



SCRIPTURE STUDIES: ROMANS INTRODUCTION

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Romans 1:16-17 (ESV) -- *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Historical Significance

So many prolific figures in the history of the church have been significantly impacted by the book of Romans.

- **Saint Augustine.** In September of 386, an African native and professor in Milan, Italy was in despair because of how sinful and wicked his life had become. While sitting in a garden weeping, he heard children playing and singing, "*Tolle, lege. Tolle lege*" which is Latin for "Take up and read. Take up and read." Next to this man was a scroll of the book of Romans and his eye was drawn to chapter 13:13-14 which reads, "*Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.* ¹⁴ *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*" Later, this same man would write about that moment, "*No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended,—by a light, as it were, or security infused into my heart,—all the gloom of doubt vanished away.*" Does anyone know who that man was? Saint Augustine...who upon reading that text was converted and became arguably the most significant theologian in church history.
- **Martin Luther.** This is also the epistle by which Martin Luther was not only converted but he also discovered the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. As he was preparing lectures for his students from Romans, he wrote this, "I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the righteousness of God,"

(referring to 1:16-17) because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous.... Night and day I pondered until ... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before "the righteousness of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven."

- **Calvin.** "If we have gained a true understanding of this epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture."
- **Romans' Content.** This epistle quotes the Old Testament some 57 times, more than any other New Testament book. It repeatedly used key words—God 154 times, law 77 times, Christ 66 times, sin 45 times, Lord 44 times, and faith 40 times. (MacArthur, John)

The Author

- **Saul of Tarsus.** Romans was written by the Apostle Paul, who was originally named Saul, after the first King in Israel. From the tribe of Benjamin. He was born in Tarsus. Tarsus was an affluent Roman city and center of learning. Saul received his primary education under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Saul would have learned to memorize and interpret the OT. He was a Pharisee and Roman citizen, which gave him the highest possible credentials in a Greco-Roman and Jewish society.
- **Saul the persecutor.** Paul was zealous for the law of God—"Hebrew of Hebrews." When he learned about a new sect called Christianity (most people thought it was just an offshoot of Judaism), Saul was furious and desired to stamp out the heretical faith. Saul was offended by the fact that many people were calling a crucified Nazarene the Messiah. It made him hostile towards Christianity and Christians themselves. Saul was at the forefront of stoning Stephen for his commitment to Jesus. From there, he entered house after house dragging Christians off to jail (Acts 8:3). Luke tells us he was breathing out murderous threats (Luke 9:1). John MacArthur said, "*He became like a war horse with the smell of battle in his nostrils, snorting out unrelenting fury against everyone and everything Christian.*" MacArthur compares Saul to Haman, who wanted to kill the Jews in the book of Esther.

- **Saul's Damascus Road Conversion.** Saul's desire to persecute the church continued. He wouldn't stop. After stoning Stephen, he went to the high priest who granted him permission to hunt down and imprison Christians who lived in Damascus. But on his way there, just as *"he was approaching Damascus, ... suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me'" (Acts 9:3-4).* Saul had an encounter with the risen and glorified Christ. In that moment, Saul realized that not only were his religious commitments false, but he had also been railing against the very God he claimed to serve by persecuting His people. Yet, Christ had mercy upon Saul. Later he would write, *"¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."* (**1st Timothy 1:12-15**).
- **Dictated Letter.** The book of Romans was written by the Apostle Paul, but it was penned by a man named Tertius. 16:22, *"I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord."* Now, this doesn't mean that Tertius composed the content of Romans. Romans was inspired by the Holy Spirit and dictated by the apostle Paul, but Tertius did physically write it down.
- **Written from Corinth.** Paul most likely wrote the letter from Corinth. How do we know that?
 - 1) Many believe the letter was delivered by Phoebe (16:2) who was from Cenchreae. Cenchreae was one of the port cities in Corinth.
 - 2) Gaius is with Paul (16:23) and this is most likely the same Gaius who lived in Corinth. *"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius" (1 Cor. 1:14)*
 - 3) Erastus, the city treasurer (16:23), may be the same one from 2 Timothy 4:20 who *"remained at Corinth"*.
- **Time written.** When we locate Paul in Corinth (Acts 18), and the time he was brought before Gallio, who was in office in 51-52, this letter was written sometime between 55-59 AD.

The Recipients

- **The Roman Church.** The book of Romans is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome. Unlike the churches in Corinth, Galatia and Thessalonica, for example, Paul did not start the church in Rome. By the time, he wrote the letter, the church was already established, which could have been as early as Pentecost. Before writing, Paul had never visited, which he makes very clear in the letter itself (1:10, 13, 15:22-23). Some believe Peter was in Rome by AD 42, but there is no credible evidence for this. There is no mention of Peter in the letter, and if Peter had apostolic authority in Rome, Paul may have certainly left them to him. There is no evidence that the church was planted by an apostle but normal disciples of Jesus (great application).
- **Jewish Expulsion.** Around AD 49, the Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2) because they conflicted with Jewish Christians who claimed that Jesus was the Christ. So, you can see the impact the gospel was making on the city of Rome. The expulsion had an impact on the church itself because it made the Roman church mainly gentile (1:5-6, 13). Paul is, after all, the apostle to the Gentiles. With Claudius' death, and Nero's reign, many Jews would have begun to filter back into the churches, which would have caused some tensions between Jew and Gentile (come back to that in a moment).

The Purpose

- **The Occasion.** This letter is not as situational as Galatians (heresy) or Corinthians (controversies) or any of his pastoral letters. Many believe Romans is more a summary of Paul's theology, like his systematic theology. While that is an attractive view, it is not fully persuasive because much of Paul's theology is missing from Romans. For example, nothing is said of the Lord's Supper. Paul's ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) and eschatology (doctrine of the last days) and Christology (doctrine of Christ) are minimally touched upon.
- **Why did Paul write this book?** There are probably multiple purposes.
 - One reason, Paul wants to introduce himself to the church.
 - Two, he wants to establish a sending base for his trip to Spain (15:24).
 - But more importantly, and before that can be done, one main reason seems to be church unity for the glory of God (15:7-13); Paul wanted to address issues between Jews and Gentiles. Romans 14-15 outline several religious controversies between Jews and Gentiles. And since the Jews would have been sprinkling back into the churches after a long expulsion,

Gentiles would not have been as reticent to adhere to these Jewish customs as they once were. So, now conflict arises. Paul's purpose throughout the whole letter is to preach the gospel in this Jew-Gentile context. The law and Israel's role in salvation history play a central role in this letter.

- **Literary Features.** Perhaps this is why Paul condemns all men, not just Gentiles, in the opening chapters in order to show the universal need for the gospel. Paul's teachings in Romans 9-11 show what a true Jew really is (one who is elected by God). Gentiles are to desist from pride (11:17-24) and shouldn't be hard on Jewish brothers who struggle with certain drinks and foods and days (14:1-15:13). Some believe the primary audience was Jews because of Paul's abundant reference to the OT (more than any other Pauline book), but that doesn't necessitate that the church is primarily Jewish. The church was established upon Jewish foundations, given that most of the Gentile Christians were probably converted in Jewish synagogues. Therefore, the Gentiles would have had knowledge of the OT and the Scripture Jesus fulfilled.
- **Gospel Defense.** Furthermore, there were serious criticisms and doubts about the gospel Paul preached in the Roman church; so, in a sense this book is an exposition of the gospel, which leads us to our primary text tonight.

Text

Romans 1:16 (ESV) -- For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

- **"For"**—this means because. So, we need to look back at what Paul just said. Paul wants to come to Rome but has been prevented (V.13). When he gets there, he wants to preach the gospel to them (V.15). Now, in verses 16-17, he states that gospel in what many believe is the thesis statement of the whole book. In other words, the rest of the book of Romans unpacks verses 16-17.
- **I am not ashamed of the gospel**
 - Paul is prepared to identify himself with Jesus and publicly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - Why would Paul say this? For what reason would he be ashamed? At least two reasons come mind.
 - 1) the gospel is foolishness to the unbeliever. Pagans thought Christianity was atheistic because it denied all other gods. They also thought Christians were cannibals because they spoke of

eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. To the Jew, a crucified Messiah was blasphemous. Their law said, everyone who hangs on a tree is cursed.

- 2) And primarily, Paul is saying he is not afraid to proclaim the gospel even it brings him harm or costs him his life, and this is a man who already suffered much (2nd Cor. 11:23-27).
- It's good thing Paul is unashamed, because in Mark 8:38, Jesus said, *"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."*
- *Illustration: Secret Service Christians*
- **Why is Paul unashamed of the gospel?**
 - *"For [the gospel] is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."* That's why Paul is not ashamed of this message. The gospel (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus) is what God uses to save sinners who believe its message. All the saving benefits of Christ are given to those who believe.
- **The power of God**
 - The word power is the Greek word *dunamis*. It's where we get the word dynamite
 - When the gospel is preached, the message itself is the conduit through which the power of God is transmitted to those who believe. The gospel carries with the omnipotence of God, and that's what we need—God's power for spiritual change.
 - In the world of advertising, we're sold countless items that promise to change how we look and feel. We're given a plethora of philosophies, programs and religions that promise to change us inwardly. But nothing can truly change our nature. Nothing can remove our guilt and sin. Nothing can make us right with God except the power of God in the gospel.
 - Specifically, the power of God in the gospel is given to those whom God calls effectively in the gospel. **1 Cor. 1:18, 24** says, *"For the word of the cross is folly to those who perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."*
 - The preacher calls everyone to believe. The Spirit calls the called to believe. The preacher gives the outward call. And the Spirit gives the power of God through the inward call; all through the preaching of the gospel (c.f. 1 Cor. 2:1-4, 1 Thess. 1:4-5).

- **Salvation in Pauline Literature**

- Salvation means to be rescued. God rescues us from the power and penalty of sin. Ultimately, God is saving us from Himself.
- When Paul speaks of salvation, he is referring to spiritual salvation. When Paul uses the word salvation, he will use in three ways. He will talk about our salvation in past, present and future terms. In other words, Paul will say, we have been saved. We are being saved and we will be saved. You could also say, He uses the word salvation to speak of justification (past), sanctification (present) and glorification (future). Salvation is an already but not reality.
- Which usage is Paul employing here? Paul seems to be using the term salvation to mean justification.
- People are always looking for some kind of salvation. They look for political salvation. Economic salvation. Physical salvation. Emotional salvation. What man needs is spiritual salvation.

- **Everyone who believes**

- The gospel is universally offered to all, and anyone who believes will be saved (10:13).
- This begins to unpack Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, which is paramount in this book (V.17, Ch.3-4).
- *"Those who believe in the gospel believe the God whose Son bore their sins and was raised from the dead"* Schreiner (Romans 4:25).
- What does it mean to believe? It's the Greek word Pisteuo. It means to trust in, rely upon and have faith in. Mental assent and agreement with the truth. Complete reliance on the promises of God (Abraham who staked his whole future on God's promises).

- **Jew First...Greek**

- Paul is emphasizing the universal reach of the gospel. Greek here means all non-Jews, which would include everyone.
- Why to the Jew first? They were God's chosen people through whom the Savior came. But Paul is doing more than reflecting upon the historical realities of Israel's heritage. Salvation continued to come through the Jews (synagogues) to the Gentiles even in Paul's day.

Romans 1:17 (ESV) -- *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

- "For"
 - This verse explains why the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe. The reason the gospel is the power of God is because in the gospel, God reveals (continually) His righteousness from faith for faith. The question is: What does that mean?
- The righteousness of God
 - The righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is God's righteousness. It is highly debated what this means.
 - Alternative views
 - The righteous attribute of God. The gospel reveals God's righteousness; that He is a just judge (3:5, 25, 26).
 - God is a covenant keeping God.
 - What I believe it means
 - First—Luther believed, as do many today, that this is the righteousness God gives to believers and it becomes the believer's status before God (c.f. 10:3, 6). This is the gift of God's righteousness for the one who trusts in Jesus (3:22). It is not an infusion of righteousness that transforms the inner man (as the RCC teaches). This is forensic declaration of righteousness before a holy God.
 - Second—some believe that this is the righteousness of God in terms of God's saving power/action (3:21). Those who advocate for this position don't deny that Paul means to say here that God gives the believer a status of righteousness through faith, but it's more than that. It also includes God's power to save in general. Verse 18 says God's wrath is revealed just like God's righteousness is revealed in verse 17. Both, it is argued, are divine activities; one being the saving power/action of God and the other His wrath. The word righteousness is used this way in the OT, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah.
 - Conclusion: It means both. As you go through Romans, context will help you determine what's in view. In many places, righteousness will refer to the forensic righteousness we have in Christ (4:9). In other places, it refers to the transformational righteousness we have in the gospel (Romans 6). Therefore, 1:17 is fundamental to all of Romans. It is also fundamental to the gospel itself, because

those whom God justifies, He also sanctifies. When God declares us righteous, we are set free from sin and we walk in the newness of life because of Him who was raised.

- **From faith for Faith**

- This is a difficult phrase and has been interpreted widely in the history of the church. What does it mean?
- Many see some sort of progression—the kind of faith in the OT to the kind of faith in the NT. Faith in the law to faith in the gospel. From faith we have now until we have ultimate faith in the future. Faithfulness of God to the faith of humans. The problem with these interpretations is that they add meaning to the text.
- Moises Silva says the interpretation that adds the least amount of meaning to the text should be preferred. Therefore, people like Douglas Moo say it is an emphatic statement highlighting the centrality of faith. This would correspond with verse 16, those who believe receive salvation. Also, the end of the verse seems to be the clarifying statement quoted from Hab. 2:4, as it is written the righteous shall live by faith. In other words, salvation is received by faith from first to last.
- Calvin said, “Man’s only righteousness is the mercy of God in Christ, when it is offered by the Gospel and received by faith.”

Application

1. Don’t be ashamed or afraid to share the gospel.
2. Be confident in the power of the gospel, not your abilities.
3. Praise God that justification is by faith alone.
4. Don’t be self-righteous