

Paul's Letter to the

ROMANS

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Background Information/ Isagogics

1. Read the following verses. What light does each shed on the background of Romans?

- a. Romans 1:10
- b. Romans 15:19-23
- c. Romans 15:25-27
- d. Romans 16:1
- e. Romans 16:23
- f. Acts 15:36
- g. Acts 19:21
- h. Acts 20:2-6
- i. 1 Corinthians 12:14
- j. 1 Corinthians 13:1

2. Date and occasion of writing:

According to Martin Franzmann,

It was probably in the late summer, A.D. 55, when Paul was about to conclude his work at Ephesus and was about to return to Jerusalem with the offering gathered among the Gentiles for the poverty stricken saints of Jerusalem, that he gave expression to his long-cherished hope of going to Rome (Acts 19:21).

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans from Corinth during the winter A.D. 55-56.

The purpose of his letter is to prepare for his visit to Rome.

Rome is not his ultimate goal. It cannot be, for Paul has made it his ambition as the apostle to the Gentiles "to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named," lest he "Build on another man's foundation" (Romans 15:20). The apostle's task is to lay foundations, not to build on foundations already laid by others.

3. Location of writing:

- a. Most likely Corinth.
- b. c.f. Romans 16:23 – Paul names Erastus who is the city treasurer of Corinth.
- c. Romans 16:1 Paul commends to Rome a woman named Phoebe who was in the Church at Cenchreae, an Easter Harbor town of Corinth. Some hold that she was also the bearer of the Letter to Romans.

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4. The content of the letter:

a. The theme is Romans 1:16-17. This theme is developed in four great movements of thought that unfold the creative power of the Gospel 1:18-15:13.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Prologue

Verse 1: *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God*

a. Παῦλος, δοῦλος Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ, - while this word can be translated “servant” it is best translated as “slave.”

b. “Christ Jesus”- Paul often uses this formula in his writings, where other writers tend to reverse this (i.e. “Jesus Christ”). The word “Christ” means “anointed One”. The Hebrew for this is *Messiah*

c. Called to be an Apostle.

1. The human requirements of an Apostle, Acts 1:21-22:

“...one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection...”

2. Paul did not meet these qualifications.

3. However, Jesus calls Paul directly as an Apostle to the Gentiles.

“Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do...” (Acts 9:3-6, ff).

d. Paul Defends his apostleship: “Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead... (Galatians 1:1);

“...and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised...” (Galatians 2:9-10)

e. “Set apart for the gospel of God” ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ, This setting apart was done by Jesus. This is a play on words, as the Hebrew word, Pharisee, means “one set apart.” Looking back, Paul was a Pharisee. But now he is set apart for the Gospel, particularly to the Gentiles.

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Verse 2: *which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures...*

- a. This Gospel that Paul proclaims is news of God's new creation in the world's last days.
- b. This Gospel was foretold through the prophets. The Jews had those Scriptures and knew the prophecies that are now fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- c. *Novum Testamentum in Vetere latet, Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet*, that is, The New Testament is in the Old concealed, the Old Testament is in the New revealed- St. Augustine.
- d. As "new" as the Gospel is, it has behind it a long history that began in the Garden of Eden, was carried through the prophets, proclaimed by John the Baptist and totally and completely fulfilled in Jesus.
- e. Therefore Paul is preaching nothing new in preaching Jesus; he is proclaiming the fulfillment of all of the Law and the Prophets in Christ Jesus.
- f. Paul's Pharisaic background shows that he has high regard for the ancient texts.

Verse 3: *...concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh*

- a. Only the Father knows the Son and can reveal the Son, and He has revealed Him in history. The Gospel, therefore, is news, genuine news of a divine action in history. Jesus comes through the line of David as prophesied, and is the "greater King" and Lord ("The Lord said to my Lord, (c.f. Psalm 110:1)
- b. That Jesus comes to rule reflects that He is Messiah.
- c. Jesus is a descendant of David in the Flesh according to His human nature.

Verse 4: *and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

- a. Jesus is ultimately the Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father.

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- b. This was fully shown at Jesus' resurrection from the dead.
- c. People, moved by the Holy Spirit, confess that Jesus is "our Lord."

Verse 5: *...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...*

- a. ὑπακοήν - submission, compliance, obedience. Paul knows of no obedience, in the religious sense, which is not faith.
- b. Grace χάρις - Undeserved love, "God's Riches at Christ's Expense."
- c. Apostleship- (ἀποστολήν)- The work of an apostle, not just the title. Paul is confirming (as he does in other places) that he is a legitimate apostle, specially called by Jesus Christ.
- d. Faith (πίστεως) – created by the proclamation of the Gospel of the Son of God, who came in freedom into the flesh and was designated Son of God in power. Faith is life; it is not a work.
- e. "All Nations" shows the mission given to Paul by Jesus. The Great Commission in a most literal way.

Verse 6 *including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,*

- a. Assurance that their faith is a saving faith. This is an assurance to us as well.
- b. We were called in Baptism. Baptism joins us to Jesus Christ.
- c. "Called" (κλητοὶ) The call comes from the Lord Himself.
- d. Belong- we are His.

Verse 7 *To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

- a. Paul is addressing the Saints in Rome; it is not a general letter to the City of Rome.
- b. The saints are "loved by God" (ἀγαπητοῖς θεοῦ). Another word is "beloved...."

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c. Called to be (literally) holy (i.e. saints) κλητοῖς ἁγίοις . Saints are those who are made holy (sinless) solely by the blood of Jesus.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

Verse 8, *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.*

a. Apostles devote themselves “to prayer and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4)

b. Thanksgiving- Paul shows us how to give thanks in all things throughout his works. For instance, in Philippians 4 he declares, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say: Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God...* He writes this shortly before his beheading, which he knew was coming. True thanksgiving thanks the Lord for all things, good and bad, knowing that *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good...* This includes our physical death.

c. The Christians in Rome are very important to Paul. The faith of the Church at Rome has been “proclaimed throughout the world.” He acknowledges what the Gospel has created there, which gives him hope for the daunting task before him of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles elsewhere.

d. Luther, “[Thanksgiving] is the fire in the censer that makes the incense of our petitions rise with a fine and joyous buoyancy to the throne of God...”

Verse 9 ... *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you...*

a. Paul makes clear in passing that his prayers for all churches everywhere are an essential part of his work.

b. The Gospel is made flesh in God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. It is Christ whom Paul serves.

c. Paul prays for the Roman Church specifically.

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Verse 10 *asking that somehow by God's will I may at last succeed in coming to you.*

- a. Paul has not yet been to Rome. Rome was a church established at Pentecost, not a Gentile church planted by Paul. It is likely the largest of all of the Churches outside of Jerusalem.
- b. Paul eventually does come to Rome. Ironically, Rome is where he will be ultimately martyred.
- c. Paul understands the agonizing plea of the Psalms such as Psalm 130: "I wait on the Lord, my soul doth wait. I wait on the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning." Paul's desire to come to Rome is all encompassing. He has not yet had that honor.

Verse 11 *For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you...*

- a. Paul's desire to come to Rome is so that he could serve them.
- b. He wants to enrich them with some gift that the Spirit has given him. The verse does not imply that he gives spiritual gifts to people. That is solely the role of God, the Holy Spirit.
- c. Spiritual gifts are listed in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.
- d. Perhaps the gift he wanted to enhance was Rome's missionary ability due to location, size, and the growing faith of her members.

Verse 12 *For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.*

- a. An apostle is not *over* a church, but *in* a church. Therefore, if Paul edifies the Church he will also be edified.
- b. Mutual encouragement of faith- story of the fireplace.
- c. Faith here is "a living acting, busy thing that works in love toward each other.

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Verse 13 *I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.*

a. While Paul needs the support of the Church at Rome to accomplish his mission among the Gentiles, he also wants to increase their faith. As the Roman Church had many Gentiles, God's gift is for them as well.

b. Paul's self-identification as "The apostle to the Gentiles" prompts this phrase, which encompasses his missionary work in Antioch, Syria, and especially, the future results of his missionary journeys sponsored by the congregation in Rome.

Verse 14 *Indeed, to Greeks and to barbarians, to [the] wise and those without understanding, I am obligated—*

a. "Greeks"- refers to those had ben Hellenized, that is, who knew Graeco-Roman language and culture.

b. The "barbarians" were those who were not indoctrinated into the Greek language and culture. It is not a negative term here. For instance some Jews fit into both of these states.

c. A literary device is used here- called a merism. Paul names both extremes with the intention of also including all those who fall in between. The point is that the Gospel that he proclaims to the Gentiles is for all. Not just the "wise" and "learned."

Verse 15, *thus the eagerness on my part to bring [the] Good News also to you who are in Rome.*

a. This reflects Paul's ongoing desire to go to the Roman Church.

b. Paul's work in the East has hindered him from getting there, which intensifies his longing to be with them.

c. He envisions that his "inaugural" visit to Rome will follow the task of delivering the offering to Jerusalem for the famine.

d. Paul's arrest in Jerusalem also temporarily delays his arrival in Rome. (See Acts 21:33, 24:27, 28:30-31).

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Verse 16 *For I am not ashamed of the Good News, because it is [the] power of God into salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to Greek.*

- a. This verse is often considered the “theme” of Romans.
- b. He is not ashamed of the Good News (Gospel) for it is from God, not man.
- c. This Good News is the power of God. The power of God lies solely in Christ Jesus. **Romans 1:16** Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ χριστοῦ· δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι.
- d. It is God’s power that creates salvation. Here, Paul is not speaking about God’s power in creation, but His power in Salvation.
- e. Salvation is for all.
- f. We begin to see the “New Israel” taking shape here. Paul will discuss this more in chapters 9-11.

Verse 17 *For [the] righteousness of God is being revealed in it from faith into faith, just as it stands written: “But the righteous person will live from faith.*

- a. Paul cites here Habakkuk 2:4.
- b. Righteousness- Paul later unfolds the meaning of this word in Chapter 3.
- c. Righteousness connotes an action. It is a saving act of God, not man.
- d. Only by submitting unreservedly to the judgment of God and by accepting in beggar’s fashion the salvation of God does one stand in a right relationship with God.

Verse 18 *Indeed the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon every ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...*

- a. Wrath of God: Αποκαλύπτεται γὰρ ὀργὴ θεοῦ ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ἀσέβειαν καὶ ἀδικίαν ἀνθρώπων τῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐν ἀδικίᾳ κατεχόντων· is being PRESENTLY revealed.

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b. The wrath of God is from heaven and it is directed upon *every* expression of godlessness and unrighteousness done by people. God's wrath is evident here and now amidst the chaos and tragedies of our world.

c. Ungodliness is a powerful, derogatory word which depicts and absolute rejection of the existence of God with a correspondingly dishonorable lifestyle.

d. Since virtually no one in the ancient world was an atheist (they believed in the Roman gods in this case) this word strongly goes against the mindset of the culture and biblical world view.

e. The word "unrighteousness" is used to reinforce this point.

f. Why all the godlessness and unrighteousness? It is because people are actively suppressing the truth and exchanging it for unrighteousness. We see strong evidence of this is today's society as well.

g. The wrath of God is not a "lightning bolt" from heaven. Rather it is God allowing people to walk away from Him and follow their passions, sin, and lust—*without Him*. As they are without Him on earth so, too, will they be outside of His presence in eternity. Being outside of God's presence in eternity is hell. More to follow on this.

Vese 19 *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*

a. These people do suppress the truth. They are not ignorant but rebellious.

b. They are not atheists but *anti*-theists (against God!).

c. God reveals His truth, they have ignored it.

d. Do we do the same in our lives at times?

Verse 20 *Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse;*

a. God is still at work in creation. Luther's explanation to the First Article of the Apostles Creed:

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I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean?

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them.

He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

- b. How could you use this information if you are in dialog with a woman considering abortion? What promises from God lie within?
- c. In the end, those who have willed to live their lives outside of Christ are without excuse.

Verse 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.

- a. Those who willed to live their lives outside of Christ will have no plea that they can make in their defense before the judgment seat of God.
- b. Franzmann, "Man refuses to be bound by God, even if he is to be bound by cords of love [in this life]."
- c. Those who reject God and come under His almighty wrath have no anchor point to save it from futility. They will not have the light to walk by; they shall not, by the judgment of God, have the light to see by.

Verse 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

- a. Walking away from God now, incurring His wrath, will prove to be eternally damning. When the Lord lets you walk away from Him it is never a good thing.

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Verse 23 *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.*

- a. This speaks about idols.
- b. Remember that Rome was filled with idols. Many Christians were at one time idol-worshipping pagans before the Holy Spirit called them to faith.
- c. Excursus on idolatry vs. symbolism and Christian art.

Verse 24, *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,*

- a. People do what they want to do.
- b. God gives them up to the defilement of their unleashed sensuality.
- c. This causes the loss on honor in the eyes of all.
- d. This is referring to prostitution.

Verse 25 *because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

- a. “The lie of idolatry for the truth of God, worship of the creature for adoration of the Creator—this mad exchange dooms the exchanger.
- b. The Apostle sums this up with the doxological “Amen.”

Verse 26 *For this reason God gave them up to their dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural,*

- a. We move from prostitution to homosexuality.
- b. “Defilement of the body, debasement in unnatural passions—these are the heavy hand of God on irreligious man. That hand bears hard also upon the communal life of man.
- c. When mankind refuses to acknowledge God, man is turned in upon himself (he and his sinful activities become his own god).

Verse 27 *and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.*

- a. Both women and men were guilty of this same debasement and sin.
- b. Their sin and the entrapment that they have entered is the beginning of judgment. It will only grow until the Day when the Lord reappears.

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Verse 28 *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.*

a. God's intent was that life (and sexuality) would be a blessing to mankind; Mankind has turned sexuality into an end, not a means to be utilized and expressed solely in Holy marriage between a man and a woman.

Verses 29-31 *They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity,, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, ruthless.*

Envy- Jealousness, breaking the 9th and 10th Commandments

Murder- Hatred, breaking the 5th Commandment

Strife- The lack of God's peace, resulting from breaking the First Commandment

Deceit- lying, breaking the 8th Commandment,

Malignity (maliciousness)- also a form of hatred, breaking the fifth and eighth Commandments

Gossips- breaking the 2nd Commandment and the 8th Commandment

Slanderers- Breaking the 2nd and 8th Commandments

Haters of God- Breaking the 1st Commandment

Insolent- rude, arrogant lack of respect- Breaking 5th and 8th Commandments

Haughty- arrogantly superior to others, breaking the 1st, 5th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Commandments

Boastful- Breaking the 1st Commandment

Inventors of Evil- Breaking all of the Commandments

Disobedient to parents, breaking the 4th Commandment. For an example see Mark 13:12

Foolish- breaking the 1st and 2nd Commandments

Faithless- Breaking all of the Commandments

Ruthless- breaking all of the Commandments

Verse 32 *Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve of those who practice them.*

a. Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5

b. Approval, silence, to God means assent. Paul condemns those who do not speak out.