

The Book of Romans

Introduction

Rom 1:1-7

The first five books of the New Testament are primarily historical books, the first four describing the life of Jesus Christ ending with His death, burial, resurrection and ascension back to heaven from when He had come in the first place and then the fifth, the book of Acts, recording the advance of the gospel by the church after the departure of Jesus and the empowering of His people through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

But then we come to a series of letters written by various authors of the First Century to the churches as well as to Christians at large seeking to help them with various struggles they were facing as they matured and developed. Those authors include Peter, James the Less, Judas (not Iscariot), the apostle John and then the one who penned more such material than the rest put together, Paul the converted Pharisee and the last addition to the roster of the apostles.

We have been studying him for the last two years as he carried the gospel to what we now know as Turkey but also to Macedonia, Greece, Cyprus, Creta, Malta and eventually Italy, specifically to Rome. History gives us reasons to believe that he may have also carried the gospel westward into what we call France and Spain, maybe even Great Britain.

Almost all of the letters written by Paul were written to churches that he had been directly responsible for founding but this book that we are beginning here was written to a church whose origin we do not know, the church at Rome.

It stands at the beginning of the second section of the New Testament, that which deals primarily with doctrine instead of history. Now please understand, the first five books, the gospels and the book of Acts, do contain theology, important theology for sure, but they are primarily concerned with telling a historical narrative. The next 21 books are primarily theological and the last book, the Revelation of Jesus Christ (also called the Apocalypse), it mostly prophetic.

Some have asked, and it is a valid question, “why does the book of Romans come first?” It certainly was not the first written but the early church and most of the scholars since the early days have seen it as the most important and the one which is the most thorough treatment of Christian theology that was ever produced. When one has mastered this book the theology used and the terms referenced, the concepts mentioned, in the rest of the New Testament are understood much better.

It was a very important book to some very important believers of church history. Augustine of Hippo, a philosopher and professor in the Fourth century, came to an understanding of the gospel through reading the book of Romans. Then, during his lifetime, one of the most profound and dangerous errors to ever come to the world was born in the mind of a man named Pelagius, a supposed Christian who began to powerfully argue that the notion of original sin and total depravity were incorrect, that humans did not come into this world blind and helpless spiritually but were capable of self-improvement and obedience to God so that they might be accepted by Him on the basis of their good works. Augustine successfully argued the Orthodox position

against him but the notions of Pelagius are tenacious and are still with us in modified form. Those who argue for Truth against Pelagian ideas are very much indebted to the book of Romans for the theological help that Paul gave us there.

Most people are aware, who know church history, that the book of Romans and the great doctrine of Justification by Faith are what led Martin Luther to challenge Rome and eventually be expelled from the Catholic Church as he grasped and began to teach and preach the great theology of the book of Romans. This was the beginning of the movement known as the Protestant Reformation.

The great English writer John Bunyan, author of the Pilgrim's Progress, was likewise impacted by this book, together with the letter to the Galatians and the commentary of Martin Luther. He was led to Repentance and Faith by the study of this letter of Paul to the Romans.

Some years later in Geneva Switzerland, a Scotsman by the name of Robert Haldane through conversations with some theology students led them to an understanding of the book of Romans and several of them led in a resurgence of Protestant theology in France and the rest of Europe. They became mighty men of God and great teachers of the Word of God.

These are only few examples over time of the impact of this book on the history of the world. The reality is that every serious preacher of salvation by Grace through Faith and the Sovereignty of God have been moved and taught by this wonderful schoolbook that Paul wrote and God has preserved for the world to read.

The Book Itself, an Overview

As we have said, this book is the most complete and exhaustive orderly arrangement of Christian Theology to be found in scripture.

Paul will start at the beginning, the problem of the Wrath and Justice of God, then he will proceed to describe the human condition as naturally occurring without faith and without the Grace of God. He shows what a problem this is and then proceeds to affirm by the example of Abraham that the Work of God to save man is revealed through Abraham, through Adam and through Christ. He discusses the 'mechanics' of the process, shows that believing and serving God is a learning curve but one that is blessed with absolute assurance that God's Work in a soul cannot be overthrown by any circumstance. Going on he demonstrates the Sovereignty of God in the saving process and comes to terms with the issue of Israel and the promises/covenants, reconciling the salvation of the remnant, the conversion of the Gentiles, and stern warnings to believers on both sides about how they view the other. Then in chapter 12 he begins the process not only of showing how believers are to live but especially how believers from different cultures are to behave themselves around issues that are not critical to the Christian faith. In all it is a wonderful setting forth of Christianity even though, by comparison with many books that have been written since, it is remarkably brief.

It seems only fitting that we should ask why Paul wrote the book. It seems obvious that he knew some of the people there.

Rom 16:1-15

1 I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:

(It seems that this lady may have carried the letter to Rome.)

2 That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

We know that they were church planters in their own right who had worked with Paul but had also worked independently of him.

5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

6 Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.

7 Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

It seems obvious that some of Paul's family was there.

8 Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord.

9 Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.

10 Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household.

11 Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.

12 Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.

13 Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

14 Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.

15 Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them. KJV

So, the list of people whom Paul knew among the believers at Rome was quite large.

Knowing them, then, it seems logical that he was concerned that at least some of them had not been well educated in some of the basic elements of Christian theology and he was anxious to correct that issue.

Of course, many have claimed over the years that Peter was the founder of this church. We think that to be an error for several reasons.

1. If Peter had founded the church it is doubtful if they would have needed this level of education that Paul was sharing.

2. Paul did not insert himself into other men's ministries.

Rom 15:20

20 Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: KJV

3. Paul wrote the entire book without mentioning Peter's name which would have been very odd if he had been the founder of the church.

More than likely some of the folks that Paul named in Romans 16 who had known Paul from other settings had moved to Rome and begun a work there, maybe Priscilla and Aquilla.

The Text:

Rom 1:1-7

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,
2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)
3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;
4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:
5 By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:
6 Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ:
7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

We notice that the book begins with the name of its' author, Paul the apostle, the man who had been born named Saul in the city of Tarsus on the southern coast of Turkey. He had been born to an extremely orthodox Jewish family who had financed his education to the very top level of Judaism under the tutelage of the great Rabbi Gamaliel who himself was the son of one of the most famous Rabbin of all time, Hilel.

As the prophecies of the OT teach us, the Lord Jesus Christ had come into the world to rescue two groups of people, the chosen ones from among physical Israel and then the Gentile element of the promise of Abraham that in him all the tribes of the earth would be blessed. Paul would be used in city after city and region after region to make the case of the Messiah from the Jewish scriptures. Without a single page of what we speak of as the New Testament, with only the Law and the Prophets, Paul was so trained in the Bible of his time that he was able to mightily evangelize that element of the Jewish population that was honestly seeking after God. He was able to answer their questions and meet their objections to his claim that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed that One Who Was to Come.

But that was not the extent of his education. Tarsus, his home, was also a center of Greek culture

rivaling Athens as well as Alexandria Egypt. As the record we have of him demonstrates, he was familiar with the culture and the writers of the Gentile world, able to quote them as needed to make connections with a Gentile audience, the one that he was actually called by God to evangelize. He would make this statement about himself.

1 Cor 9:22 “...I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” KJV

And indeed he was. In fact, it was just this mixture of education and talent which would make Paul the perfect one to write this letter. He could see and have compassion for both elements of the culture of the Roman church and find a way to encourage them to emphasize the vital elements of Christianity and allow room for different cultures to make different decisions about some things.

“a servant of Jesus Christ...”

The word ‘servant’ is literally the Greek word for ‘slave,’ one who is legally owned by another, his property, and not his own person.

This was critical in Paul’s thinking, the fact that he was not a free and independent agent but one who had literally been purchased, totally and completely, and was no longer his own person.

He made a very interesting point when giving instructions to servants as well as free men who were called to the gospel.

1 Cor 7:20-23

20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

21 Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.

22 For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. KJV

Every Christian is a purchased possession of the Lord, he said, whether he is in this life a slave or a free man. Each one is to consider himself such and Paul very much was a believer in his own doctrine.

Paul used that word several times in chapter 6 of Romans as he worked out the mechanics of personal Christian service.

Rom 6:19 “... as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.” KJV

We saw a wonderful practical demonstration of that when we walked with him through his Second Missionary Journey.

Acts 16:6-10

- 6 Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,
 7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.
 8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.
 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.
 10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Paul literally considered himself as a man who had died and had been raised from the dead, owing his entire existence to the work of Jesus Christ.

Gal 2:20

- 20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. KJV

Gal 2:20

- 20 I have been crucified with Christ: and I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And the real life I now have within this body is a result of my trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. TLB

And he demonstrated that he really believed that, over and over again giving himself to real danger, real threats, and monstrous persecutions.

2 Cor 11:24-28

- 24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.
 25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;
 26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;
 27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.
 28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. KJV

He did not consider his life to be his own but actually owned by the Lord Jesus Christ and he proved over and over again that he took the issue seriously. But as one reads him one realizes that he thought all believers should have the same attitude as he did since he had the same attitude that Jesus had demonstrated.

Phil 2:5-8

- 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

- 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
- 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. KJV

“...called to be an apostle...”

No doubt, as at other places, some at Rome would be tempted to wonder why and how Paul felt that he had the right to write to them to tell them anything at all.

The reason, of course, is that he had been called by God in the Person of Jesus Christ to be “one sent” by Him to the world to bear witness of His Gospel. He was the “apostle to the Gentiles” and really the only one.

His authority to them was the same as his authority is to us. We take his word that the declarations he makes are the very Word of God and are to be believed and obeyed as if the Lord Jesus Christ Himself had uttered them.

This book is a record of God’s Revelation to mankind, especially that part of mankind outside the Jewish bloodline. It is truth unmingled with any error whatsoever. Its’ principles are not subject to change or modification. In whatever Gentile culture this book may find itself, the principles and affirmations found there are to be obeyed, even if they disagree with deeply held beliefs and prejudices in that part of humanity.

Just as he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ we are not to be ashamed of his declaration of it nor the laws of God that he affirmed. Our faith in Jesus Christ is tied to our loyalty to the teachings of those whom He has sent.

“...separated unto the gospel of God...”

Other translations read, “set apart for the gospel of God.” (NIV) And we must remember that this setting apart was done personally by the Lord Jesus Christ. Unless we disbelieve the account that he gave of his own conversion we realize that he has been set in a place by God Himself to declare the gospel. Thus the trustworthiness of his declarations are as valid as the Word of God Himself and are to be thought of in that way.

The 'gospel of God' which he mentions is THE GOSPEL. It is variously called:

Matt 24:14

- 14 And this **gospel of the kingdom** shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. KJV

Mark 1:1

- 1 The beginning of **the gospel of Jesus Christ**, the Son of God; KJV

Acts 20:24

- 24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so

that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify **the gospel of the grace of God**. KJV

It is all one and the same. There are not various gospels just varied ways of describing the one gospel.

It is the gospel of the kingdom because it is the gospel of Jesus Christ Who is the King of His kingdom and all who believe in Him become a part of that kingdom. It is the gospel of the Grace of God because there is no one who believes who does not do so by a gift of faith (grace) from God. No one can climb in any other way and no faith generated in the heart of a man without God's enablement is sufficient to bring him into a saving relationship with God.

“Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures”

There are promises made in the OT which cannot be understood in any other way with integrity than as prophecies of Christ Himself.

Isaiah divides fairly naturally into two sections. The first part, chapters 1-39 deals with Isaiah as he interacted with the people of his time and the circumstances related to his life. But from chapter 40 onward, he casts his eyes, as it were, forward to a time of blessing through the Savior whom God was going to send. Consider these passages.

Isa 40:3-5

- 3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:
- 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. KJV

Isa 42:1-7

- 1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.
- 2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.
- 3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.
- 4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.
- 5 Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:
- 6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;
- 7 To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. KJV

Isa 49:1-6

- 1 Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.
- 2 And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;
- 3 And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.
- 4 Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.
- 5 And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.
- 6 And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.
KJV

And then there is that wonderful passage that begins at 52:13 and goes through 53:12 describing exactly the sufferings of Christ.

And these are only examples of what may be found in the OT. Remember this was the only Bible that Paul had to preach from and it was this Bible which had prophesied of Christ Who came and fulfilled it all.

This was the message which Paul proclaimed and all that he taught was in reference to this revelation.

Truly the church at Rome as well as the rest of the world has been fortunate to have such a book with such a foundation as this.