

The Letter of Paul to the Romans¹

Romans 1:1-17 – September 25, 2022

New Covenant Presbyterian Church – Richmond Hill, GA – Sunday School

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 57. *What benefits hath Christ procured by his mediation?*

A. Christ, by his mediation, hath procured redemption, with all other benefits of the covenant of grace.

DQ: Why has Romans been so important throughout church history?

1. Background to Romans

- a. The church in Rome was founded by Jews and proselytes, not by Paul or a member of his ministry team.
- b. Nero ordered the Jews to leave Rome in A.D. 49, leaving the church to become dominated by Gentile Christians.
 - Acts 18:2a, “And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.”
- c. Nero died in A.D. 54, causing the order to lapse, with many Jews returning back to Rome, which likely caused a strained relationship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians.
- d. Paul authored Romans in A.D. 58.
- e. Paul is the author (Rom 1:1), Tertius the amanuensis (Rom 16:22), perhaps Phoebe is the courier of the letter (Rom 16:1), and the recipients likely Gentile and Jewish Christians in churches in Rome (Rom 16:1-16).
- f. Paul wanted to visit Rome to preach the Gospel, and then travel from there to Spain, but first needed to travel to Jerusalem to deliver the collection from the Gentile churches. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem was carried to Rome as a prisoner, where he would die as a martyr c. A.D. 62/64.

2. The Reason for Paul’s Epistle to the Romans

- a. Rom 15:15-16, “But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”
- b. From internal and external evidence, it appears his purpose for writing Romans was to minister to the Jewish and Gentile believers by epistle, being delayed in person, and to engage them as partners in gospel ministry in his mission to Spain.

3. Rhetorical Features

- a. Diatribe: the author engages a hypothetical dialogue partner.
- b. Internal dialogue: the author poses and responds to his own questions.
- c. Speech-in-character: the author adopts a particular persona to articulate the experience of particular persons.

- d. Creedal statements, hymns, benedictions, Scripture quotations, syllogisms, and midrashic argument.
- e. Stylistic features: parallelism, anaphora (repetition of initial words or syllables), homoioteleuton (similar-sounding endings), and chiasm (repetition of words or ideas in reverse sequence).

4. Simple Outline

- a. Righteousness from God (1-11)
- b. Righteousness in Practice (12-16)

DQ: Why would Paul need to introduce himself?

5. Paul's Greeting (1:1-7)

- a. Who is this Paul (v. 1)?
 - He's a servant like the OT prophets.
 - 2 Kings 9:7, "And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my **servants** the prophets, and the blood of all the **servants** of the LORD."
 - Ezra 9:10-11a, "And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, which you commanded by your **servants** the prophets..."
 - Dan 9:6, "We have not listened to your **servants** the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land."
 - He's an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.
 - Luke 6:13, "And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named **apostles**..."
 - Gal 1:1, "Paul, an **apostle**—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father..."
 - "The distinctive qualifications of the apostles were that they were directly and personally called and commissioned by Jesus, that they were eye-witnesses of the historical Jesus, at least (and specially) of his resurrection, and that they were sent out by him to preach with his authority (Stott, 46)."
- b. What is the Gospel Paul preached (vv. 1-6)?
 - Verse 1b: the Gospel has a divine origin.
 - Verse 2: the Gospel fulfills God's redemptive plan.
 - Verse 3-4: the Gospel is about the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the God-man. Notice the contrast:
 - Son of David (2 Sam 7:10-16) & Son of God (Ps 2)
 - Born of David & Declared Son of God
 - According to the flesh & According to the Spirit
 - Verse 5: the Gospel is for all nations (not just for Jewish Christians).
 - Verse 5: the Gospel is received by faith and changes a person's obedience.
 - Verse 6: the goal of the Gospel is the glory of Jesus Christ.

DQ: How do you unite ethnic diverse Christians in the church?

- c. Who are the recipients of the epistle (v. 7)?
 - Loved by God, called to be saints, and children of the Father.
 - *Father* language implies covenantal relationship, which now includes Gentile Christians.
 - Ex 4:22-23, “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve me.’ If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’”
 - Isa 1:2, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me.”
 - Hos 11:1, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”

6. Paul’s Missionary Prayer (1:8-15)

- a. Notice the bookends: a faith proclaimed (v. 8) and a gospel to preach (v. 15).
- b. Verses 10, 13: Paul was providentially hindered from doing a noble, God-honoring task.

DQ: How do we reconcile human planning and God’s providence?

- c. Verse 11: Paul desired to impart a spiritual gift (χάρισμα) to them to make them strong. Two interpretations:
 - First: The spiritual gift is some gift of the Holy Spirit, such as, tongues or prophecy. The problem with this view is that it is always the Holy Spirit who imparts these gifts (see 1 Cor 12:1-4, 7-11, 28).
 - Second: The spiritual gift is Paul’s understanding of the Gospel, which includes Jewish and Gentile Christians. This would seem to fit the context best because of his expressed desire to preach to them, and his calling as the Apostle to the Gentiles (see v. 13b).
- d. Verse 14: From where does Paul’s “obligation” derive? See v. 1.
 - Greek (Ἕλλην): (1) a person of Greek language and culture; (2) in the broader sense, all persons who came under the influence of Greek, as distinguished from Israel’s, culture (BDAG).
 - Barbarian (βάρβαρος): (1) pertains to those who use a language that is unintelligible to outsiders, *foreign-speaking*; (2) with focus on non-Hellenic association: pertaining to not speaking Greek or participating in Greek culture, *not Hellenic* (BDAG).

7. Paul’s Thesis Statement (1:16-17)

- a. These two verses provide “...a statement of the main theme of the letter. It functions as the *propositio*, that is, a statement of the proposition that will be argued and defended in the rest of the letter. Thus 1:16-17 foreshadows major themes expounded later in the letter, such as salvation for all who believe, the place of the Jewish people in the plan of salvation, and the revelation of the righteousness of God (Kruse, 66).”
- b. The gospel will indeed appear as “folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor 1:18).”

- c. For whom is this salvation? "...everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
- What was the Jewish advantage? See vv. 2-3 and 3:1-2. This advantage also included responsibility (see 2:9).
 - Paul's ministry to the Gentiles included an effort to make them jealous (see Rom 11:14). As we learn in Acts, Paul would often preach to the Jews in the synagogues first, and then, once rejected, bring his preaching to the Gentiles.
- d. What is the "righteousness of God"?
- Is it a righteousness given that comes from God (a genitive of source or origin)?
 - A righteousness that is possessed by God (a possessive genitive)?
 - Is it God's righteous actions of salvation (a subjective genitive)?
 - Or is it a both-and option?
- e. Paul quotes Hab 2:4, "...the righteous shall live by his faith."
- Some debate this verse in Hab 2:4 should be translated something like, *he who through faith is righteous shall live*. What's the difference? Is Paul saying that faith is the way to righteousness? Or faith is the way of life for those who are righteous?
 - Paul quotes Hab 2:4 in Gal 3:11, as evidence of justification by faith. This would seem to fit with Paul's purpose in Romans. "Paul's concern here is not how righteous people live, but how sinful people become righteous (Stott, 65)."
 - Heb 11:38 quotes Hab 2:4 as evidence that faith is the way righteous people live and persevere.

¹Secondary Resources Used: Class notes from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). John Stott, *The Message of Romans*. TBST (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994).