

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

October 12, 2022

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

The Letter to the Romans

Introduction to the Letter

Text – Romans 1:1 – 17

Introduction

The Epistle to the Romans is the first letter included in the Bible order of epistles. It was not the first chronologically, however. *Romans* was the sixth of Paul's recorded letters, written after *Galatians*, *1st and 2nd Thessalonians*, and *1st and 2nd Corinthians*. It was written from Corinth in approximately 58 A.D. at the end of Paul's third missionary journey. Though not first chronologically, this letter was possibly included first because of its foundational importance of establishing the principle of the righteousness which can only come from God.

The primary purpose of *Romans* is not to preach to the lost sinner about how to be saved although we often use the Romans Road to reach people with the Gospel. It is rather written to teach the doctrine of salvation to those of us who are saved. Harry Ironside, the great pastor of Moody Church said this:

I would add one other thought, which I believe is of moment, particularly for those who seek to present the gospel to others. It is this: in *Romans*, we have the gospel taught to saints rather than the gospel preached to unsaved sinners. I believe it is very important to see this. To be saved it is only necessary to trust in Christ. But to understand our salvation and, thus, to get out of it the joy and blessing God intends to be our portion, we need to have the work of Christ unfolded to us. This is what the Holy Spirit has done in this precious epistle. It is written to people who are already saved to show them the secure foundation upon which their salvation rests: namely, the righteousness of God. When faith apprehends this, doubts and fears are gone, and the soul enters settled peace.¹

When I was first saved, I did not understand salvation, and I still struggle comprehending the depth of truth involving redemption. A careful study of *Romans*, however, will help us all get a better grasp of how a lost sinner receives the righteousness of God.

Martin Luther said:

"The epistle to the Romans is the true masterpiece of the New Testament and the very purest gospel, which is well worth and deserving that a Christian man should not only

¹ Ironside, H. A. (1920) *Romans and Galatians* (Kindle Locations 104-109). Kindle Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

learn it by heart, word for word, but also that he should daily deal with it as the daily bread of men's souls. It can never be too much or too well read or studied, and the more it is handled the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."

John Wesley, the father of Methodism, was saved on May 4, 1738, after hearing a message from Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on *Romans*.

John Bunyan, the writer of *Pilgrim's Progress*, was saved after reading *The Epistle to the Romans*.

John Phillips states that *Romans* presents salvation "fully, freely, and forever".

In introducing this letter to the Romans, we will take a partial look at verses 1 and 7:

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, ... "To all that be in Rome, ..."

Our initial focus in this first glimpse of the letter will be to meet the human author, to understand more about the intended audience, and to make sense of the aim, or purpose, for the writing.

Preaching Point – We are commanded to study.

Why are we studying all this preliminary information about *Romans*? Because the information contained in this introductory study is imperative for us to learn the important doctrines contained in the text. To learn the Letter, we must first examine the context, and the context will be revealed in this introductory study. The Bible commands us to:

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

The Author

The human writer of the letter to the Romans is identified in the first verse. We do not ever take a position other than what is plainly stated in the Bible, and the Bible tells us who the writer is. There are some liberal Bible critics who desire to pick apart what is plainly taught by the Bible.

Paul also had the help of some others in communicating this wonderful letter. Tertius, an amanuensis (one who takes dictation - Romans 16:22), penned the epistle as Paul dictated it. Paul himself was merely a scribe of sorts, someone who received this inspired truth as God dictated it to him. The letter was then delivered by Phoebe (Romans 16:1 and 2 – note – Cenchrea was located next to Corinth, and was the port city for Corinth)

Let's take a moment to learn what we can about the human author.

The following is an excerpt from a previous study on *The Life of Paul*:

I. Paul's Background as an Enemy of Christ

"For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." - (Philippians 3:3-6)

"But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people." - (Acts 21:39)

It is important to note that Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, and was given the name Saul by his father. (Acts 22:1 – 3;) He is not actually referred to as Paul until Acts 13:9.

"Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him," - (Acts 13:9)

The Bible does not indicate that God changed his name to Paul, but that he was known by both names. Though he was Hebrew by both blood and faith, he also had Roman citizenship, which entitled him to many privileges and rights that other Jews did not enjoy. How Paul received this citizenship is unclear. It is believed by some that the city of Tarsus was granted freedom in the years prior to the birth of Saul, and thus every person born in it was automatically granted citizenship.

It is interesting that Paul never mentions his family in his writings. He visited Tarsus shortly after his conversion and on both his second and third journeys, yet there is no mention of him visiting or witnessing to family members

Paul was a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee.

"But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." - (Acts 23:6)

The Pharisees were a very legalistic sect of the Jews that seemed to have originated in the period between the Old and New Testaments, possibly during the revolt of the Maccabees against Antiochus Epiphanes. They are not mentioned at all in the Old Testament. This group held to a strict code of ceremonial laws and consisted of about 6000 members. They were bitter enemies of the Lord. The name *Pharisee* means separated ones. Jesus often rebuked them for placing their traditions above the word and will of God (See Matthew 15:3 – 9; 22:18; 23:13, 23, 25, 29; Luke 12:1).

Notice that there is another group mentioned in Acts 23:6 – the Sadducees. They were the liberals of the day. They denied the existence of angels, and the possibility of a

resurrection. Though the Sadducees and Pharisees were almost opposite of each other, Jesus warned His followers to beware of the “leaven” of both groups (See Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:8).

A. His Education as a Pharisee

"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day." - (Acts 22:3)

He was educated “at the feet of Gamaliel” – a well-respected doctor of the law (See also Acts 5:34 – 40). Gamaliel was also a Pharisee, and quite possibly the most influential teacher of Paul’s day. As a student of this man, Paul would have become expert in both the Old Testament Law, and Rabbinic traditions.

Paul was probably a member of the Sanhedrin (see Acts 26:10) – a council of seventy-one members made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees, with the High Priest being the chief officer.

It is possible that Paul was at one time married because he was a Pharisee, a rabbi, and a member of the Council. That leaves us with the question of what happened to Paul’s wife. If, in fact, he was married at one time, his wife had probably died prior to the time of Paul’s travels and writings.

B. His Enmity as a Persecutor (See Acts 7:54 – 8:3; 9:1 - 2)

"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." - (Acts 26:9-11)

Paul hated Christians. He saw himself as an agent of God in the extermination of all that professed faith in Christ.

II. Paul’s Birth into God’s Family (Acts 9:3 – 17)

A. Paul’s salvation was powerful - Salvation for anyone is a divine act of God, but Paul’s conversion was uniquely miraculous. Jesus personally appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus.

B. Paul’s salvation was personal – You will notice that the Lord revealed himself only to Paul, not to the men that were travelling with him.

C. **Paul's salvation was prepared** – Another disciple of the Lord – Ananias – received a vision also from the Lord preparing him to assist Paul. It was after Ananias came to Paul that the scales were lifted from his eyes, and he received the Holy Ghost.

D. **Paul's salvation was preceded by the testimony of Stephen** – The death of Stephen certainly had a profound impact on Paul.

III. Paul's Baptism and Training as a Disciple

A. He was baptized by Ananias in Damascus (Acts 9:18)

B. His discipleship began with the disciples in Damascus (Acts 9:19)

He immediately began preaching Christ in the synagogues (v 20 – 22) He boldly convinced many Jews in Damascus that Jesus is the Christ.

C. He escaped the Jews in Damascus only to be shunned by the disciples in Jerusalem. (Acts 9:23 – 26)

D. He is defended by Barnabas (Acts 9:25 – 28)

E. He gets into another scuffle with the Grecians (see Acts 6), and they try to kill him. (Acts 9:29)

F. He is sent home to Tarsus. (Acts 9:30 - 31)

G. Barnabas finds Paul in Tarsus and brings him to Antioch (Acts 11:19 – 26)

H. Barnabas and Saul deliver relief to the saints in Judaea (Acts 11:27 – 30)

I. Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch with John Mark (Acts 12:25 – 13:1)

Paul's training was **practical** in that he immediately put into practice the things that he learned. His training was also **personal** in that several individuals invested their lives in him, especially Barnabas.

IV. Paul's Frequent Boasting of the Grace of God

Every time Paul had the opportunity, he rehearsed his testimony before unbelievers. The personal testimony is one of the most effective tools any believer has in witnessing to the lost. New believers may not know all the Scriptural arguments regarding salvation, but they should know what happened to them.

A. **Before the Jews at Jerusalem** – Acts 21:39 – 22:16

B. **Before Agrippa** – Acts 26: 1 – 23

Conclusion

1. The Audience

Verse eight tells us that the letter was written to all believers in Rome. Rome was the capital of the entire Roman Empire. It was founded in 753 BC but is not mentioned in the Bible until the New Testament. The population of Rome was over one million in Paul's day. Rome is located 15 miles from the Mediterranean Sea in central Italy.

The City of Rome contained many Jews, and after Pentecost, began to be a place where Jewish Christians lived. According to a Suetonius, a first century Roman Scholar in his "Life of Claudius", Caesar Claudius who reigned from 41 to 54 A.D., "banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus."²(presumably Christ – see Acts 18:2 – Priscilla and Aquila were kicked out of Rome).

Some of the believers at Rome had probably been converted to Christ at Pentecost (Acts 2:10), and others may have been converted through the ministry of Paul and others after the time of Pentecost. Priscilla and Aquila were originally from Rome but were with Paul in Corinth and in Ephesus on his second journey in 50 – 52 A.D. Apparently, they were now living back in Rome as we see that a church was meeting at their house. (Romans 16:3 – 5)

The letter was written to "all" believers in Rome, both Jew and Gentile. Portions of the letter were specifically addressed to Jews (2:17; 4:1, 12); but other portions of the letter were addressed to Gentiles (1:13; 11:13). Other sections seem to be designed to explain the assimilation of both Jews and Gentiles into the Body of Christ. (11:17 – 31)

2. The Aim (or Purpose)

As was already stated, the theme of this letter is the righteousness of God:

"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:17)

Harry Ironside points out that there are three New Testament letters that quote the phrase from Habakkuk 2:4: "the just shall live by his faith." In Romans the emphasis is on "the just;" in Galatians, the emphasis is on "shall live;" and in Hebrews, the emphasis is "by faith."³

In *Romans*, Paul will prove that righteousness cannot come from adherence to commandments, but rather only through faith in Christ. Whether Jew or Gentile, righteousness can only be imputed to the lost sinner when he places his trust in the Lord Jesus:

² Suetonius. *Life of Claudius*

³ Ironside (Kindle Location 51)

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9)

In this epistle, Paul will step by step, precept upon precept, and line upon line, diffuse all arguments to the contrary.

Paul was not correcting false doctrine here in Romans, as he did in Galatians; nor was he rebuking bad behavior, as in the Corinthian epistles. He was establishing doctrinal as well as practical principles surrounding the theme of the righteousness of God. The great doctrines of sanctification, justification, and eternal security are all carefully explained here in this letter. Paul wanted to make sure that this church in Rome was "established" in the faith (Romans 1:11).

There is also a secondary purpose recorded in Romans 15:22 – 24. Paul wanted to eventually reach into Spain with the gospel, and he wanted to stop and visit the saints in Rome on the way and solicit their support for his journey.

The Epistle to the Romans breaks up into three major divisions. There is the doctrinal section in chapters 1 – 8; the dispensational section in chapters 9 – 11; and the devotional (practical) section in chapters 12 – 16.

John Phillips observed that there are several key words and phrases found in this letter:

Some of the key words in Romans are law (78 times), all (71 times), righteousness (66 times), faith (62 times), sin (60 times), death (42 times), in Christ (33 times), flesh (20 times), impute (19 times), and God forbid (10 times).⁴ Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John gave the facts about Christ's sojourn on earth, but Paul gave the meaning of it, so that in Romans we have the gospel according to Paul. More Old Testament quotations appear in Romans than in all the other epistles put together—some seventy quotations from fourteen Old Testament books. In this way Paul showed that the gospel message is the same throughout all ages.⁴

⁴ Phillips, John. (2009) *Exploring the New Testament Book by Book: An Expository Survey* (Loc. 1071-1075). Kindle Ed. Grand Rapids, MI. Kregel Pub.