

Sunday Morning Sermon

October 4, 2020

“An Introduction to Romans”

Romans 1:1-7

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¹ Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. ⁵ Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

***⁷ To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

When John Calvin purposed to write a commentary on the book of Romans, he began his very brief introduction in this way:

“With regard to the excellency of this epistle, I know not whether it would be well for me to dwell long on the subject; for I fear, lest through my recommendations falling far short of what they ought to be, I should do nothing but obscure its merits.”

– “the excellency of this epistle” – With regard to the excellency of this epistle, whatever we might say will certainly fall short of its true merits. The Apostle Paul’s epistle to the Romans has been regarded over the centuries to be the highest peak, the Mt. Everest of God’s revelation to man, the cathedral of the Christian faith. Simply stated, Paul’s epistle to the Romans is the greatest document, the most significant document ever produced. J.I. Packer describes it as the: “*place where all the main biblical themes are brought together and displayed in a single panoramic sweep.*”

And think for a moment about the panoramic sweep of the book of Romans. The scope of Romans is breathtaking. Through the book of Romans, we’ll consider the doctrine of God. We’ll consider the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We’ll consider the ministry and operation of the Holy Spirit. We’ll consider the doctrine of man, the doctrine of sin, the judgment of God. We’ll consider God’s glorious plan of redemption, God’s covenants, God’s providence, predestination, election, reprobation, regeneration, justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification. We’ll consider federal headship, representation, imputation, union with the Lord Jesus Christ.

There’s an extensive explanation of the place of the Law. There’s an extensive explanation of the workings of grace. The relationship between the Law and grace. The relationship of grace to hope. The relationship of hope to the Christian life. The place and importance of obedience to the Christian life. The struggles and difficulties of living the Christian life. Overcoming sin in the Christian life. The nature of the Lord’s church. The place of both Jew and Gentile in the plans and purposes of Almighty God. The message

and meaning of the Old Testament. The proper interpretation of the Old Testament. The significance of baptism. Our relationship to the government. Liberty of conscience. The liberty of the Christian. Our relationship to one another in the body of Christ. And that's just a representative list.

It truly is staggering! I mean it is absolutely staggering with such an economy of words, sixteen chapters, all that God instructs us through this letter. Calvin would say again, that: *"When anyone gains a knowledge of this epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture."*

William Tyndale: *"Romans is a light and a way unto the whole Scripture."*

Tyndale goes on to say:

"I think it meet [fitting, good] that every christian man not only know it, by rote [in other words, know it from memory] and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. No man verily can read it too oft, or study it too well; for the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is; and the more groundly it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it, so great a treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein."

This letter, if considered, should grind you to powder under the unfathomable weight of our sin, and then lift you to heights unimaginable for lowly, undeserving, wretched creatures like us.

It will strip you of self-confidence and then show you an unbreakable, unshakable confidence.
It will strip you of self-righteousness and then show you a perfect righteousness.
It will strip you of what you think is freedom and show you what true freedom really is.
It will strip you of false religion and lead you in the way of faith, lead you in the way of truth.
It will strip you of hope in anything else, and show you an unwavering, unflinching hope.

All that said, the book of Romans is truly glorious in its presentation of the gospel. The primary theme of the book might be summarized in a simple statement by Paul concerning the gospel in chapter 1, verse 17: ***For in it [in the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."***

Now being that the true gospel has been under attack by the enemy of our souls since the garden, many have come to consider Romans as the guardian of the gospel, a role that the book has excelled in over the centuries since its writing. Consider this very fact from the words of John Owen in John Owen's assessment of the book of Romans. Listen:

"God favored the people of Israel with the rituals of religion, which were designed merely as aids [they were pictures] and means to attain and preserve true religion; but they converted them to another purpose, [They took those rituals and they converted them to another purpose.]

[Owen says] *and, like the heathens, regarded them as meritorious performances, and expected God's acceptance for the very religious acts which they exercised: and in order to make up, as it were, a sufficient quantity of merit, they made additions to those services which God had appointed, as though to multiply acts of this kind was to render their salvation more certain.*

You see their error that Owen is pointing out?

“The very same evil [Owen says] crept early into the Christian Church, and still continues to exist.

Owen continues:

The accumulation of ceremonies [the building up of these ceremonies] is of itself a sufficient proof that salvation by faith was in a great measure lost sight of: we want no other evidence; it is what has been ever done whenever the light of truth has become dim and obscure.

We see the same evil in the present day! [Owen says] Outward privileges and outward acts of worship are in effect too often substituted for that grace which changes the heart, and for that living faith which unites us to the Saviour, which works by love and overcomes the world.

The very disposition to overvalue external privileges and the mere performances of religious duties is an unequivocal evidence that salvation by faith is not understood, or very imperfectly understood, and not really embraced. The only remedy as means for this evil is that which we find employed by Paul in this Epistle.”

Amen to that! Amen! Romans becomes the guardian of the gospel.

Nowhere has this been more evidently true than in the life and experience of the young Augustinian monk from Wittenberg, Germany. Martin Luther was caught up in the accumulation of those ceremonies – and an accumulation of those ceremonies very common to Roman Catholicism. As a Roman Catholic monk, Luther had wearied himself trying to maintain a right standing with God, trying to maintain that right standing through the Catholic sacrament of penance. So Luther would confess for hours, he would fast for days, he would whip himself and punish himself, strip himself down to nothing in the cold – it’s the practice of asceticism – believing that earned or merited some right standing, some righteousness with God. It was Romans chapter 1, verse 17, this theme of the book, as it were, that would provide the remedy, as Owen says, for that evil.

Luther said:

“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,” because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is just and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous!

Night and day [Luther said] I pondered until I saw the connection between the righteousness of God and the statement that “the just shall live by his faith.” Then [all of a sudden, as it were – Luther says,] I grasped that the righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith!”

In other words, that righteousness of God is the righteousness that He gives sinners as a free gift of His grace when they turn to Christ in faith. And it’s by that righteousness, the righteousness that is a free gift of God that He justifies them and makes them right in His sight. He does that in the blood of the Lamb, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you see? Luther comes to an understanding of this truth. That’s the gospel! And he comes to that understanding through a meditation on, a ponderance on Romans chapter 1, verse 17. Luther says:

“Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn [Amen Luther. Amen! It took a new birth for Luther to have come to that understanding.] I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open gates into

paradise. The whole 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 gate to heaven!

Luther would later call the book of Romans “the chief part of the New Testament and the perfect gospel.” It would essentially be the Greek translation of the New Testament by Erasmus along with Luther’s study of that translation in the book of Romans that would unleash the firestorm that was the Protestant Reformation.

Well, brothers and sisters, the same errors persist today. And those same errors don’t only persist in Roman Catholicism, they persist all over the place in a variety of colors, and fashions, and styles. Politicians fill most pulpits today. Snake oil salesmen, showmen, professionals, as it were, fill most pulpits today. Performers, they’re performers; hirelings, man-pleasers, ear-ticklers, feckless cowards, feckless compromisers. They’re all over our town, all over Orlando today. What is said is generally awful, what is left unsaid is even worse, and the people love to have it so. The people love to have it so. Carl Marx was obviously wrong. Religion isn’t the opiate of the masses. False religion is the opiate of the masses. They don’t want the truth. They want what is false. And there’s a dealer on every street corner.

Romans is a powerful, God-wrought, Holy Spirit inspired remedy to all that garbage. Through the lens of this book, the sewage on our streets becomes clear. Social justice, feminism, tyranny, homosexuality, perversion, politics, abortion –and certainly not the least of which, certainly not excluding the remaining sewage that we may find within our own heart and mind – all of this the book of Romans lays bare. You and I, we see in the book of Romans, we are sinners. And how can a sinner be right with a Holy God? The book of Romans is just a clear exposition of that glorious truth in all its technicolor splendor.

But, as the sight of that sewage comes into sharper focus, it’s the sight of our Savior in this book that fills our sight and fuels our faith, Christ, who is our righteousness. One who studied this book compared himself to a man who was groping in the dark. And as he was groping in the dark, reached out for this book, as a man might reach out for a rope to steady himself. And in the dark he laid hold of this rope that is the book of Romans as a man would lay hold of a rope for guidance. He found that he had laid hold of a bell-rope, and it made a sound, he said, fit to wake the dead. This book has awoken many dead over the centuries. Praise God!

You and I should look forward to this book with great anticipation. We should absolutely relish the thought of spending time in this book together, to take on this study. And you and I need to be in prayer fervently together, that the Lord would be pleased to bless this work for our good and for His glory. I know it’s said of many things today and you hear it all the time – it’s said of many things today, from hearing aids, to catheters, to pumpkin spice lattes – but it’s true of this book. This book really will change your life. The Lord will change your life through a study of this book.

Verse 1 begins with: ***Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ***, – I want to spend our remaining time together this morning considering the historical context for the book of Romans through the life and ministry of the book’s author who is ***Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ***.

Turn with me to Acts chapter 2, and look there beginning with me at verse 1. ***Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ***, – The Lord Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. There have been multiple encounters between the disciples of Jesus and Jesus over the forty days between His resurrection and between His ascension. And at one point, the Lord Jesus has appeared to over 500 disciples together at one time, many of those disciples still alive at the writing of these letters in the New Testament. And it would be the truth

of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead that would then fuel what would be the relentless preaching of the gospel by the disciples of the early church in the very city where the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified.

Think with me. The very disciples who fled at the arrest of Jesus Christ, now powerfully proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in the very city they fled from. And what changed their disposition of heart? It was the resurrection of the Lord. They had seen the risen Lord. On the Day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, Peter would stand up with the eleven and preach the gospel. Chapter 2, verse 1 records the opening scene.

Verse 1: ***When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.***

Notice they didn't have to practice that. They didn't have to go to classes to learn how to do that. The Spirit gave them utterance. Verse 5: ***And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.*** Now that's fascinating that you don't see that around Charismania today, do you? They heard them speak in his own language. Whatever language he was speaking, I'm hearing him in my language. Now, where is that miracle? Where is that gift of tongues today? It's not happening today, by the way. It's not happening. Neither are the utterances of the previous verse. Those aren't happening either folks.

Verse 7: ***Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? [Now notice, verse 9] Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.*** That day in Jerusalem, three thousand souls would be added to the church. And the Bible says that those new disciples went everywhere preaching the gospel. They went everywhere preaching the gospel; all over Jerusalem, all over Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost ends of the earth, including Rome – preaching in their own languages the crucified and the risen Christ.

Well, as the gospel began to spread, as you might imagine, the Jewish leaders, the scribes, the Pharisees began to panic. They brought Peter, brought the others before the council in Acts chapter 5 saying: ***"Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"*** – preaching the Lord Jesus Christ. And as the Lord had warned them in the upper room before His death, persecution begins to ramp up against the new church. Disciples begin to be rounded up, imprisoned, beaten, eventually killed for their faith. The first would be a man named Stephen in Acts chapter 7.

Turn over to Acts chapter 7. And in Acts chapter 7 drop down to verse 54. What was Stephen doing? Stephen was preaching the gospel. Verse 54: ***When they heard...[the preaching of Stephen] they were cut to the heart, [That's what good preaching will do. It'll bring conviction. And you can either be hostile or you can be humble] they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. [What does that sound like? It sounds like hostility. Verse 55] But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and***

Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Drop down to chapter 8, verse 1: *Now Saul was consenting to his death.* [In other words, Saul thought it right that they should stone Stephen in the temple that day.] *At that time [verse 1] a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.* [It’s interesting, isn’t it? how the Lord uses the very persecution of His own people to further the spread of the glory of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ such that sinners would be saved. And how those disciples of Jesus Christ are themselves worthy of honor for their sacrifice. We see it on the pages of Scripture. Verse 2] *And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*

Now Saul here was a Jewish man, originally from Tarsus, named possibly after a fellow Benjamite. The first king of Israel was named Saul and was a Benjamite. It was common at that time for Jewish men to have both a Jewish name, a Hebrew name, and a Greek name. And we find out later in Acts chapter 13, verse 9 that Saul’s Greek name was Paul. Paul’s father from Tarsus had become a Roman citizen, made Paul a Roman citizen as well, and a Roman citizen by birth. Paul had been given the finest of Jewish educations, as well as receiving the finest of Roman or Greek educations, Paul had been given the finest of Jewish educations. He studied at the feet of Israel’s greatest teacher at the time, the Rabbi Gamaleo, from the age of thirteen. It was at that time that Saul became a fiercely zealous Jew.

Look at verse 3: *As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.* Everyone he could find, every Christian he could find, went to every house, dragging them off. Paul, Saul, set the bar in his zealous persecution of the church. Saul was wild with zeal for his Judaism. He was unmatched in his zeal for Judaism, persecuting the church. He would say of himself in 1 Timothy chapter 1, verse 13 that he was *a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man,* – the chief of sinners having persecuted the Lord’s church.

He described himself in Philippians chapter 3, verse 5 as: *circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law,* [Saul saw himself as] *blameless.* It’s much like, wasn’t it? foreshadowing, if you will, of Haman in the days of Esther, wanting to murder all the Jews. Here is Saul now, wanting to murder all the Christians.

Look at Acts chapter 9 – a page to the right – look there at verse 1: *Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way,* [That’s what they called Christians at that time. They were people of the Way. The Lord Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. They are people of the Way, speaking of Christians,] *whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

Saul was zealous to find them, to search them out, to bring them back to Jerusalem, to see them tried and punished and killed. Persecution had scattered them. Saul was intent on rounding them all up. Paul told King Agrippa in Acts chapter 26: *Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison,*

having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; [How do you think he compelled them to blaspheme? Paul was zealous in persecuting Christians.] and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. Which is what he's doing right here in Acts chapter 9.

Verse 3: *As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.* [Notice it's Jesus Christ whom he's persecuting as Saul breathes out threats and murder against the Lord's church. Do you see? We're united to Him. He is our Brother, as it were, and when we're persecuted, He's persecuted.] *It is hard for you [Saul] to kick against the goads."* A goad was a long wooden pole, often with an iron tip at the end that they used to jab oxen to get them to go the right direction. Paul here, Saul, is kicking against those goads.

Verse 6: *So he, trembling and astonished,* [That's an understatement. Can you imagine? Saul trembling, fearful, terrified and astonished. His mind rocked now. His world in upheaval, turned upside down. And all that Saul could do was say,] *"Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

This insolent blasphemer is now humbled. His world turned upside down. The Lord then instructs Ananias to meet Saul in Damascus and tells Ananias in verse 15: *"Go, [Ananias] for [Saul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."* It's interesting. Over the years, I will often hear someone say or remark, "Wouldn't it be something if God were to save this person or that person who is a famous person or a person who is really wealthy or a person with a lot of influence." "What would it be like if God would save Donald Trump? Or if God would save..." "What the Lord might do through that."

Well, here you have it. God saves Saul, the persecutor of the church, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, concerning the Law, blameless. A man of matchless zeal, of matchless education, matchless upbringing in Judaism, of matchless knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul was a tremendous man of influence. And here the Lord saves the Apostle Paul, and He says, "You go. I'll tell you what you're going to do. I'm going to show you how many things you're going to suffer for My name's sake." And the Lord, who can draw a straight line with crooked sticks all day long, accomplishes much through this formerly insolent blasphemous man.

Verse 20. What did he do? *Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.* [I really like that.] *Then all who heard were amazed,* [verse 21] *and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.*

Paul comes out of the gate storming, storming the gates of hell, storming this world with the gospel. Saul *of Tarsus* becomes, Romans 1, verse 1, *Paul, a bondservant of [the Lord] Jesus Christ,* What happens in the very next verse? Acts chapter 9, verse 23: *Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him."* Well, of course they did.

From there, from that point we can piece together, if you will, a chronology of Paul's ministry from various passages in Paul's letters. We know from Galatians chapter 1, that Paul then, spent three years in

Arabia. Listen to Galatians chapter 1, verse 11. Paul says: ***But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.***

That's where it comes from. It comes from a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul didn't receive it from men. He wasn't taught it by man. He got it through direct revelation. And listen, it's the same for us today. It doesn't come to us from man, as if it's something that we can manipulate, or change, or adjust, or edit to suit our own liking, It comes from a revelation of God to man through the Lord Jesus Christ on the pages of Scripture and it's not to be meddled with. The gospel is not to be changed into "Ask Jesus into your heart." The gospel is not to be changed into a series of sacraments that you have to do to keep righteousness with God. The gospel is not to be changed, it's not to be altered, it's not to be edited. We are to use the Word that God uses. We are to use the gospel that is here given to us clearly on the pages of Scripture, and we're not to meddle with it. People today continuously meddle with it. And what they're doing is they're peddling something that then isn't the gospel.

Paul says in verse 13: ***For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.***

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

He spent that time, that three years in Arabia, where the Lord through direct revelation gave Paul the gospel, and gave Paul an understanding of His Word through the Scriptures of the Old Testament that Paul was extremely well versed in. And Paul came to understand the revelation of God in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That three years ended up with a quick trip to Jerusalem to see Peter. And then afterward, Paul went into the regions of Cilicia and Syria and finally back to Tarsus, back to the area that he was from.

Acts chapter 11, verse 25 records that the church at Antioch sent Barnabas to go and find Paul in Tarsus. They wanted Paul to come and teach in Antioch. And he is brought back to Antioch and spends a year there with Barnabas, teaching the people. And all of that would then encompass a 14-year period in the life of the Apostle Paul. Putting Paul in Antioch in 48 AD, when the Spirit of God set him apart for missionary work in Acts chapter 13. Flip the page and look at Acts chapter 13, beginning there in verse 1. Paul would embark on 3 missionary journeys in his ministry, this being the first:

Acts chapter 13, verse 1: ***Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.***

Now, what follows is a description of Paul's 1st missionary journey through the region of Galatia north of Israel. And Paul there, went to Cyprus, to Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe; all the cities throughout that region. As he went, planting churches; seeing churches planted. As they traveled, they faced tremendous, tremendous persecution. The terrain was incredibly difficult. They had a terribly difficult time. The mountains were imposing. And Paul was likely thinking of segments of this trip when he wrote in 2

Corinthians chapter 11 – we’re very familiar with – that he was stoned in Lystra, that he was *in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of [his] own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness...in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, and in hunger and in thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness*— It would have been this missionary journey, the first of three.

Many of the Jews on that journey rejected the gospel at every turn, stirred up people against Paul, such that Paul and Barnabas then turned their attention to the Gentiles. And Paul is considered the apostle to the Gentiles. Concluding his 1st missionary journey through Galatia, Paul then writes Galatians around 49 to 50 AD, after returning to Antioch in Syria.

From Paul’s letter to the Galatians, we know that false teaching *immediately* became an issue in those churches. It takes no time at all before the enemy starts sewing seeds of destruction, seeds of false teaching in the Lord’s church. The gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone was *immediately* challenged and corrupted by the Judaizers. So, between his 1st and 2nd missionary journeys, Paul takes a trip to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem council that is recorded in Acts chapter 15, where the council affirms there the true gospel.

In 50 AD then, Paul takes Silas and begins the 2nd of his three missionary journeys. He decides to go back through Syria and Cilicia in Acts 15, strengthening the churches. Paul and Silas meet Timothy in Lystra and take Timothy with them. And then something interesting happens. Three of them are prevented by the Spirit of God from going over into Bithynia or into Asia. The only route available to them was to the port city of Troas, where Paul receives the “Macedonian call” in Acts 16. Paul has a vision of a man in Macedonia calling for his help.

So Paul, Silas, and Timothy, understanding that to be God’s direction, immediately head for Macedonia. They pick up Luke on their way to Philippi and Paul plants a church in Philippi, He plants a church in Thessalonica. He plants a church in Berea. Paul is a prolific missionary, a prolific church planter, and God is prospering the work of the gospel. The church, the gospel is spreading all over the place. And then leaving Silas and Timothy behind in Berea, Paul departs for Macedonia in the north, and then heads south to the region of Achaia, where we have Paul’s preaching at the Areopagus in Acts 17. Then Paul ends up spending 18 months in Corinth between 50 and 52 AD and that’s recorded in Acts chapter 18.

Turn to Acts chapter 18, look there beginning in verse 1: ***After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because [the Emperor] Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); [He met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth. And Priscilla and Aquila were Christians who had come from Rome and joined Paul in his work in Corinth. They had come from Rome and] because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.*** That’s going to become important here in just a moment.

From Acts chapter 2 remember, we know that there were visitors who had come from Rome who were converted in Jerusalem at Pentecost. There were visitors from Rome. Here in Acts chapter 18, we find twenty years later or more, two known Christians, Priscilla and Aquila, leaving Rome and meeting Paul in Corinth. There’s a church that has begun in the city of Rome. And it has been established by believers with no apostolic help, no apostolic support yet. This is a church that has cropped up in Rome at the preaching of the gospel.

Now, Paul tells the Romans in Romans chapter 1, verse 8. He says: ***First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.*** [When Paul writes this letter to the Romans the church is well known, their faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. Verse 9] ***For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—*** [These folks in Rome had been without an apostle up until this point. Paul wanted to be an influence with them, wanted to be a help to them, wanted to teach, wanted to help, wanted to see them established; established in apostolic doctrine. Verse 12] ***that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.***

[Verse 13] ***Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.***

Well, in Acts chapter 19 then, beginning in verse 1, Paul begins the 3rd and last of his missionary journeys. ***And it happened, [verse 1] while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus.*** And from a home base, as it were, in Ephesus, Paul made what would be a 2nd trip to the city of Corinth. After which, he would write 1 Corinthians from the city of Ephesus. Paul would then leave Ephesus for Macedonia, and then onto Corinth one last time to pick up a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. We talked about that when we went through 2 Corinthians together. And after a short 3 month stay in Corinth, nearing his departure from Corinth for the last time, Paul would sit and write his letter to the church at Rome in and around AD 57.

Now Paul would write with an amanuenses; a scribe, so-to-speak. Turn with me to Romans chapter 16 and look at verse 22. What were the conditions or the circumstances of the writing of this letter? Paul would have sat nearing the end of his stay in Corinth, nearing the time that he would leave to go to Jerusalem with his gift for the church there. But Paul had on his mind the church at Rome. So Paul sits to write. And Paul uses what has been called an amanuenses, a scribe. We see that in Romans chapter 16, verse 22. ***I, Tertius, [The name of this scribe, the amanuenses, was Tertius.] I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.***

So Paul, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit dictated this letter to Tertius. You can imagine the scene, can't you? The scroll's opened up, Tertius sitting at the desk, and Paul thinking, Paul, maybe, with scrolls open in front of him considering the church in Rome, and then dictating this letter. That would have been amazing to have been there. And Tertius was the first to have heard this epistle.

Paul then, in writing the letter mentions several believers in and around Corinth. So we know that he's in Corinth when he writes the letter, and it secures our understanding of where the letter was written. In chapter 16, in verse 23, Paul is staying with Gaius. Gaius was a man that Paul had baptized in Corinth in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 14. Now Paul is staying with him as he writes this letter. And in chapter 16, verse 1, he mentions Phoebe from Cenchrea which was a port town very near to Corinth. It would be Phoebe who would be the one to carry this letter to Rome. When Phoebe carried this letter from Corinth to Rome, Phoebe would have arrived in a city of nearly 1 million people at that time. It would have been an absolute massive city by the standards of that day, the very heart of the Roman Empire.

As we consider Phoebe going to Rome and delivering this letter in AD 57, let me ask you a question: Where was Peter? Where has Peter been? What has Peter been doing all of this time? Was Peter in Rome?

No. Where was Peter? Peter was in Jerusalem. Peter hasn't been to Rome. Where has Peter always been? Peter has always been in Jerusalem. Peter was considered a pillar in the church at Jerusalem. Peter was a leader in the church at Jerusalem. Peter was an apostle to the circumcision from his home base in Jerusalem. Peter didn't go to Rome. Well, how did this church in Rome get started? Peter didn't plant a church in Rome – sorry to say Roman Catholics. How did this church in Rome get started? Jews from Rome visiting Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 went back to their home city and preached the gospel, which is what Christians do, and this church got started.

Very interesting, in AD 49, before this, the Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome. We have that edict written in the history of the Roman Empire, in secular history, as it were, of Rome. And it lines up exactly with Paul's statements in Acts 18, where Paul meets Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth. They were coming from Rome because the Emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome. Now it's very interesting: It's very likely that the edict of Emperor Claudius in Rome was related to Jewish *Christians*. Now, this is fascinating.

From the Roman historian Suetonius, the edict of Claudius said this: "He expelled from Rome the Jews constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus." Chrestus was a name that you may have found among Roman slaves at the time, but it wasn't a name that was found at all among the Jews. If I remember correctly, there was someone who made a list of all the Jewish names that were common around this area at that time. There were 550 names that they could trace to Jewish owners of the name. And of the 550 of them, none of them was Chrestus. Chrestus isn't a Jewish name.

Now, what does this say then? 1) This may have been a proselyte. If he was a proselyte, a Jewish proselyte stirring up trouble, it's very likely that he was a Christian, Jewish proselyte among the Jewish population in Rome. 2) Or, secondly, the edict could have been related to those causing disturbances at the instigation of Christus. The codex Sinaiticus manuscript at the time, reads χρηστιανοσ (Chrestianos). Christians, in other words.

Either way, it's very good evidence, one or two that the gospel was being preached in Rome, and the Jews there in the synagogues were responding to the preaching of the gospel in the synagogues, in and around Jewish neighborhoods in Rome, in the same way that the Jews in other areas – Greek-Roman empire areas – had responded to Paul's preaching of the gospel, where they stoned him and beat him, left him for dead and persecuted him from city to city. The same thing is happening in Rome. There's trouble being started, trouble brewing, trouble being instigated by Chrestianos, or Chrestus, or Christus in Rome. And so, what does Claudius do? He announces, demands the removal of all those trouble making Jewish people out of the city of Rome. The Jews were responding with disturbances and persecution.

Well Paul would eventually make it to Rome. Paul had intentions to go there, wanted to establish them in the gospel, wanted to preach the gospel to them. Paul would eventually make it to Rome, but not specifically for the purpose of visiting the growing church in Rome. Paul would be arrested on his return to Jerusalem in Acts chapter 21. Paul would be seized by a mob. Paul would be beaten again, and it was a Roman commander that would quiet the crowd and take Paul into custody. And knowing that he would be certainly killed by the Jews in Jerusalem, and when the Roman soldiers were about to scourge him, Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship. Paul would be charged with sedition and then sent to Rome, because Paul had made his appeal to Caesar.

Now, on his way back to Jerusalem before his arrest, Paul had met with the elders of the church at Ephesus in a town called Miletus, and listen to what Paul says in Acts 20, in verse 17:

From Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

"And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God..."

Paul would finish his ministry in Rome. What was driving Paul continuously was love for the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ and him crucified. What was fueling Paul's zeal now? No longer hatred for the Lord, or hatred for the Lord's church. It was love for the Lord, and Paul's love for the gospel, and Paul's love for God's people. What drove Paul? The gospel. The gospel.

Romans chapter 1, verse 13: *Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), [but I planned to come to you] that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.*

It's all because of the truth. The truth of Romans chapter 1, verses 16 and 17: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*

Why? Why is the gospel revealed? Because, verse 18: *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth [of God] in unrighteousness!*

Paul would spend roughly two years under arrest in Rome. He would eventually be sentenced to death as a leader of the Christians – as a leader of the Christians. And Paul would be led out of the city along the Ostian Way. Paul would be beheaded at a place called Aquae Salvia, modern day Tre Fontane. And as Tertullian said, *"The blood of the martyrs proved to be the seed of the church."*

F.F. Bruce said in his commentary on Romans that, *"Persecution and martyrdom did not extinguish Christianity in Rome."* Praise God for Paul's ministry. Praise God for His use of men like Paul to proclaim His glorious treasure. Praise God for this book of Romans. Amen? Next week we're going to dig further into the book itself.

All praise, honor, and glory to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ for the spread of the gospel to the uttermost ends of the earth even to us! Amen.