *"My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else."* (Romans 15:20, NLT)
 4. Because of Acts 20:3-6 we can summarize with high probability that Romans was written in Greece, possible Corinth before Paul arrives in Jerusalem.
- C. What is important for us to realize is that in this time Paul is making a huge transition from 25 years of ministry to now focusing on the West Mediterranean. So he prepares to bring an offering to Jerusalem as a 'visual' to what God has done in Asiatic nations and in hopes of

also bringing 'theological healing' to the rifts between Jew and Gentile. This may account for why so much of Romans appears to be confused as to who Paul is writing to...Jews? or Gentiles?

II. The Church in Rome.

- A. The tradition of the Church in Rome as having been started by Paul or Peter is hard to accept. First of all Paul states and has stated in other letters that he will not build upon another man's work. *"My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else."* (Romans 15:20, NLT)
- B. The most likely scenario is that Jews from Rome were touched by the Acts 2 outpouring. *"Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome"* (Acts 2:10, NLT) And they returned to Rome and birthed the church there.
- C. Therefore the synagogue in Rome became the home of the church in the city of Rome. Again you see the mixing of Jews and Romans and understand why Paul seems to be addressing both. Claudius, Emperor of Rome, also expelled Jews from Rome because there was so much fighting between Jews who accepted Christ and those who did not. *"There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome."* (Acts 18:2, NLT) Yet in Romans 16:3 Paul is saying to greet Priscilla and Aquila. So that exile was short lived.
 1. Think of how this impacts the church. If the Jews are out of the picture for while the church of Rome grows outside of Jewish influence.
 2. The Jewish influence actually diminishes in this time so theologically the impact would be huge.
 3. This further explains the existence of house churches in Romans 16.

III. The Audience of Romans

- A. *"I am saying all this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this,"* (Romans 11:13, NLT) Roman Gentiles made up a significant portion of the church in Rome. But yet it was Jewish Christians that birthed the church in Rome.
 1. On the one side Romans appears to be written to Jews.
 - a) Ro 16:3,7,11 Paul lists Jews by name there.
 - b) Chapter 2 seems to be written to Jews. *"You who call yourselves Jews are relying on God's law, and you boast about your special relationship with him."* (Romans 2:17, NLT)
 - c) Chapter 6:14, 7:1 Paul associates them closely with the law.
 - d) Abraham is called 'our father in the flesh' in Romans.
 - e) The failure of their law (3:19-20, 27-31; 4:12-15; 5:13-14, 20; 6:14; 7; 8:2-4; 9:30-10:8)
 - f) Chapters 9-11 speak of the Jews' unfolding place in the plan of God.
 2. On the other hand Romans appears to be written to a Gentile audience
 - a) *"Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey"*

him, bringing glory to his name. And you are included among those Gentiles who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:5-6, NLT)

- b) Romans 15:16 Paul was sent to the Roman Gentiles.
- c) Ro 11:11-24 Paul is talking about the Jews for the purpose of Gentiles understanding.
- 3. “Paul’s purpose may be to rehearse the basic issues separating Jews and Christians and to show what his gospel has to say about them, with the purpose of helping Gentile Christians understand the roots of their faith and their own situation vis-à-vis both Jews and Jewish Christians.” Moo, D. J. (1996). *NICNT Romans* (p. 11). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- 4. Most likely given the situation and history of the church in Rome, both are to be considered in the audience that Paul writes although by now the Gentiles greatly outnumber the Jews.

IV. The Letter

- A. Paul’s letter to the Romans is not pastoral, it is not personal as in to Timothy or Titus.
- B. Paul’s letter to the Romans is more of a paper on his theology written for a specific time and purpose. He does not answer questions that are asked of him. Instead he writes to this mixture of Jews and Gentiles and very ‘craftily’ lays out answers that each side of the ‘aisle’ may be asking.
- C. It is far from a comprehensive theology by the apostle.
- D. Romans, becomes for us, a book/letter that has at its heart a general theological argument/arguments.

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8/9/2017

V. Why is Paul writing this letter to this church?

- A. We must remember that this is a letter not a theological work. We can't escape that.
- B. His purpose in writing he never really states though 15:14-ff comes close.
- C. *“I am fully convinced, my dear brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well you can teach each other all about them. Even so, I have been bold enough to write about some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder. For by God’s grace, I am a special messenger from Christ Jesus to you Gentiles. I bring you the Good News so that I might present you as an acceptable offering to God, made holy by the Holy Spirit.”* (Romans 15:14-16, NLT)
- D. Another possible purpose for this writing was to gain an audience/a support base for his reach into Spain
- E. Another possible reason in writing Romans is the amount of Judaizers attacking Paul's work/Christians and God’s work wherever the church was being birthed.
- F. Another purpose might be in preparation to his trip to Jerusalem with the announcement of where he would go next.
- G. Ultimately we have to believe that Paul is addressing answers to problems facing the church in Rome. His focus as we will see in the days to come is on the Gospel and what does it mean.
- H. Luther said, “[Romans] is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read

or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes." Moo, D. J. (1996). NICNT Romans (p. 22). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

VI. Theme of Romans

- A. "How can a sinful person be made right with God?" was Luther's problem. But it was not Paul's. Rather, the question Paul sought to answer was: "How can Gentiles be incorporated with Jews into God's people without jeopardizing the continuity of salvation history?"
1. Chapter 1-4 tells how God brings sinners into relationship with Himself.
 2. Chapters 5-8 provides for that *individual's* eternal life in glory
 3. Chapter 12:1-15:13 is on transforming that *individual's* life on earth now (12:1-15:13).
 4. Chapters 9-11 tells how God in acting on behalf of the sinner through out redemption history. It remains in the background of the Gospel but show how God has worked.
- B. "The real center of Paul's thinking is to be found in chaps. 5-8, in his doctrine of union with Christ and the work of God's Spirit." Moo, D. J. (1996). NICNT Romans (p. 23). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. The key is Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- C. The major theme of Romans boils down to Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. All of Romans seems to have specific points dealing with Christ, making him the central theme of the Gospel! *"For I am not ashamed of this **Good News** about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—the Jew first and also the Gentile. **This Good News** tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life.""* (Romans 1:16-17, NLT) See also vs 3 *"The Good News is about His Son."*
- D. "With Christ as the climax of history, then, history can be divided into two "eras," or "aeons," each with its own founder—Adam and Christ, respectively—and each with its own ruling powers—sin, the law, flesh, and death on the one hand; righteousness, grace, the Spirit, and life on the other. All people start out in the "old era" by virtue of participation in the act by which it was founded—the sin of Adam (cf. Rom. 5:12, 18-19). But one can be transferred into the "new era" by becoming joined to Christ, the founder of that era, thereby participating in the acts through which that era came into being—Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (cf. 6:1-6). This *corporate* element in Paul's thinking is vital to understanding his argument at a number of points in Romans." NICNT Romans

Conclusion:

- Romans is Paul's summary of the Gospel which he preaches.
- There you have an introduction to the Book of Romans.