

## **An Introduction to Romans**

Years ago a professor asked our class, “If you were allowed only one book from the Bible to have for the rest of your life, which book would it be?” While I love and enjoy so many portions of Scripture and would miss them dearly, my answer now is the same answer I thought then, I would choose Paul’s letter to the Romans. Why Romans? Well, before we move forward with our introduction to Romans, I’d like to briefly give a few reasons for my choice.

### **Some Benefits in Studying Romans**

#### **Romans Provides the Theological Explanation for the Entire Storyline of the Bible**

While Romans does not repeat the entire biblical narrative Romans provides the divine significance behind the redemptive events in both the Old and New Testaments.

For example, Romans gets behind Adam’s disobedience and the ensuing curse upon humanity, 5:12-21. By one man sin entered the world and death through sin (5:12) might not give us all the details we would like but in one passage the Apostle explains the behavior of mankind and God’s justifiable judgment for man’s idolatry. From judgment to justification, we discover the ultimate purpose of the Law, 3:19-20, (to demonstrate the impossibility of redemption through law keeping) and the necessity of the promise of blessing, (salvation by God’s gracious promise through faith alone). Irreversible guilt and condemnation require another way for righteousness, namely, the person and work of Christ (the promised Heir) according to the blessings embedded in the Abrahamic Covenant. What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. Thus, God, in Christ, condemned sin in the flesh, Romans 8:3-4. This work of atonement is now granted as a gift according to the faith of Abraham. Finally, for our present purposes, Romans unveils the divine plan regarding Israel and the nations with respect to salvation/righteousness, 9:1—11:36. Israel falls prey to the wiles of sin through the law by seeking to establish their own works-righteousness, 9:31-32. Israel’s failure to hear the voice of the law calling for faith in Christ, leads to the regathering of the nations (Gentiles) under the blessings of Abraham, Genesis 12:3. In turn, salvation coming to the Gentiles then becomes God’s vehicle for bringing the righteousness of faith by grace back to Israel, 11:11ff.-26.

Unlike any singular book of the Bible, Romans provides the theological backdrop for the historical movement and redemptive moments within the Bible. In Romans we get to hear the mind of the Author of creation and our salvation.

#### **Romans Provides the Divine Sense and Purpose for the Major Themes Throughout the Bible**

Closely related to the theological connections mentioned above are insights about the major themes that remain constant throughout the Bible. Consider, for example, Adam's sin and the ensuing sinfulness of humanity. While mankind's idolatry is obvious throughout the pages of Scripture, sin's purpose and nature is never as clearly explained until we encounter Paul's explanation in the pages of Romans (e.g., 7:7-25).

Similarly, life and death take on new dimensions juxtaposed through the contrasting lives of two individuals, 5:12-21. Further, Romans provides new dimensions to the word flesh, 7:14ff. as does the idea of spirit/Spirit. More than this, these themes are uniquely connected to the promises made to Abraham and the Law given through Moses. Along with concepts such as faith, works, and righteousness, Paul associates the reality of sin through the flesh empowered by law, 7:7-25, while connecting faith with the Spirit according to the Promises. In Romans we discover how one path leads to wrath, namely, sin energized by the flesh attempting to keep the law, 4:15, while conversely, we also discover how the gracious promise embraced by faith through Christ enlivened by the Spirit, brings righteousness and life.

Lastly, in our brief overview, Israel, as God's people, finds new definitions in Romans. Paul tells us that the true Jew, the real Israelite, is the Jew who has been circumcised by the Spirit, 2:28-29 (used elsewhere in Paul as a designation for new birth, consider Philippians 3:3 and Colossians 2:12-14). I do not understand Paul as equating every born again person an Israelite, rather, Paul tells us that only the Israelites who are born by the Spirit should be considered belonging to God's people, Israel.

### **Romans Provides the Foundational Picture of a life lived under grace.**

Without question there are several New Testament passages that give detailed and inspirational instruction about living the Christian life (e.g. Colossians 3:12ff.; Ephesians 4—6). Romans, on the other hand, begins with justification, 3:24—4:6, discusses faith, 4:4-25, the guarantee of the promise, reconciliation, 5:1-11, and the reign of grace through Christ, 5:12-21. Additionally, Romans discusses the flesh and the Spirit, 8:1-14 our adoption and inheritance, 8:15-25, and ultimate glorification, 8:28-39. Romans, however, does not stop there. This letter provides not only the theological foundation for New Covenant spirituality, chapters 3-8, but also exhortation and encouragement for Christians in community with other believers, 12:1-13, with the secular marketplace, 12:14-21, and with civil authorities, 13:1-7. Further, Paul sets forth the moral basis upon which these relationships are lived, namely, the law of Christ, the law of love, 13:8-10, while once again reminding both Jew and Gentile that the law of the Messiah (the law of love) fulfills every and anything God truly required from the Law of Moses.

Furthermore, nowhere else in the New Testament are we given as detailed a look at what it means to be in Christ. Romans 6:1—7:6 reckons the believer in Christ, both crucified to sin under the law and raised to a new life under grace, the living Savior, 6:14; 7:4-6. This exchange of death in Adam for life through the crucified and resurrected Savior becomes the basis for the Spirit of Life in Christ to enliven a new relationship with the Father (*Abba*), 8:14-16. This new life by the Spirit not only removes us from the curse of sin and death, 7:25, but frees the Christian to love others unconditionally thus fulfilling the Messiah's law, 13:8.

While I love and enjoy all of Scripture and what each book of the Bible adds to our understanding about God and mankind in relationship, the letter to the Romans singularly provides the divine mind behind much of the drama of world redemption. I do believe I would still take Romans as the book of choice if not allowed anything else from the Canon.

## **I. Important Background Discussions Relating to the Epistle of Romans and Our Spiritual Lives.**

### **A. The Author of Romans: Paul the Apostle (Acts 9, 13—28) is the Undisputed Author of the Epistle to the Romans.**

The usual treatment of authorship deals with the internal and external evidence (witnesses) attempting to establish the credibility of the biblical witness. Regarding the authorship of Romans, there are a number of fine commentaries and background articles that examine these evidences, and which convincingly conclude that Paul is the undisputed author of the letter to the Romans.<sup>1</sup>

Discussing the author, however, has merit for several other reasons.<sup>2</sup> For our purposes, accepting Paul as the author, allows us to get to know Paul and better appreciate God's intended messenger and message.

#### **1. As a former pharisee, Paul is uniquely qualified to explain the distinctions between the Law and God's redemptive grace through Christ**

In Acts 23:6, Paul identifies himself as a second-generation Pharisee. Adding to this heritage and background, Paul also identifies himself as God's steward concerning the mystery of Christ, Ephesians 3:4. This two-edged sword uniquely qualifies Paul to explain the distinction between righteousness by faith and a righteousness by works of the Law, cp. 4:1-5 with 9:32; 10:1-13. In Paul's day works of the law also included faithfulness to an oral tradition which was developed during and governed certain factions of Judaism since the Maccabean era, Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:1-10. With his introduction to righteousness by faith, Paul now understood the impossibility of zealous works-

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<sup>1</sup> We need to cite only one of the many works that convincingly authenticate Pauline authorship. C.E.B. Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Limited, 38 George Street, 1977), 2. "Today no responsible criticism disputes its [Romans] Pauline origin. The evidence of its use in the Apostolic Fathers is clear, and before the end of the second century it is listed and cited as Paul's. Every extant early list of the NT books includes it as Paul's. Every extant and early list of NT books includes it among his letters. The external evidence of authenticity could indeed hardly be stronger; and it is altogether borne out by the internal evidence, linguistic, stylistic, literary, historical, and theological. Since Paul's authorship is not now being questioned, it is unnecessary to set out the evidence here." Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> There are several important reasons for discussing authorship, even when the biblical text states the author's name. 1) Confirming Authenticity: Confirming the author mentioned in the text reaffirms the credibility of Scripture. For those who struggle with historicity of the Bible this confirmation may be used by God to strengthen their faith. 2) Background and culture: Discussing authorship introduces aspects of the culture and historical setting of the letter that would otherwise be neglected. These background details assist in understanding the meaning of the text. 3) Understanding the overriding message: Authenticating the author allows us to compare this letter with other letters written by the same author leading to a more fully developed sense of understanding the passage. 5) Deepening our relationship with Christ: Most importantly, in understanding Scripture, we gain a deeper appreciation for Christ and what God has done through Christ for the rescue and transformation of humanity. This understanding grounds and directs our spiritual lives.

righteousness as the means of having a righteous standing before God, 3:20. Knowing Paul's background regarding a rules-and-regulations religion as well as faith in Christ, adds a sense of depth to Paul's insistence that through Christ we "uphold the Law," 3:31 and yet now "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness," 10:4. For Paul upholding the law refers to a the law's salvific purpose, namely an awareness of our guilt as sinners and the necessity for something or Someone outside of ourselves in order to be acquitted from this guilt of sin and experience freedom from wrath, 5:9. Paul uniquely connects the relationship between sin/death and keeping the commandments (namely, attempting to establish a righteousness that proceeds from within), and life by the Spirit fulfilling the righteous requirements of Law, 8:4.

**2. As the Apostle to the nations (Gentiles), Paul is uniquely qualified to proclaim and explain the gospel in ways both Jews and Gentiles could appreciate, 1:13-15; 3:20-31; 15:14-33**

In the Old Testament we learn that God had scattered humanity into people groups (the nations, Genesis 10), Genesis 11. Immediately following this dispersal, Genesis narrows its focus on God creating a new nation for His own possession (Genesis 12—22) based upon new promises, the Abrahamic Covenant. The remainder of the Old Testament tracks the history of this new nation, Israel, while protecting the promises and projecting the future appearance of Jesus, the Messiah, Abraham's promised heir (David's promised heir, 1:3), Galatians 3:16.

With the appearance, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, God specifically commissions Paul to invite these previously scattered nations (the Gentiles) to become fellow heirs of the same divine promises made to Abraham, consider Genesis 12:3 as well as Ephesians 2:11—3:10. While the Twelve were specifically commissioned to go to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," Matthew 10:6,<sup>3</sup> it was Paul who was specifically set apart to go to the nations, Acts 9: 15; Romans 15:15-16. As a Pharisee, Paul knew how to address the synagogue. As a Jew growing up in Tarsus, a city dominated by Gentile history and presence, Paul was accustomed to the Gentile marketplace, Acts 17. In Romans, we get to listen to God's specially prepared messenger explain God's gift of righteousness for all people. Our spiritual lives are informed by the one person uniquely qualified to put all the pieces of God's plan into one coherent picture.

**3. As one steeped in the Jewish tradition Paul is very familiar with cultural conflicts between Jews and Gentiles.**

In Christ, Jews and Gentiles began worshiping the same God. This new community met as co-heirs of the same promises, with the same Messiah, and, in many instances, in the *same* room. Through his unique understanding of this unexpected turn of events, consider Ephesians 2:11—3:10, Paul could best sort out cultural conflicts the Jews and

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<sup>3</sup> There seems to be enough textual evidence in Matthew chapter ten to consider that Christ's sending out the Twelve during His earthly ministry transcends a singular event. Several of the predicted consequences such as the persecution depicted did not occur during their initial mission, rather these events occurred after Christ's ascension. Hence, it would be plausible to consider that the Twelve were primarily commissioned to evangelize Israel while Paul, Acts 9:15; Romans 15:14ff., was the apostle to the nations.

Gentiles were facing. Paul knew the contempt the Jews had toward the Gentiles, consider Galatians 2:15. Paul knew the freedom from Jewish traditions the Gentiles were experiencing, 1 Corinthians 8--10. So, when Paul instructs differing parties how to co-exist, we gain insights about liberty and love working together, Romans 13:8—15:7. Through Paul we begin to navigate the tensions between the gift of righteousness apart from law and the inherited cultural impulse to “do.” We learn insights on balancing the freedoms in Christ with the tensions arising from backgrounds that are not strictly prescribed by the gospel. The strong (those steeped in redemptive grace) learn how to fulfill the Law of Christ (13:8) by bearing the lifestyles of those still bound to a former understanding of spiritual life, 15:1-3. Reading how Paul navigates these first-century conflicts we get an inside and very practical application of Christ’s command to love one another. Paul, in Romans, clearly explains how we should treat one another in the church.

#### **4. As church planter/pastor Paul has learned to care for both corporate and individual issues arising from living the Christian faith.**

Paul was a one-of-kind theologian and Bible teacher, consider Ephesians 3:1-7. But what is often missed is that Paul was a compassionate shepherd of God’s flock, 2 Corinthians 11:28-29. Paul’s life modeled the redemptive love Christ had for us on the cross. We see this passion for people when he genuinely wishes he could be accursed from Christ for the salvation of the Jews, 9:3; when he toiled night and day in order that the Gospel would be unhindered in Greece, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12; and, as he lived without natural amenities so that he could become all things to all people for the sake of the Gospel, 1 Corinthians 9—10. If Paul taught us anything it was that the Gospel impacts lives. God’s grace changed a persecutor of the Church into one of Messiah’s most compassionate servants. Paul not only taught us what to think, he showed us how to care. Paul was transformed by an active-faith model of Christian spirituality as he followed the Holy Spirit’s lead. Truly Paul’s was a life transformed by grace, 1 Corinthians 15:10. As we read Romans, we read a passionately pastoral message about God’s love for us, 5:8.

### **B. The Approximate Date for Writing Romans**

Knowing the date of the letter to the Romans helps us identify the historical setting and provides some clarity to the context behind Paul’s words. To do this we need to look for clues within the letter. We then connect those clues to information we have about the first century Judaism and the Roman Empire. Then, finally, we gather details about Paul’s life provided in the book of Acts as well as his other letters.

#### **1. The Collection for the Believers and Paul’s Trip to Jerusalem**

Our first clue regarding the date has to do with Paul’s statements about the collection for the believers in Jerusalem. This collection also connects us with his trip to Jerusalem in which he delivers the funds collected. In turn, the delivery of these funds directly connects us to Rome.

The key passage regarding these plans is Romans 15:25-28. Here Paul mentions his upcoming trip to Jerusalem. Paul also mentions that the funds to be delivered were

collected from Macedonia and Achaia (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth). If this is the immediate setting for this letter, then Romans would relate to Acts 20—21 which details Paul's journey through Macedonia and Achaia. Not only do we discover that Paul probably wrote this letter in Corinth, but we also discover the connection with his trip to Jerusalem. Paul's trip to Jerusalem, then, places these travels toward the end of Acts and immediately preceding the chaos in Jerusalem, Acts 21, Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, Acts 21:33, and eventual extradition to Rome, Acts 25:10-12.

## **2. Paul's Connection with Various Individuals Mentioned in Romans Chapter Sixteen**

The above assumption becomes more plausible by several personalities mentioned in chapter sixteen. The first of these connections would be the commendation of Phoebe (16:1-2), who belonged to the church at Cenchreae, the port of Corinth. The mention of Phoebe indicates that Paul was in and around Corinth while writing this letter. A second personal connection involves the greeting from Gaius (16:23). Gaius served as Paul's host at the time and may possibly be identified with the Corinthian Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 1:14. Thirdly, the greeting from Erastus, who held an important post of the city treasurer (16:23), leads us to assume a Corinthian point of origin. Erastus may possibly be identified with the man of the same name (who was left at Corinth) mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:20. Finally, the mention of Timothy and Sopater, who send greetings, indicates Corinth as these were Paul's companions when he left Greece heading to Jerusalem.

If the unity of this epistle is maintained, as I believe it should, and if we have established a Corinthian point of origin for this letter, the date for writing this letter may approximated without difficulty. Working from the time of Gallio's appointment to the proconsular office at Corinth, it is possible to calculate that Paul's Jerusalem journey took place either in AD 57 or 58.<sup>4</sup>

Considering these factors, Romans was more-than-likely written during Paul's three month stay in Greece mentioned in Acts 20:2-3. Less certain, though with a degree of confidence, one can place the date of this letter in the year AD 58.

Considering these details, it is most likely that Paul writes this letter as he prepares to return to Jerusalem with relief funds for the impoverished believers. From Jerusalem Paul then plans to visit Rome while preparing himself for a missionary journey to Spain, cp. 15:28. The letter to the Romans was most likely written in Greece either in AD 57 or AD 58.

## **C. Rome and the Readers in Rome c. AD 57/58**

Having established a plausible date for this letter we can consider some of the political and religious settings in Rome.

### **1. The city of Rome in A.D. 58**

As one might expect Rome was the political and economic center of the Roman Empire. In the first century Rome was the largest city in the Empire. With a circumference

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<sup>4</sup>Donald Guthrie, *NT Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1968), 396-97.

of about thirteen miles the population has been estimated to be between one and four million inhabitants.<sup>5</sup>

Generally, Rome was economically poor. The few who were wealthy lived in luxury villas separated from much of the population. Though half the population of Rome was made of free citizens, most of these citizens lived on welfare<sup>6</sup> refusing manual labor thought fit only for slaves. The typical Roman household consisted of several slaves.

For the poor, life was treacherous. Housing consisted of high-rise tenements. Above the first floor there were no sanitary facilities. Human waste and garbage would often be discarded out windows into the street. Also, it was not unusual for these complexes to collapse and kill many. Life expectancy in these conditions was no more than thirty- five years.<sup>7</sup>

With the Roman population being largely dependent upon welfare it is no wonder that Paul saw this city as a great opportunity for the gospel. The Roman way of life was failing. The slaves and citizenry were ready for a lasting solution. Contrary to a prosperity mentality, we should understand how God plans for adversity and poverty in this age of regathering as a divine preparation of hearts for the gospel. God uses trying circumstance to draw people to His Son.

## 2. Nero, AD 54-68

Politics in Rome revolved around the emperor. In fact, one of the religions in ancient Rome focused upon the deification of the emperor and homage paid to the emperor as a god.<sup>8</sup> At the time Paul wrote this letter Nero sat as emperor.

At seventeen years of age Nero's rule began with great promise. For the majority of Nero's reign, Agrippina, Nero's mother, ruled the Empire. Political intrigue, murder, affairs, and selfish misconduct characterized Nero's lifestyle.<sup>9</sup>

Nero's reign, however, is remembered as providing some of the best years in the Empire since the days of Augustus. The provinces were well governed. The rebellions in Armenia and Britain were brought under control. The unrest in Palestine was kept quiet and the common man on the street would have stated all was well.<sup>10</sup>

During the latter part of Nero's rule, though several years after Romans was written, a great fire destroyed all but four of the fourteen districts in Rome. This event, while not important in understanding the letter to the Romans, provides some insight regarding Christianity and the growing contempt held by the community. As it happens, to escape accusation, Nero blamed the fire on the growing and unpopular Christian community. This

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<sup>5</sup>In 1941 an inscription was discovered at Ostia with statistics indicating that in AD 14, the year of Augustus' death, the city of Rome had a population of 4,100,000. Heibert, *Introduction to the NT*. vol 2, 164.

<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that over 200,000 were on Rome's grain dole in Augustus' day. It became a regular practice for the emperor to provide "bread and circuses," free food and free entertainment for the unemployed masses of the capital." *ISBE* vol 4 p.231.

<sup>7</sup> For additional reading on Rome in the first century see, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, Jerome Carcopino. Yale University Press, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 185-99.

<sup>9</sup> See *Catacombs and the Coliseum*, by Benko and O'Rourke for the details of Nero's life.

<sup>10</sup> Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, vol 1 ICC (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark), xiv,xv.

blame led to a period of persecution toward the church.<sup>11</sup> It was during this short period of persecution that Paul and Peter are considered to have been martyred.

### 3. Religious life in Rome

Rome's first-century religious scene seemed to be quite eclectic. Old mystery religions, various philosophies, Judaism, and allegiance to the emperor served as the general metaphysical focus.

By the year AD 58 the polytheism of ancient Rome had fallen out of favor. While some still carried out religious rituals, both the cultured and the uncultured held most of the religious beliefs of the past with contempt. Popular attitudes were wide open for foreign religions. "There was in Rome a temple devoted to the worship of the Egyptian deities Isis and Serapis. Monuments of the worship of Mithras are known from the time of Tiberius. Nero himself revered the Syrian goddess Astarte."<sup>12</sup>

The Jewish population in Rome goes back to the time of the Maccabean princes (second century BC). The first substantial settlement dates to Pompey taking Jerusalem in 63 BC. Apparently, a number of Jews were sold as slaves but because of their "obstinate adherence to their national customs"<sup>13</sup> they proved troublesome to their masters and were soon manumitted. Those who were released founded their own synagogue and under Augustus "were allowed to form a colony on the further side of the Tiber."<sup>14</sup>

In AD 52 Emperor Claudius commanded all Jews to be expelled from Rome, cp. Acts 18:2. Three years later, however, Claudius died, and under Nero, the Jews were given relative freedom.

As for Christianity, their beliefs and practices were new. As the Christian community grew, however, both the Gentiles and the Jews began to hold this new "cult" with contempt.

### 4. The church in Rome

As Judaism began to separate itself from Christianity, the various Christian gatherings took on their own identity, which became the focus of governmental concern.

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<sup>11</sup> FF. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 399-403 gives the following account: "Sometime after midnight on July 19, AD 64 a fire broke out at the north-east end of the circus *maximus* in Rome, adjoining the Palatine and Caelian hills. The shops which stood in a colonnade round the outer face of the circus were full of combustible wares which provided fodder for the flames, and the conflagration, securing a hold there and fanned by the wind, raged throughout the city for five days. People were unwilling to believe that the fire was accidental, and many thought that Nero had arranged it in order that he might rebuild the city nearer to his heart's desire. Nero accordingly found it expedient to find scapegoats. The Christians in Rome, by now a large community, were charged with instigating the fire. Why the Christians? First, no doubt, because they were unpopular 'haters of the human race,' disliked by all for their anti-social attitude. In Juvenal's words, they belonged to the sewage of the Orontes which discharged itself into the Tiber; Their (the Christians) execution was an occasion for popular entertainment; Nero's gardens were thrown open for the occasion. According to Tacitus, some were crucified, some were sewn up in the skins of animals and hunted down by dogs, and some were covered with pitch and set alight to serve as living torches when darkness fell."

<sup>12</sup> Heibert, *Introduction to the NT*, Moody Press, p. 165.

<sup>13</sup> Sanday and Headlam *ICC Romans*, T&T Clark, p. xix.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

The epistle to the Romans is the earliest witness to the existence of a church in Rome. Paul, however, writes of his desire to visit the church in Rome, “these many years” (15:23), which might indicate that the church was present for several years prior to this letter.<sup>15</sup>

How the church was founded can only be assumed. There is no biblical evidence of any missionary effort. It has been conjectured that as Christians moved to Rome from other parts of the Empire, they established various home churches.<sup>16</sup> By the time this letter was written, the collective church was of considerable size. This estimate takes into account the number of households which were greeted in chapter sixteen. Finally, internal evidence in the letter itself indicates that the church in Rome consisted of both Jews and Gentiles. Debate over which segment was larger continues.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding the church in Rome is essential in understanding the situation Paul addresses. To understand the Roman church as consisting of both Jews and Gentiles together adds a dimension of urgency for the message of this correspondence. The emphasis about God’s righteousness apart from the law carries tremendous significance. While the important message of Romans is neither Jewish nor Gentile, we sense the Apostle carefully attempting to unite these believers with the theological reality concerning this new era in God’s redemptive plan. Regarding sin and the need and access to redemptive grace, both Jew and Gentile were now on the same footing.

#### **D. The Occasion for Writing Romans**

There are several possibilities prompting Paul to write a letter to the Roman church.

##### **1. Paul’s life-commission was to proclaim the good news about Christ to the nations (Gentiles)**

As mentioned earlier, Paul was commissioned (an apostle) to take the good news about Christ to the nations. Since the city of Rome served as the center of the empire, Paul understood Rome to be a strategic focal point for proclaiming the Gospel to the known world. This being the case, Paul begins his letter discussing his passion to preach the gospel to those in Rome, 1:15. Additionally, as the letter concludes, Paul repeats his intentions reminding these Christians about God’s grace to proclaim Christ to the nations so that he might offer the nations to Christ as an acceptable sacrifice, 15:15-16.

##### **2. Paul prepares the church in Rome for a potential visit**

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<sup>15</sup> A statement by Suetonius, who was Hadrian’s private secretary, indicates that Christianity was introduced into Rome c. AD 49 (Cranfield, *ICC Romans*, vol 1 p. 16).

<sup>16</sup> There are three views generally presented as to the origin of the Roman church. 1) the Roman Catholic view asserts that Peter founded the church while he supposedly lived in Rome for twenty-five years after escaping from Herod’s prison (Acts 12). There is no biblical evidence for this view. To the contrary, the evidence is stacked against Peter’s residence in Rome (cp. Acts 15; Galatians 2). 2) Roman Jews, converted on the Day of Pentecost returned to Rome and founded the church. 3) The view mentioned above.

<sup>17</sup> Those who believe the Roman church was primarily Jewish cite 1) the multiple uses of the OT, 2) the important section on the future of Israel in God’s program, 9-11 3) The addressing of the Jew in Romans 2:17ff in the second person singular as opposed to the third person plural (1:18-32), 4) there is no mention of any of the Gentile doctrinal problems which plagued the other Gentile churches to which Paul wrote. Those who hold to a Gentile church state: 1) Romans 1:13 “I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.” 2) The Gentiles are referred to in second person in Romans 11:13. 3) The Jews are referred to in third person throughout Romans 9-11.

Though Paul's intentions had been to visit and encourage the believers in Rome, in God's plan, he had been prevented (15:21f; 1:13). As his stated purpose was to preach the Gospel among them and to impart some spiritual gift (1:11,15), the letter to the Romans might be considered a formal contact informing the church about his possible visit.

The letter to the Romans also seems to have been written to prepare the Roman Christians for Paul's visit. The extensive details about the gospel in this letter served as the primer for the faith. Romans, then, was written to prepare the church for Paul's visit while allowing the church to prepare for further discussion about the gospel and the Christian life. Paul's detailed theological account of the gospel further served to prepare both the Jewish and Gentile contingent about the equal status in Christ. If nothing else the letter to the Romans describes the Jews and Gentiles as equals regarding guilt, the need for righteousness by faith, their position in Christ, and their irrevocable sonship with God through the Spirit of adoption.

### **3. Paul felt the need to expand his mission to the nations**

A final purpose may have been to alert the church in Rome to consider being Paul's base of operations for westward expansion for the gospel. Having preached the gospel throughout the regions of Asia Minor and Greece, 15:23, Paul intended to expand his boundaries and mission all the way to Spain, 15:28. In heading to Spain Paul naturally understood that he would pass through Rome. The letter to the Romans prepares the church to consider itself as a base of operations for the gospel heading west.

### **E. The Theme of Romans: God's Righteousness apart from Law.**

There have been many suggestions attempting to settle upon a singular theme for Paul's letter to the Romans. For our purposes let's mention three.

For some, the Apostle is attempting to settle issues concerning the Law and grace. For instance, the term "law" appears at least 74 times in Romans, while the word 'law' is only used a total of 47 times elsewhere in Paul's letters.<sup>18</sup> Still, others have understood Romans as a letter attempting to resolve issues in the church arising between Jewish and Gentiles believers.<sup>19</sup> Finally, others have settled upon God's righteousness and the theological theme of justification by faith.<sup>20</sup>

Without extending the conversation, perhaps all these themes could be understood as essential elements in Paul's argument. Romans seems to represent Paul's efforts in explaining to both the Jews and Gentiles in Rome the significance of the gospel and the Christian life and how God has brought believers from Israel and the nations together into one redeemed community.

Certainly, having first century Jews and Gentiles 'under one roof' could create problems, 14:1—15:13. Romans fourteen and fifteen, confirms that conflicts in lifestyles seem to have developed. The problems arose from the attitudes, habits, and traditions

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<sup>18</sup>Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 27.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

emerging from one's understanding about law and grace. Devout Jews in the first century were immersed in a tradition based upon rabbinic understanding of Torah.<sup>21</sup> The Gentiles, on the other hand, had a variety of pagan lifestyles and traditions which, according to Second Temple Judaism, were considered repugnant. Paul knew the conflicts firsthand (Acts 13 and Galatians 2 come to mind). Even without knowing any specifics in the Roman church, Paul understood the potentials for conflict.

With these possibilities, Paul knew the importance of a proper understanding of the gospel. The gospel was the great equalizer between Judaic traditions and Gentile godlessness. Both realities needed to understand the gospel, that is, the God's gifted righteousness through faith apart from the Law. Jewish traditions based upon law could not save. Pagan lawless lifestyles could not save. All, Jew and Gentile alike, were under sin, 3:9-10. Only the gospel had the power of God unto salvation, 1:16-17. The gospel revealed God's righteousness in a Person, 3:21-22, not in legal code with behavioral traditions reflecting an ancient culture. Whether a person was a Jew or a Gentile, justification/ acquittal before God had to be given as a gift, 3:24. Further, to be completely free from sin's reign unto death, a person had to be set free from the law, 7:4-6. A new life had to be available for all, 8:1-4. And, since God had governed history in such a way that, whether one was a Jew or a Gentile, all were deemed equally disobedient and in equally in need of these mercies, 11:30-32, Paul instructed the church in how to treat one another in love, 13:8.

The impact of the gospel, properly understood, was hard for some to wrap their heads and hearts around. And so, Paul explains the good news of God's grace, a divine provision powerful to save, revealing a righteousness through a Person, and given as a divine gift apart from works of the Law. This last thought "the revelation of God's righteousness apart from the Law," I believe, best captures the theme of Romans.

## **F. The Purpose of the Epistle to the Romans**

We have been hinting about the purpose for this letter throughout our introduction. So, let's briefly mention several aspects to the purpose of Romans.

### **1. The missional purpose**

The primary occasion and purpose behind writing this letter seems to be missional. Romans was written to express Paul's desire to preach the gospel to those in Rome. Paul's commission to and passion for reaching the nations apparently prompted the writing of this letter. The letter to the Romans served to prepare the church in Rome for a personal visit. Paul indicates his desire to bear fruit in Rome, 1:8-15. As a part of this mission, Paul also informs the church at Rome about his intentions to utilize his connections in Rome as a middle ground for heading further west to Spain (15:22-28).

### **2. The instructional apologetic purpose**

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<sup>21</sup>In the first century the oral traditions of Second Temple Judaism, often referred to as Oral Torah, became the primary understanding for practicing the Mosaic Law. After the demise of Jerusalem and the Temple, AD 70, and the dispersal of the Jewish nation, certain rabbis undertook the project of preserving these oral traditions in written form. First published at the end of the second century these written tractates are called the Mishnah. Together with the Gemara, which makes interpretive comments on the Mishnah, Talmudic Judaism emerged in later centuries.

As mentioned earlier, the church in Rome probably was not founded by any one person. This church was a collection of Jewish and Gentile believers coming together from different regions of the Empire. Paul, then, writes this letter to further ground these Christians in Christ. The letter to these Romans presents the nature of God's righteousness as revealed in the gospel. Romans explains the Person and work of Christ as the divine provision for our salvation and takes us beyond the historicity of the crucifixion and resurrection, exploring how these events accomplished salvation, even beyond our greatest anticipations.

### **3. The pastoral purpose**

Finally, as previously pointed out, Paul was a compassionate pastor. Thus, the overriding purpose for Paul's instruction must be understood as pastoral. Paul not only seeks to ground believers in the faith, he also seeks to alleviate growing tensions, to resolve points of conflict, and to direct the community to a life of grace. Understanding the Jewish mindset and having first-hand experience with Gentile paganism, Paul, as pastor-teacher, seeks to ground these Christians in the faith and to point them to a lifestyle of redemptive love, not as an attempt to secure God's righteousness already gifted through Christ, but that they might express this righteousness as a testimony to the world, 1:8.

### **G. The Key Passage to the Epistle to the Romans**

Two passages stand together as key to Paul's letter to the Romans. First, and perhaps the most dominant is Romans 1:16-17. The gospel, Paul tells us is the "power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...for in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed." Everything else in this letter explains the depth and dynamic of this passage. Yet, the argument of Romans pivots upon another passage. Romans' unique message hinges upon 3:21-22. We read, "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed—namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction."<sup>22</sup>

Embedded in this significant passage lies the entire drama of world redemption. Here the role of the law, 3:19-20, and the grace of the covenants of Promise meet.<sup>23</sup> This passage introduces us to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the uniqueness of the gospel as the singular event and message, both explaining and changing the course of redemption history and offering humanity God's righteous acquittal as well as the hope of glory, 5:1-2. Take your pick. But to understand the unique message and emphasis of Romans my attention focuses on 3:21-22, "But now apart from the Law..."

### **H. Theology and the Epistle to the Romans**

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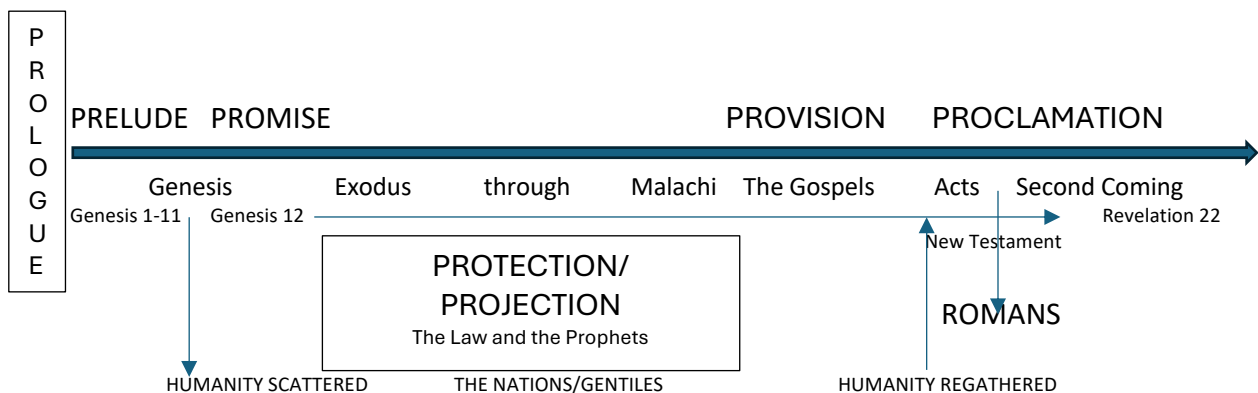
<sup>22</sup> Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Ro 3:21–22.

<sup>23</sup>More about this as we discuss chapter four. For now, we might simply say Paul connected the Abrahamic promise "all the nations of the earth will be blessed," Gen. 12:3 with the justification of the Gentiles, Gal. 3:8.

As one might expect, a letter explaining how God is changing the course of human history might include a vast array of theological themes and subjects. Romans does not disappoint. Rather than go over these here, we will single out these themes and subjects throughout the notes under special heading, Taking a Closer Look. These special sections include salvation, faith, God's wrath, future judgments, Law (in Romans), humanity's sinfulness, redemption, justification, propitiation, grace, future glory, reconciliation, Adam's sin, sanctification, our union with Christ, Law and sin, flesh and sin, the Holy Spirit (in Romans), adoption, predestination, foreknowledge, election, Israel and the nations, spiritual gifts, civil authority, as well as the Law of Christ and Christian liberty.

## I. Romans in the Big Picture

Understanding any book of the Bible should begin with understanding its purpose within the divine plan. Below is a simple chart that places Romans within God's plan for redemption.



In the 'big picture' Romans serves as the theological crown jewel to the Church's proclamation of God's salvation through Christ. Yet, as hinted before, Paul, through Romans, provides insight into all facets of redemption history.

Regarding the prologue, God's unconditioned activity before the foundation of the universe is unveiled as we hear how God's foreknowledge and predestination, 8:28-30 guarantees the glorification of those in Christ. Regarding this plan, Paul also tells us that God had determined to "shut up all in disobedience, so that He may show mercy to all," 11:32.

Paul provides insight regarding the 'prelude' (Genesis 1—11) demonstrating that Adam's failure in the garden was a type/pattern explaining, through contrast, the triumphant life-giving obedience of another, Jesus our Lord, 5:12-21.

The promise governing redemptive history is thoroughly covered in Romans chapter four. Here Paul grounds the basis of salvation by faith apart from works upon the Abrahamic promises. Here, hundreds of years before the Law, God acquits the believer, Abraham, apart from the law, on the basis of faith. Abraham believed that God could bring into existence that which did not exist as well as give life to the dead, 4:17. Certainly we see the connection between Abraham's faith and the faith of those who trust God's promises guaranteed in Christ.

As Romans connects salvation to the promise, Paul's letter clarifies the role of the law regarding God's righteousness and our acquittal. Certainly, the law is holy, righteous, and good, 7:12. But the righteous requirement of the law is unattainable. It is through this law that the entire human race is shut up under sin's guilt, 3:19-20. It is through the message of the law that we hear God's voice to look for another, another way. The law seals everyone under sin and subject to God's wrath, 3:19, 4:15, but the law projects God's plan beyond itself and our inability to perform. Now, apart from the law, God's righteousness is made known in another, unexpected place, a person, in the faithful obedience of the last Adam, Jesus of Nazareth, 3:21ff. Romans proclaims this movement in God's redemptive plan as no single book in the Bible.

Paul's letter to the Romans proclaims God's plan for redemption, the purpose of sin and death, the revelation of mercy and grace, and the hope of life from the body of Adam's death as no other book in the Bible. In this letter the various epochs and episodes depicted throughout Scripture come together as a coherent whole.

## K. Romans in The First Century Setting

In addition to seeing Romans in God's redemptive plan, we should get a glimpse of Romans in relation to major events in first century Roman, Jewish, and Church History.

|      | Roman                                                                                      | Jewish                                                                                                                      | New Testament                                                                                                                                        |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B.C. | Reign of Augustus as Emperor (27 BC—AD 14)                                                 | Reign of Herod the Great (37—4BC)<br>Beginning of Herod's Temple (20 BC)                                                    |                                                                                                                                                      |
|      | First census ordered by Quirinius the governor of Syria (6 BC)                             | Death of Herod (4 BC)                                                                                                       | Birth of Christ (c. 6—4 BC)                                                                                                                          |
| A.D. |                                                                                            |                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                      |
| 10   | Reign of Tiberius (14-37)                                                                  | Caiaphas as high priest (18)                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                      |
| 20   |                                                                                            |                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                      |
|      | Pilate appointed prefect over Judea (26)                                                   |                                                                                                                             | John the Baptist's ministry (c. 28-29)<br>Beginning of Jesus' Ministry (c. 28—29)                                                                    |
| 30   |                                                                                            |                                                                                                                             | Crucifixion of Christ (30-33)<br>Pentecost (30—33)<br>Stephen Martyred (32-35)<br>Conversion of Saul (32-35)                                         |
|      | Dismissal of Pilate by Rome (36)<br>Reign of Caligula (37—41)                              | Reign of Herod Agrippa (37-44)                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                      |
| 40   |                                                                                            | Death of Herod Agrippa (44)                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                      |
|      | Reign of Claudius (41-54)                                                                  |                                                                                                                             | •James martyred (41-44)<br>•Peter imprisoned (41-44)<br>•Paul visits Jerusalem (famine relief) 46-47<br>•Paul's first missionary journey (47 or 48)  |
|      |                                                                                            | Jews expelled from Rome (49)                                                                                                | •Jerusalem Council (49)<br>•Paul's second missionary journey (49—51)<br>• Paul's third missionary journey (52-57)                                    |
| 50   |                                                                                            | Appointment of Felix as procurator (52-59)                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                      |
|      | Reign of Nero (54—68)                                                                      | Appointment of Festus as procurator (59-61)                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                      |
| 60   |                                                                                            |                                                                                                                             | <b>PAUL WRITES ROMANS while in Corinth AD 57/58</b><br>•Paul's arrest in Jerusalem (57)<br>•Paul before Festus and Agrippa II; appeal to Caesar (59) |
|      | Great fire of Rome; Christians blamed and persecuted (64-68)<br>Reign of Vespasian (69—79) | Jewish revolt against Rome (66)<br>Christians flee Jerusalem to Pella (66)<br>Fall of Jerusalem (70)<br>Fall of Masada (73) |                                                                                                                                                      |
| 70   |                                                                                            |                                                                                                                             | •Paul in Rome (60—61)<br>•Martyrdom of Paul and Peter (between 64—68)                                                                                |
|      | Reign of Titus (79-81)                                                                     |                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                      |
|      | Reign of Domitian (81—96)                                                                  |                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                      |
| 90   |                                                                                            |                                                                                                                             | Roman persecution of the church (94-96)<br><br>Death of John (c100)                                                                                  |

## L. Romans Place and Message in the New Testament Canon

Paul's letter to the Romans has a unique message. This message divinely complements other books within the New Testament. Below is a chart that provides some general information as to how Romans fits into the New Testament.

| Date      | Book            | Author                                                       | Message/Purpose                                                                         |
|-----------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AD 49     | Galatians       | Paul just after 1 <sup>st</sup> missionary journey           | Connected to Promise, Paul teaches freedom from the Law and alive by the Spirit         |
| 50-51     | 1 Thessalonians | Paul during 2 <sup>nd</sup> Missionary journey               | 1 Thessalonians looks forward to Christ's return                                        |
| 50-51     | 2 Thessalonians | Paul during 2 <sup>nd</sup> missionary journey               | Details surrounding Christ's return                                                     |
| 55-56     | 1 Corinthians   | Paul during 3 <sup>rd</sup> missionary journey               | Solving church divisions and some doctrinal questions                                   |
| 55-56     | 2 Corinthians   | Paul: during 3 <sup>rd</sup> missionary journey              | Reconciliation under the New Covenant                                                   |
| 57/58     | Romans          | Paul: From Corinth during 3 <sup>rd</sup> missionary journey | The righteousness of God apart from Law                                                 |
| 40s—60s   | James           | Jesus' half brother                                          | Living wisely                                                                           |
| Early 60s | Mark            | John Mark                                                    | The beginnings of the Gospel: Jesus is the servant of the Lord                          |
| 60-62     | Philemon        | Paul: detained in Rome                                       | Forgiveness of Christ                                                                   |
| 60-62     | Colossians      | Paul: detained in Rome                                       | The preeminence of Christ                                                               |
| 60-62     | Ephesians       | Paul: detained in Rome                                       | God's glorious salvation                                                                |
| 60-62     | Philippians     | Paul: detained in Rome                                       | The sufficiency of Christ                                                               |
| 60—64     | Luke            | Luke: while in Caesarea or Rome                              | Everyone's gospel: Jesus is the Son of Man                                              |
| 60-64     | Acts            | Luke while in Rome                                           | The initial spread of the gospel through the further works of Christ by the Holy Spirit |
| 62-68     | 1 Timothy       | Paul: while in Macedonia                                     | Instructions to a pastor about the care for a church                                    |
| 62-68     | Titus           | Paul: while in Nicopolis                                     | Establishing a healthy church                                                           |
| 64-68     | 2 Timothy       | Paul: while in Rome                                          | Final words to a spiritual son                                                          |
| 64-68     | 1 Peter         | Peter: while in Rome                                         | Christian response to suffering                                                         |
| 64-68     | 2 Peter         | Peter: while in Rome                                         | Warning about false teachers                                                            |
| 60—70     | Matthew         | Matthew: probably in Antioch in Syria                        | The OT promises are fulfilled: Jesus is the Messianic King                              |
| 60s       | Hebrews         | Unknown                                                      | The superiority of Christ                                                               |
| 50s/70s   | Jude            | Jesus' half brother                                          | Warning to false teachers                                                               |
| 80s-90s   | John            | John: in Ephesus                                             | Believe in the gospel: Jesus is God's Son                                               |
| 80s-90s   | 1 John          | John: in Ephesus                                             | True fellowship with God                                                                |
| 80s-90s   | 2 John          | John: in Ephesus                                             | Warnings about false teachers                                                           |
| 80s-90s   | 3 John          | John: in Ephesus                                             | Insight about church relations                                                          |
| 90s       | Revelation      | John: on Patmos                                              | The triumph of faith over sin and death through Christ                                  |

## M. The Argument<sup>24</sup> of Romans

Until now we have been discussing the ‘what’, ‘where’, and ‘when’ of Romans. In this section we will briefly discuss Paul’s logical argument within this letter and why he arranged these themes to make his point.

If we consider Paul’s theological purpose the explanation of the revelation of God’s righteousness in and through the Person of Christ (see above) then we would piece together the book of Romans in the following manner.

- Greetings and the occasion for writing, 1:1-17

Comparing other letters written by Paul we discover that his introductions not only greet the reader(s) but often set the content and mood for the epistle.<sup>25</sup> Paul’s introduction to Romans, 1:1-17, similarly, provides us with an initial greeting and the reasons or foundational truths upon which the letter is built. This section, however, ends with a two-verse introduction to the remainder of this letter. The gospel which Paul preached represents God’s power for salvation and reveals God’s righteousness, 1:16-17.

- The Perfect Mess: The need for God’s righteousness through Christ, 1:18—3:20

Having introduced the initial theme for this letter, the gospel as the revelation of God’s righteousness, the first major section in Romans deals with human guilt. Paul presents humanity’s universal guilt to establish the need for God’s righteousness apart from the law.

In this first section we discover that our guilt before God begins with humanity’s universal idolatry, 1:18-25. Human beings suppress the truth about God through unrighteousness and establish, instead, the worship of other ‘gods.’ Universally, we have “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling created beings and things,” 1:23. Simply stated, we worship and serve creation rather than the Creator, 1:25. As a result God’s wrath/judgment demonstrates itself both in that God gives us over to our idols, 1:24, 26, 28, and that there eventually be a day of accountability/wrath. God has allowed our own desires, passions, and thoughts, to have their way with us. In so doing God confronts us with the reality that our self-serving behavior justifies God’s judgment, 1:32.

We are now introduced to an essential them in the letter to the Romans, God’s law. In Paul’s argument we are told that every human being has heard the voice of God’s Law, 3:19-20. Those without the written law (the nations/Gentiles) hear the voice of God’s law embedded in the conscience, 2:15. Those with the written Law, namely the Jews, hear God’s voice through the biblical text. Further, we are now confronted with an impossible reality, namely, that “those who do the law will be declared righteous,” 2:13. Unfortunately for humanity, “all who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law,” 2:12.

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<sup>24</sup> The argument of a book is an attempt to understand the logical flow of the book’s message. Rather than strictly focusing upon “what” the passage means an argument focuses upon “why,” the author includes his material to communicate his message and why the author place this material where it is in the work?”

<sup>25</sup> Consider, for example, Galatians immediately reminds the churches about the gospel and possibility that there are some who are abandoning the gospel for a works religion.

While God's righteousness is the basis for eternal life, 2:6-7, the harsh reality is simple, there are none righteous, 3:10. There are none, apart from God's intervention, who understand, or who seek God, 3:11. Thus, Paul summarizes our universal guilt and our need for something more, something that does not originate with ourselves. We read in 3:19-20, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no one is declared righteous before Him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin." God's moral voice through Law declares everyone for what they are, inexcusably guilty and in need of something more.

- The Perfect Man: The provision of God's righteousness through Christ, 3:21—5:21

The hopelessness of the previous section in Romans is intended to open our hearts for the great news about the gospel. Both the Jew and Gentile reading 1:18-3:20 should realize that, according to their own performance, they are on equally condemned. Regarding guilt, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Now with this sense of doom Paul launches into a message of triumphant grace, 3:21—5:21. Paul describes the provision God has made to fully acquit, 3:21-4:25, make peace (reconciliation), 5:1-11, and grant eternal life, 5:12-21. This acquittal (justification) is apart from the law of works, 3:27-28 and according to promise, 4:1-25. Through Christ's faithful propitiatory obedience, 3:21-26, God offers His/Christ's righteousness as a gift to any who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, 3:21-31. Christ's faithfulness and obedient sacrifice fully satisfies God's righteous requirements demanded from us, 3:21-22; 5:17-21, and, because of Christ's righteous obedience, God can justly justify (fully acquit), as a gift, anyone who believes this message, 3:24ff...

To substantiate his point, Paul calls upon two Old Testament witnesses, consider 3:21. The first witness, Abraham, is directly from the Law, the Torah. The second, David, come to us from the Jewish category, the prophets. Both the law and the prophets, 3:21 (Abraham and David) testify that God's righteousness is reckoned to the sinner apart from works, 4:1-8. More than that, Paul adds that the promises God made through Abraham were always based upon faith apart from works, 4:9-25. Justification through faith alone has always served as the basis for anyone to enjoy a reconciled relationship with God. This relationship, Paul adds, includes the attending freedom from the impending sentence of wrath, 5:1-11, and, beyond acquittal (justification), to future glory, 5:2. Whereas Adam failed to obey God, bringing sin and death into the world, Christ's obedience overwhelmingly triumphs over Adam's failure, 5:12-21. Through Christ, we who believe, become beneficiaries of Christ's obedience. The 'free gift' not only demonstrates God's righteousness but satisfies God, 5:32; 5:1-11, and guarantees that the believer will reign with Christ for eternity, 5:17-21.

So far in this letter to the Romans, Paul has established that human guilt, the perfect mess, is universal, namely, that there is no difference regarding guilt and condemnation between the Jew and the Gentile, and that acquittal from this guilt is equally provided for both the Jewish people and the Gentiles through the perfect man, Jesus.

- The Perfect Way: The possibility of God's righteousness through Christ, 6:1—8:39

Paul's declaration about a believer's guaranteed future glory takes his discussion in another, but necessary, direction. If grace overwhelmingly overcomes sin; if our salvation is guaranteed, why struggle with sin, 6:1-2? Because of this apparent dilemma, Paul introduces the idea of progressive sanctification, or Christian spiritual growth. Now Paul informs us about the exchanged life provided through Christ's death and resurrection. Now, through Christ, we, the believer, have legally died to sin's dominion. Sin can no longer kill the acquitted. Those who trust Christ have been united with Christ in the likeness of His death, 6:3. This union has placed us beyond the domain of sin and under the rule of grace, 6:14. Further, we learn that we have the potential of a spiritual life that pleases God through our union with Christ and His resurrection. In explaining the depth of God's gift we discover our new identity with Christ, 6:1—7:6, the utter futility in attempting to keep God's Law, 7:7-25, and our new reality in Christ, namely, life in the Spirit, 8:1-30.

First, when Christ died on the cross, we who believe died (legally) to sin, 6:1-7. Dying to sin involves much more than merely being forgiven. Indwelling sin is empowered by Law, 7:8-11. Being alive to the Law empowers sin to kill. Being dead to the Law through the cross of Christ takes away sin's power to kill. As Paul says, "For someone who has died has been freed (acquitted) from sin," 6:7, and "apart from the Law sin is dead," 7:8. The gospel's message includes the good news that believers are no longer under Law, and, because of this, sin can no longer kill the justified.

Further, Paul also tells us that we have been united with Christ in His resurrection, 6:1-14. As Christ is raised from the dead and alive to God, so we, united with Christ, have Christ's life. This union with Christ's life is a new operating system. We are under grace, 6:14, and we, alive from the dead, can present ourselves as instruments for God's righteousness, 6:12—7:6. The experience of God's righteousness (Christ) in our lives is now possible. We are dead to the Law and alive to God by the Spirit through the resurrected Christ. Because of this exchange, death for life, we can bear fruit for God, 7:4-6.

Additionally, the spiritual life of those acquitted represents life apart from works of the law. We have already discovered that Law renders everyone guilty before God, 3:19-20. Now, in Romans seven, we learn that any human being confronted by and attempting to obey God's Law discovers futility. Every human, until the resurrection, is "made of flesh and sold into slavery to sin," 7:14. The weakness of the flesh, 8:3, and the overriding power of sin is, apart from our union with Christ, an unstoppable combination. We are told that sin embraces God's law, deceives us through the commandment, produces more sin, and kills, 7:7-11. Further, we discover that when confronted by God's law we are confronted by our utter inability, due to indwelling sin, to keep God's law, 7:14-25. While all of this seems to add to our hopelessness, it is through this hopelessness that God speaks. Our futility because of the law of sin and death is intended to lead us back to Christ.<sup>26</sup> Through the Law we die to the Law<sup>27</sup> and discover that God's righteousness (whether imputed or experienced) must come apart from the Law, 3:21-22. Romans seven informs us that living righteously must also come from outside us. From the futility of attempting to please God on his own, Paul shouts the solution for Christian living, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our

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<sup>26</sup>Consider Galatians 3:22-26.

<sup>27</sup>Galatians 2:19

Lord!” and immediately describes the new life in Christ by the enlivening ministry of the Holy Spirit

While indwelling sin works through the flesh, 7:14-25, and renders all hopelessly unable to please God, God Himself has condemned sin in the flesh, 8:3, placed us ‘in the Spirit’, 8:9, and has given us the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, to enliven us so that we might bear fruit to God, 7:6; 8:1-14. Life by the Spirit fulfills the divine expectation of the righteous requirements of the Law, 8:4. This new union with Christ, 6:1—7:6, leads us to a deepened familial relationship with God, 8:14-16 and, we, as the first fruits of the Spirit, now await our glorious reign with Christ (which includes the restoration of all creation), 8:17-25. The gospel has powerfully made those who were guilty and bound to sin and death free from this death and united with the living Savior. Not only are we acquitted (justified), we have Christ’s life exchanged with ours.

God’s righteousness revealed refers to more than justification. We see not only our need for righteousness (1—3) and God’s provision through Christ with full acquittal/justification, peace/reconciliation, (3—5) and union with Christ, but also our transformation by the Spirit, namely sanctification/glorification (6—8). This is the perfect way. Along the way we also discover that God’s Law was given so that we might realize that true righteousness from within is impossible and must come from outside ourselves. And so God’s gifted righteousness through Christ and our new-life position with Christ makes us beneficiaries of His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, and gives us a share in Christ’s future glory, 8:16-18, 30. All this is super-great news, and, to leave no doubt, Paul closes this section of his letter with a series of glorious exclamations. We are told that we have the confidence that the Holy Spirit intercedes/prays for us ensuring everything will work for our final good according to God’s plan, 8:26-30. We are assured that God is on our side, 8:31, that God through Christ has supplied everything we need for spiritual life, 8:32, that, as though standing in a court of Law, there is no accusation or condemnation for the justified, 8:33-34. Finally, we are assured that we, who are more than conquerors, cannot be separated from this redemptive love, 8:31-39.

- The perfect plan: for God’s righteousness to the nations, 9:1—11:36

With the glorious explanation about the triumph of grace in the preceding chapters, a serious concern arises. If righteousness and glory are granted apart from the Law, has God’s word failed, 9:6? Has Israel’s adherence to the law failed God’s purpose? The answer is simple, yet profound. Israel’s insistence upon obeying the law has moved God’s plan for the nations forward so that both the chosen from Israel and the nations might experience the mercies of promise.

Paul begins the important section of Romans with an intense confession. His passion for Israel moves him to constant prayer, even a desire to face condemnation if his condemnation would be their salvation. God made Israel as a nation for Himself. Israel received the privilege of sonship, glory, the promises, and the law, including all the services and worship included with Torah. That said, Paul assures his readers that God’s word has not failed, 9:6. Everything we assume about Israel’s history has been according to a greater plan. This plan, understandably, is according to God’s choice. Whether it is Abraham, Jacob, or Pharaoh, redemptive history unfolds according to God’s plan, 9:6-18. Not every Israelite

belongs to the Israel of God, only the children of the promise, 9:8; 2:28-29, just as, from the outset, not all Abraham's offspring were heirs to the promise, 9:9. God chose the course the promise would take. By God's choice the Abrahamic promises moved through the younger of the twins born to Rebekah. By God's plan, Pharaoh became an instrument of mercy by which the promises moved forward, 9:14-18.

Now, according to God's plan, the promise can be understood to be moving forward toward its full purpose. The Gentiles, since Babel, had been, according to law, e.g., Deuteronomy 20:16-20, vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. In relation to the promises, the nations were not beloved, e.g., Malachi 1:2-3. Israel, on the other hand, was a special creation, originating from the promise and with the privilege to carry the promises forward. But the promise and attending privileges, preceding the law by four hundred years, was not attained by works of the Law, but by faith. And it is upon this issue that redemption history shifts.

In Paul's day Israel refused God's gift of righteousness by faith. They sought to establish their own righteousness by works of the law, 9:31—10:4. And now, with Israel's rejection of righteousness by faith, God begins offering His gifted righteousness to the Gentiles. The scattered people who were 'not God's people,' are now called 'beloved,' 9:24-30.

To further explain this turn of redemptive events and the reality of Israel's rejection of righteousness by faith, Paul discusses faith and Israel's refusal to believe. Citing and alluding to several Old Testament passages (e.g., Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 9:4; 30:12-14; Isaiah 28:16; Joel 2:32), Paul, in chapter ten, contrasts living by the law and believing the message about Christ, 10:5-12. Paul, then, indicts Israel's unbelief, 10:18-21, and informs us that God's plan/word has not failed, Israel has failed God's plan.

This last disclosure about Israel's failure, now, in chapter eleven, prompts Paul to ask whether God has rejected Israel. Here Paul makes it clear that God has not abandoned Israel, 11:1-7. Currently, Paul tells us, there is a remnant of Israelites being saved while the nations are being gathered, 11:7-12. In fact, Paul goes on to say that, in God's plan, the gathering of the nations has been designed to provoke Israel's return to God. As Israel's rejection of righteousness through faith opened the way for the nations to be joined to the promises, e.g., Acts 13:44-52; the nations being fellow heirs of the promises (originally made with Israel), will become the catalyst for Israel's eventual acceptance of God's righteousness through faith.

The reality that the nations are being grafted into the promise, (which is natural for Israel since they were biologically connected to the promise, 11:17) has been a part of God's plan all along (consider Genesis 12:3; 22:18 with Galatians 3:8). This plan has been according to God's choice (Ch. 9). Blinded by their efforts for self-righteousness through works of the law, we now discover that God's strategy to rescue Israel and bring them to faith, was the inclusion of the Gentiles, 11:28-32. God's word, gifted righteousness and Israel's glory, has not failed. This nation (the natural branches) can and will be grafted back to the root, the promises, 11:25-27. God's gifts and calling are irrevocable, 11:29. God's plan for salvation has always required that every nation see themselves as under sin so that God, through this intuitive and universal guilt, might show mercy toward all, 11:32. The guarantee presented, 8:31-39, does not stand in jeopardy, God's righteousness through the gospel is

progressing according to plan. Israel's failure has led to Gentile salvation. Gentile salvation will, in turn, provoke Israel's return. With Israel's return the redeemed will experience life from the dead, 11:15. God's mercy through Christ according to the promises irrevocably include Israel but also include salvation for the nations. Through Abraham, a non-Israelite, shall all the nations be blessed, Genesis 12:3; 22:18. It is with this ultimate success in mind that Paul exclaims, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!"

- The Perfect life: The Law of Christ bringing peace to the nations 12:1—15:13

From the vantage point about God's merciful promises and plan for righteousness, Paul begins the fifth section in Romans. Picking up the theme of mercy mentioned in 11:32, we read, "Therefore I exhort you...by the mercies of God...", 12:1. God's mercy extended to all nations provides the basis for Christian dedication and godly living. Whether we are Jewish and, therefore represent natural branches connected to God's promise, or whether we are Gentiles, and represent those being grafted into God's promise, we are now encouraged to live as those gifted with Christ's righteousness, Christ's exchanged life, and, as those with the hope of an eternal inheritance.

To do this, Paul begins this section with an exhortation toward a full commitment to Christ. Paul, using temple language, encourages us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice, 12:1-2. Accordingly, because of the measure of God's gift, we are to treat other believers as fellow-members of Christ's body. This unity refers to Jew and Gentile under one roof, united in the same Messiah. All the "branches," chapter 11, are connected to the same root, namely, the promises made to Abraham. The nations and the remnant of Israelites now being saved are one body. And, because of this unity, Paul describes the interrelatedness within the Christian assembly as it involves spiritual gifts and personal concerns. We are to serve one another according to the faith God supplies, 12:3-8. We are to exhibit love and brotherly affection, clinging to the good, honoring one another, rejoicing, enduring, praying, giving, showing hospitality, even blessing our adversaries, and overcoming our evil surroundings us with good, 12:9-21. Whether we agree with "Rome" or not, the redeemed are to submit to civil authorities, 13:1-7. These governing authorities are God's civil servants established to punish evil and protect the good. We are to honor those ruling over us by paying tribute and taxes when required.

Finally, we are to live alongside one another in love, 13:8. This redemptive love becomes the theme in chapters fourteen and fifteen (through 15:13). This exemplary love summarizes the Law which humanity could not keep. Yet as those gifted with a righteous status, united with Christ in His death and resurrection, and as those possessing the life-giving Holy Spirit, we are instructed in the way of redemptive love. Elsewhere called the law of Christ, Galatians 6:2, redemptive love serves as the divine means to live beyond the inevitability of disagreements among believers (especially, as in the Roman church, between Jews and Gentiles), 14:1—15:7. The spiritually mature are to yield their freedoms in Christ to the consciences of those who are weak (immature in Christ), 15:1-3. And beyond this, the Jewish and Gentile believers are to welcome each other in the same way Christ received them, 15:7.

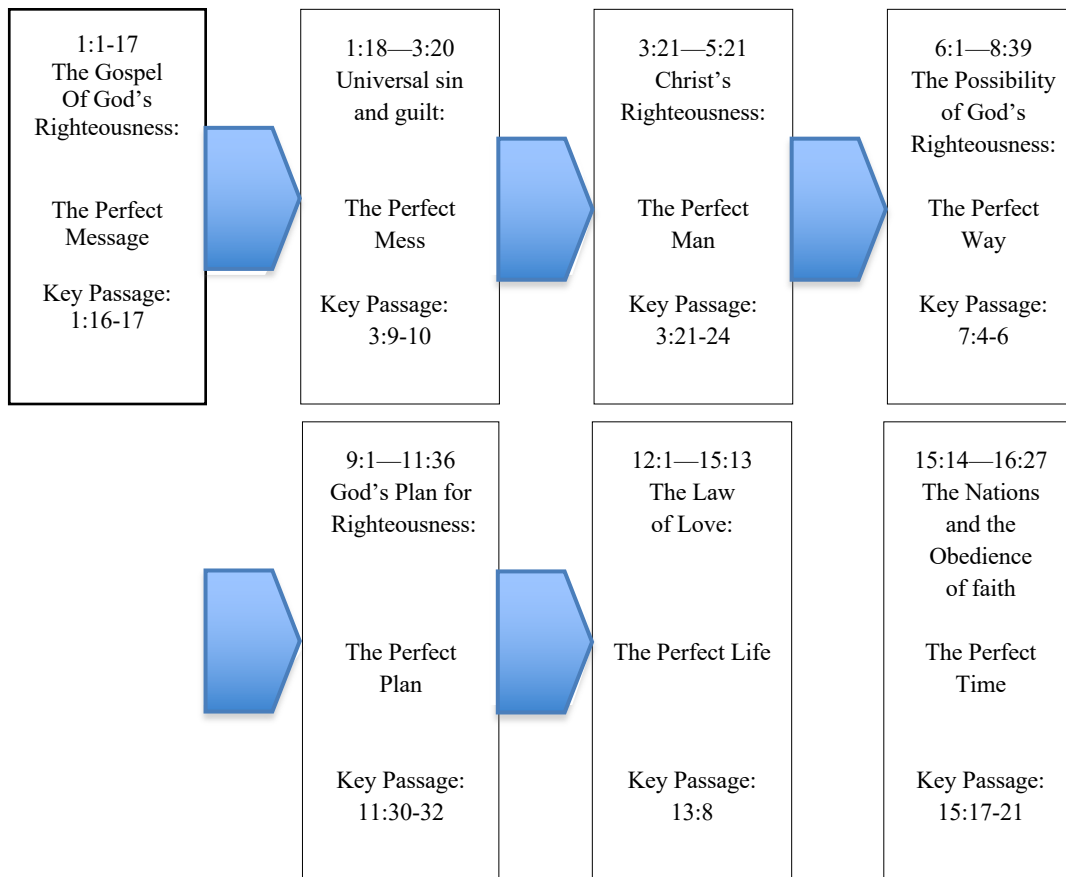
- The Perfect Time: The mission for God's righteousness through Christ, 15:14—16:27

Paul's transition into In our final section began as a declaration that God was now regathering the scattered nations into one people. As we are to welcome one another in the same way Christ welcomed us, 15:7 so we discover that as God invites the nations to receive the promises, believers are invited to be a part of the regathering. Those who were once far off and strangers to the promise <sup>28</sup> are invited to be a part of this divine program. It is the perfect time.

For Paul this invitation includes materially assisting Jewish believers experiencing hardship. As Gentiles grafted into Israel's promises, Paul encourages the redeemed from the nations to help the believing Israelites experiencing famine, 15:27. Further, Paul entreats the Roman Christians to assist him in reaching the nations beyond Italy. The Apostle intends to head to Spain, 15:24. The Roman church is asked to participate in God's mission.

Finally, as Paul finishes greeting various households in Rome, the Apostle concludes this letter, with a benediction which aptly summarizes the Apostle's stewardship and mission, 16:25-27.

To summarize Romans' argument here is a simple thematic flow chart of the letter.



<sup>28</sup>Consider Ephesians 2:11-3:10; Matthew 28:19-20