

CEC Bible Study: Romans

Session 2: An Overview of Romans

Aug. 12, 2020

Christ Episcopal Church

Cape Girardeau, MO

Group Introductions

- Any newcomers?
- Recap of last week (see last week's discussion notes [here](#))

Opening Question: Why Did Paul Write Letters?

- Thinking of Paul not just as a missionary, but as a *pastor* of various church communities
 - Sometimes promises additional visits ([1 Thess. 2:17–20](#); [Phm 22](#); [Rom. 1:9–12](#))
 - Sends emissaries on his behalf to “check in” on churches ([1 Thess. 3:4–6](#))
 - Sends letters as a substitute for a personal visit
 - Usually sent by private envoy — there was no USPS!
 - Someone known personally by the sender, trustworthy
 - Courier often had the authority to read and interpret the letter before the congregation
- Paul's letters
 - Informal (off-the-cuff, not a formal theological treatise)
 - Rarely written by Paul himself
 - Commonly used a scribe for dictation (“*amanuensis*”)
 - e.g. [Rom. 16:22](#); compare [Gal. 6:11](#)
 - Almost always *occasional* — i.e., Paul's reason for writing is prompted by a specific event or set of concerns within the life of a particular Christian community

The Typical Outline of Paul's Letters

- **Salutation**
 - Identifies the sender and recipient, offers greetings (“Grace and peace to you...”)
 - e.g. [1 Thess. 1:1](#); [1 Cor. 1:1–3](#); [Gal. 1:1–5](#); and [Rom. 1:1–7](#)
- **Thanksgiving**
 - Usually in prayer form: “I give thanks to God always for you...”
 - Perhaps a rhetorical device: Paul may use thanksgiving section to identify the community *as he wishes it were*, rather than *as it actually is*.
 - e.g. [1 Thess. 1:2–10](#); [1 Cor. 1:4–9](#); [Rom. 1:8–15](#); but *not* in Gal! (See [Gal. 1](#))
- **Body**
 - Main concerns of the letter
 - Highly particular, usually addresses specific problems within the church community
- **Moral Exhortation (“*Parenesis*”)**
 - Usually near the end of the letter
 - Often introduced by the word “Therefore...”

- “Therefore I beseech you: behave in *this* way, not in *that* way...”
 - e.g. [1 Thess. 4:1–12](#); [1 Cor. 15:58](#); [Gal. 5:13 – 6:10](#); [Rom. 12–15](#)
 - (see esp. [Rom. 12:1–2](#); [15:14–16](#))
- **Conclusion**
 - Greetings to specific individuals within the community
 - Final appeals
 - Exhortation to fellowship (“Greet one another with a holy kiss...”)
 - Blessing/Benediction
 - e.g. [1 Thess. 5:12–28](#); [1 Cor. 16:1–23](#); [Gal. 6:11–18](#); [Rom. 15:30 – 16:27](#)

Why Did Paul Write Romans, Anyway?

- Paying attention to the outline above, what can we know about Paul’s relationship with the Romans and his reason for writing to them?
- Paul’s relationship to the Romans:
 - 1) Paul was not the founder of the church, nor had he ever visited them before
 - [Rom. 1:9–10](#)
 - Paul also acknowledges his own lack of authority to command the Romans to do anything ([Rom. 15:14–16](#))
 - 2) Paul intends to pass through Rome for a visit on his way to Spain
 - [Rom. 15:23–24](#)
- Possible reasons for the letter:
 - Mutual encouragement ([Rom. 1:11–12](#))
 - Perhaps a “dress rehearsal” of his defense in Jerusalem?
 - Paul is on his way to deliver the collection to the saints ([Rom. 15:25–28](#))
 - On the gentile collection: [1 Cor. 16:1–4](#); [2 Cor. 8–9](#); [Acts 24:17–21](#)
 - Seems to be worried about how this “gift” will be received ([Rom. 15:30–32](#))
 - We know there is tension between Paul and the leaders in Jerusalem — namely with the “pillars” Peter, James, and John ([Gal. 2:6–14](#))
 - Compare accusation against Paul in [Acts 21:21](#), followed by his trial and imprisonment in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and journey to Rome
 - Paul’s “justification” of his own mission:
 - To “bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles for the sake of [Christ’s] name” ([Rom. 1:5](#))
 - Overarching theme of Romans: The “Law-free Gospel” does not eliminate the need for the Law, nor the need for obedience from the gentiles
 - See Paul’s “concluding argument” ([Rom. 15:7–12](#))
- Most likely reason:
 - Concern regarding “God’s faithfulness and the future of Israel” (see below)

The gospel the “apostle to the gentiles” preached was first for Jews and “also” gentiles (Rom. 1:16). But Paul found that many Jews — not unlike himself at one time — rejected the good news. At the same time, many gentiles were coming to faith, often because of the work of Paul and his associates. This situation caused Paul immense agony; it was perhaps his greatest practical, spiritual,

and theological challenge. Has God been unfair? unfaithful? Does Paul's gospel of the "righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:17) ultimately reveal an *unrighteous* God? . . . Dealing with the past, present, and future of God's salvific activity, Paul asserts that God is faithful to Israel even if most Jews are not now confessing the gospel's central conviction: that the crucified and resurrected Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and universal Lord.

Complicating Paul's situation is the apparent arrogance of (at least some of) the gentile believers in Rome. This arrogance may have arisen due to the earlier banishment of Jews, including Jewish Christ-followers, from Rome under the emperor Claudius, as well as the small number of Jewish believers in the Roman assemblies of Christ-believers. Both realities may have been interpreted by gentiles as a sign of divine disapproval and even [God's] rejection of the Jews. Paul's sustained theological argument [in Romans], which focuses on God's great mercy and thus faithfulness, also has a very pastoral aim: to prevent pride and to engender unity and respect.

Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord* (Eerdmans, 2016), 445–46.