

Introduction to Romans

Isaiah 42:1-13

Isaiah 42:14-25

Responsive Psalm 139:1-10

This morning before we start to dive into this book, I want to take some time to lay out the history, and put the writing of this book into context. I personally always enjoy this part of going into a new book for I think it sorta brings it all alive, getting a feel for the author himself, where he was at and what he was up to at the time and to get a greater sense as to why the book itself was written. I thought that it would be interesting to dive into one of Paul's epistles after having just gone through the book of Acts and reading much of the historical accounts of Paul's missionary journeys. This letter to the Roman's is the longest of the 13 epistles that we have and is considered by many to be Paul's greatest work. In this letter, Paul using a system or rhetorical questioning points to the significance of Christ's sacrifice, and in it sets down one of the most systematic presentations of doctrine in the bible. This book is packed with information, it is more than just a book of theological principles being taught, it also has practical applications, and exhortations of the good news of Jesus Christ. In this letter, Paul lays out the reality that the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ is more than mere facts to be believed, but is rather a life that is to be lived. A life of righteousness befitting a person who has been justified freely by God's grace through the redemption of Jesus Christ.

Though it is quite obvious, it is worth noting that oddly enough there seems to be a debate on the authorship of this book, by all scholars worth their salt they attribute this letter to Paul, but there is a small handful who do not. Though it starts out in verse 1, with an introduction saying basically that it is Paul who is writing, there is the argument that there were those who wrote using the names of famous people to give their own writing clout. But I think that can simply be debunked here for within this very letter we get a sense of where Paul was during the writing of it. The book of Roman's was likely written by Paul while he was in Corinth and staying at the house of Gaius, which would date it to late AD 55, to some time early AD 57. Paul states that he is about to travel to Jerusalem which matches in the book of Acts where it states that he stayed in Greece for 3 months. Also it is likely that Phoebe is the one who delivered this letter to the church in Rome, herself living on Cenchreae which was just East of Corinth, after passing through Corinth, meeting with Paul could then take a ship from it's west Port and head to Jerusalem. Likewise also Erastus who is mentioned in the 16th chapter of this book also lived in Corinth, himself being the city's commissioner for public works and city treasurer. So there is internal evidence placing the writing of this letter, by Paul, from Corinth to the believers in Rome delivered by the hands of Phoebe as she traveled through likely one the way to Jerusalem herself.

Prior to writing this letter, Paul had been evangelizing the area's around the Aegean Sea and was eager to take the gospel up into Spain, which would be a journey in which he would pass through Rome on the way. So in many ways this letter is a letter outlining his reasoning for visiting them in Rome, and in a way preparing the church for his visit. The Church in Rome was a mixture of both Jews and Gentiles and it is believed that this was a reality that caused some strife within that fellowship. Paul, being a Jew himself, and a former Pharisee shifts his arguments in this letter to cater to both audiences and to address the church as a whole, bearing witness of the unity that is found in Jesus Christ. Because of the nature of this letter, with Paul addressing both the Jews and Gentiles fairly specifically, and also the general church as a whole, it is debated among scholars as to whether this was a personal letter being sent to a few, or was a letter intended for the entirety of the churches in Rome.

There is also some debate on the length of this letter, some believing it to be only 14 chapters originally, and others 16. Some argue that the 16th chapter version is actually the original written by Paul and that various scribes or churches truncated it down to 14 to make it appeal more to a general audience. Others speculate that the last 2 chapters were actually a part of a second letter and some scribes combined the two in their recording and copying of it. But either way, whether it was originally 14 chapters, or 16 chapters it does not change the content, purpose, or meaning of the book. It can be an important debate to have among those who are seeking to determine the canon collection of scripture, looking for evidences both within and without of the written word. But for us, as we study through this book, I think it is of little importance, for as I said, it neither changes the meaning, or goal of this letter and our purpose in this study is to extract the theological, and doctrinal principles and meanings laid forth by Paul.

One of the most notable accounts that we have about the church in Rome was written by a 4th century author, Ambrosiaster, who states, "It has been established that there were Jews living in Rome at the time of the Apostles, and those Jews who had believed in Christ passed on to the Romans the traditions that they ought to profess Christ but keep the law. One ought not condemn the Roman's for this, but rather praise their faith, because without seeing any signs or miracles, and without seeing any of the Apostles, they nevertheless excepted Jesus Christ although it was through the Jewish rite." We can already get a sense by the make-up of the Roman church what the content of this letter that Paul wrote to them is going to be about. As we have studied other writings of Paul's over the years it seems a strong theme throughout all of them is the issue of dealing with the Mosaic law, and the influence of Jewish Christians wanting to impress it upon the gentiles. This is a theme that we will also see in this book, for as was stated, many Roman's came to faith through the ministry of the believing Jews who lived there, but along with it came the baggage of the Mosaic law, and largely Paul writes this letter to them to set this record straight.

At the time of the writing of this letter, Jews made up a significant portion of the population in Rome, having synagogues, and places of meeting established within the city would have given curious Roman citizens and introduction to the Jewish, and Christian God. Likewise churches comprised of both Jew and Gentile Roman's grew up within the city, there is speculation as to who established these churches, some attribute to Peter, others to Paul but there is no real clear evidence of either. In chapter 16, there is a list of names of those who dwell in Rome that Paul is writing to, and addressing, and it also seems to suggest that there was multiple churches within the city verse 5 of chapter 16 mentions the house church which meets in the home of Priscilla and Aquila, and verse 14 and 15 mentions of other groupings of believers. Which brings back the debate as to whether this was a personal letter, or a general letter written to all the churches. In light of chapter 16, if taken to be canon, suggests that it is a general letter written to all of the gathering believers in Rome.

Though there were likely multiple synagogues, and churches within Rome, and Rome itself being made up of a large portion of Jews, they did not escape persecution. Early on in the book of Acts with the account of Priscilla and Aquila we saw that Jews at one point were expelled from the city of Rome. Around AD 49, Emperor Claudius made an edict, that all Jews should be removed from the city of Rome. Most scholars confirm that this expulsion was due to in-fighting among the Jews, According to The Jewish Virtual Library website, they say, "On the death of Caligula, rioting broke out between the Jews and the Greeks over the question of equal civil rights.

Claudius quelled the riots and issued two edicts, in one, he reaffirmed the rights of the Jews of Alexandria to keep their religion and rulers, while directing both parties to make peace. In another edict issued to the world at large, Claudius reaffirmed the same privileges to the rest of the Jews in the Roman empire. He also decided in the favor of the Jews in their dispute with the Samaritans and banished Cumanus Ventidius who was the procurator at the time. According to the historian Suetonius Claudius banned the Jews from Rome, but the details are obscure, Disputes between Jews and Christians had caused disturbances within Rome, and Claudius either banned certain Jews or prohibited them from gathering which lead to their voluntary departure. It is generally accepted that the Emperors goal was to maintain peace, and this was not an act of hostility toward the Jews.

Having a sense of the environment in Rome gives us a bit more insight and depth into Paul's writing in this letter. It gives us a greater understanding of the conflict going on between not just the Jews and the Christians, but the Jewish believers and Gentile believers. Some scholars believe that it is likely that the Gentile Christians may have developed a dislike, or a looking down upon the Jews because they theologically rationalized that the Jews were no longer God's people, creating civil unrest between the 2 parties in Rome. So again we can see why Paul spends so much time in this letter addressing what is believing faith, and what it is to be a follower of Christ.

In light of who Paul was writing to, both gentile and Jewish Christians it has been noted that the structure of Paul's writing is sort of an exposition of Old Testament Theology bringing the in the laws and traditions of Israel into the faith of the believers through a proper understanding of the death, burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Christ tells how a sinful people can find access to God through sacrificial atonement , which was clearly the focus of Israels' sacrificial system. As we have been studying through the different sacrificial types when Paul comes and preaches, he has pointed out that there are different types of sacrifices with different meanings. There was the Sin offering, which made atonement, there was also celebratory offerings, such as the whole burnt offering or the great day of atonement offering, then lastly there was the dedication offerings as well as first fruits, first born, paying vows. Essentially there was the forgiveness and atonement by God through atoning sacrifices, the celebration of being at peace with God in the fellowship and peace offerings, and the dedication to worship and serve God through the dedication or meal offerings.

Paul employs the same basic theological pattern in his writing of Romans, first atonement by God, then peace with God, and then dedication to God, as he weaves his theological arguments from the beginning of Gods work until the end. Before we dive into the context of this letter next week, I want to take some time this week to do sort of a large overview of this book. So we can get a sense of the broad strokes and main thrust of Paul's writings before we get lost and tied up into the details over the coming months.

In Chapter 1, Paul gives his greetings, and introduction laying out his purpose of writing this book. He gives an overview of the natural revelation through creation, noting that creation rejected its creator for the satisfaction of its more baser instincts, which this chapter is also an exposition on the book of Genesis.

Chapter 2, Paul announces the judgment of God according to the truth, explaining that the judgment is by law and that circumcision alone avails nothing explaining the theological implications of the law.

Chapter 3 and 4 Goes on to show the point that all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God, that there is none righteous, that no one is justified by works but instead that righteousness of God comes through Christ's atoning sacrifice, the propitiation in his blood, This is explained to be the fulfillment for the atonement sacrifices, the true meaning and purpose was to point to Christ. The sacrifices of old here just a ritual, there had to also be faith operating or there was no value.

Chapter 5 Once there is justification by faith in the atoning blood, there then follows a celebration of being at peace with God in a new life. This chapter picks up on the idea of Israel's peace offerings, showing that because of the atonement has been made by Christ, we may now have peace with God.

Chapter 6, shows that we are so identified by faith with the sacrifices that we are actually dead in him, that is to say, As with Israel's ritual sacrifices, the sacrifice that is slain is the substitute for the sinner, so likewise we are dead to sin. Just as the believing Israelite knew, that the blood of the dead animal should have been his or her blood that was spilt, we also reckon the same, that because Christ is the substitute he died in our place. And since we have already died in Christ, we now live in him and have become servants of righteousness.

Chapter 7, goes on to show how though those things be true, that we are dead in sin, and born again in righteousness through Christ, we are still human creatures in this body who struggle constantly with sin. Israel repeated her sacrifices, but we do not. Instead we find freedom from the law through God's provision, a provision which is better than the repeating of ritualistic sacrifices over and over.

Chapter 8, That better provision that was made for us, was the coming of the holy spirit who leads us into righteousness and bears witness to us that we are God's children. IF we are in Christ, we are dead to sin, but in the spiritual realities of life, it is the spirit who is alive in us delivering us from sin and bondage, through suffering to glory.

Chapter 9, 10 and 11. If all of these things be true, if the fulfillment of Christ is so much better than the old covenant and sacrifices then what do we make of the old covenant? It is here that Paul stops to recall the privileges that Israel had, the revelations of God but how through disobedience they missed the fulfillment of the promises and the Lord turned to the Gentiles for the present time, chapter 11 goes on to explain that since we Gentiles, who were without these promises are now grafted in we may have peace with God through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, therefore we are to offer ourselves as living sacrifices which brings to mind the dedication offerings of Israel.

The remaining chapters, 12 through 16, lays out the application of our new covenant relationship through Christ. That it is the law of love. Chapter 12 discusses the application of the assembly through spiritual gifts offered in love. Chapter 13 broadens the application to submission in love, and chapter 14 applies the law of love in doubtful things, focusing on having the mind of Christ. So Paul's argument of this letter builds upon the age old revelation through the rituals of Israel that was provided for the sinner to have access to God. But now Christ has come, he is the end of the law, and those rituals and sacrifices. In other words, the righteousness that the law required and that the sacrifices pledged has now become a reality in Christ. That it, it is available through faith in his atoning blood and worked out in life by the holy spirit.

So that is the sort of overview of the structure and content of the book of Romans, starting next week we will be going through each of these chapters 1 by 1 and expounding upon this summary. The book of Romans is an essential book in understanding righteousness, and our place before God, both as sinners, and as his believing children. So much effort is put into morality, and good works using the law and Israel as an example in our churches today, and not just today but it has been this way since the beginning. But we see in Romans that without faith it counts for nothing, which is an important reality that should be preached in every pulpit across the world. It is Christ who was righteous, and it is his righteousness applied to us, not our own, and it is through faith in him, on that work that he did for us upon the cross. Plain and simple. Christ Died so that we may be reconciled to him, through faith, not through works of the law, but by faith in him who has worked atonement for us. Who once and for all accomplished that which the ritual sacrifices could not, peace between God and man. And it is in this, through the ministry of the holy spirit within us, that we can rest with him, awaiting that great and awesome day when he returns and gathers his people home.