

First Presbyterian Church of Belle Vernon
Tuesday Bible Study

The Book of Romans

Introduction:

Author: The apostle Paul

Date and Place About AD 57, probably on his third missionary journey, most likely written in Corinth or Cenchreae.

Audience: Predominantly Gentiles in the church at Rome, but includes Jews there, as well.

THEME: God's plan of salvation is for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Author: Paul the apostle (see 1:1). No one has ever contested Paul's authorship of this book, unlike other epistles.

Introduction to Romans

OUTLINE

Introduction (1:1–15)

A. Identification and Justification

Paul introduces himself by describing the One who redeemed and called him

- a. For more study about Paul, see 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; 11:21-12:10; Galatians 1:13-24; Philippians 3:4-14; 1 Timothy 1:12-16)
- b. A servant of Jesus Christ—The word is *doulos*, translated as “servant” (loyalty) or “slave” (sense of ownership) depending on the context.
- c. Apostle *Apostolos* One specially commissioned by Christ. Literally, an emissary, one who is sent off. Purpose is usually to convey a message, also “ambassador” or “envoy.”
- d. Set apart for the gospel of God—Gospel=*euangellion* also “good news”
- e. Verses 2-4:
“Promised”—means more than prophecy. It commits God to make good His word. Prophecy may just be an advance announcement of something that will happen.

The good news, or gospel is centered in Jesus “his Son”

- i. Earthly life—he took on human nature
 - ii. Became an Israelite “a descendant of David”
 - iii. Through the Spirit appointed Son of God in power. Paul includes this to guard against heretical theories about Jesus’ nature.
 - iv. Jesus Christ our Lord—resurrected and given the title as Lord over all.
- f. Verses 5-6:
- i. We received grace and apostleship—possibly referring to the apostles.
 - ii. “all the Gentiles . . . to the obedience that comes from faith”
Paul's readers were not called, as he was, to apostleship; they were called "to belong to Jesus Christ" and to be "saints", the common term designating believers.
 - iii. The basic idea of the Greek for this word is “holiness.” All Christians are saints in that they are positionally “set apart” to God and are experientially being made increasingly “holy” by the Holy Spirit.

- g. Verse—Greeting “7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- h. Verses 8-10 -- Paul continues his introduction, perhaps feeling the need to be better acquainted, and unburdens his heart concerning the readers.

- i. Giving Thanks

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

Paul’s thanksgiving isn’t based on numbers or financial giving, but because of their faith.

Are we thankful for those with whom we correspond or worship? For those whom we serve with our offerings? What are we thankful for?

“The whole world has heard”

- ii. Paul prays for the believers in Rome

9 God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you 10 in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

Paul was a man of prayer and in his pastoral ministry he constantly prayed for believers throughout the Church.

Why does Paul summon God “as his witness”? He only does this when what he is claiming is difficult to believe.

1. It seems too much to expect a person who doesn’t even know you would be praying for you.
2. He wanted the Romans to know that he was not forgetting them even though he was heading to Jerusalem.

- i. Verses 11-13

11 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

- i. Paul doesn’t just want to see the Roman believers, but also to minister to them, to strengthen them and to receive strength from them.

- ii. “some spiritual gift” Not referring to the gifts of the Spirit most likely, since it is singular. The gift would come through Paul, but then would be shared with one another through the Spirit’s work in the believers.
- iii. “that I might have a harvest among you”
Paul is not hinting that the Roman believers were not saved. He uses the word “Gentiles,” hinting that “among you” refers to the community, not just the church, and that he wants to reach the unsaved, as well as helping the church in Rome bear fruit.

j. Verses 14-15

14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

- i. Paul did not consider going to Rome a vacation or a sightseeing tour, but rather an obligation, recognizing that he is Christ’s servant (v. 1), who has a charge to take the Gospel (v. 5). “I am obligated” “I am so eager.”

Q: Do we consider Christian service and witnessing an obligation to God? Why or why not? How should we approach the gospel and those in our lives?

- ii. Greeks and non-Greeks—Refers to all non-Jewish members of the human race. It is probably that “non-Greeks” [Gk *barbaroi*] may refer to people west of Rome, although they would be Rome, as well.
- iii. The “wise and the foolish”—A way of saying that ALL need the gospel. “The wise are perishing in the midst of their worldly wisdom, and the foolish in their abject simplicity. Both need the Gospel.” Expositors

B. Verses 16-29--The Righteousness of God and unrighteousness of all people

- a. *16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

Why do some people seem to be “ashamed” of the gospel? What does that look like to you?

- b. Paul says the gospel is “the power of God that brings salvation.” Power doesn’t refer to how it operates but its effect—the message of the Gospel transforms lives.
- i. How do we participate and partake in that power?
 - ii. What did the Jews look to as power? Where did they find power?
 - iii. Salvation—A broad concept meaning soundness or wholeness.
 1. In the OT—whether physical deliverance or spiritually, it comes from the Lord. Paul is quick to say in 1 Corinthians 9:22 that salvation comes through him ONLY BECAUSE he (Paul) is Christ’s representative.
 2. The effectiveness of “salvation” depends on one’s willingness to receive the message. “Everyone who believes.” True or False.
 3. Why does Paul say “first to the Jew and then to the Gentile”? Does that mean we have to wait until all the Jews hear the gospel?

Matthew 15:23-28

23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

24 He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

25 The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

26 He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

27 “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

28 Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

John 1:11

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. **11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.** 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Paul followed this same procedure, going to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles.

4. V. 17 For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Expositors: Paul is dependent here on the OT (Isa 46:12-13; 61:10), which emphasizes that God is righteous in the way he acts—an idea foreign to Greek thought. Clearly, the character of God is involved in the sense that what he does and provides is fully in keeping with his righteous nature (cf. 3:26). But just as clearly, this expression also includes the activity of God. The Gospel would not be the good news if it simply disclosed God's righteousness, and such a message would scarcely demand faith. But if salvation as God provides it is fully in keeping with his righteous character, then it has integrity.

Contrast Paul before conversion to now when he is writing to the Romans:

Previously—righteousness came from obeying the law

Currently—his righteousness is that which comes from God based on faith.

5. "The righteous will live by faith"

Galatians 3:10-14—Note v. 11

10 For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." **11 Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith."** 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." [h] 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

Expositor's: Ethical righteousness depends on a right relationship to God, so the latter merits priority of treatment.

Discuss.

C. The Guilt of Humankind (Verses 18-32)

- a. 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

Difference between “righteousness” and “wrath”

God’s wrath is not temperamental; rather it is righteous.

Romans 13:4-5 -- 4 for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience.

“Being revealed” means that the unfolding of history involves a disclosures of God’s wrath against sin. This doesn’t mean that wrath revealed today takes the place of the day of judgment (2:5) but is anticipated.

From heaven – from God.

Object of God’s wrath: all the godlessness and wickedness of men.

Godlessness means a lack of reverence, impiety that sets people against God, not just neglect but also rebellion.

Wickedness means injustice, conduct toward others.

“suppress the truth by their wickedness.” What does that mean to you?

Expositor’s “whenever the truth about God (cf. v.25) starts to assert itself and makes them feel guilty, they suppress it—either by further immoralities or by denial. Suppression of the truth implies a knowledge of the truth, and what this involves is explained in the sequel.”

- b. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse;

How is God made plain to “them”?

Natural revelation (what we see and is made plain) versus special revelation (the Scriptures)

- i. A clear testimony set before human eyes
 - ii. “understood” suggests that the revelation does not stop with perception but includes reflection, drawing a conclusion.
 - iii. A constant testimony, maintained since the Creation of the world (Acts 14:17)
 - iv. A limited testimony in that it reflects God in certain aspects only—“his eternal power and divine nature” His love and grace are elsewhere.
- c. 21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

- i. Despite knowledge shown through creation, people failed to act on it.

“neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him” (our entire duty towards God)

Does “thank God” as an exclamation count?

- ii. Thinking became futile—humankind’s need to recognize some higher power in the universe greater than ourselves, and refusal to recognize God, caused idolatry and mythology.

To become futile reflects a noun form used for idols—they are unreal and unprofitable and estranges from God.

Can you identify any examples of this?

iii. Descending scale of abandonment of God by humankind

1. Mortal man (Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 2:38; 3:1; Caesar)

2. Animal Kingdom / paganism (Ps 106:19-20, the golden calf)

d. Verses 24-25--24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

i. Therefore, because they ignored God's revelation in creation they abandoned true worship.

"Human religion in its various cultic forms is a species of punishment for spurning the revelation God has given of himself in nature. In many cases it is a means of keeping people so occupied that they never arrive at a confrontation with the true God." Expositors

What do you think about this statement?

ii. God gave them over. What do you think this means?

iii. in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves

This is referring to cultic prostitution. Note that Paul was writing from the location of the temple of Aphrodite.

iv. "worshiped created things rather than the creator."

Expositor's "They have wholly rid themselves of God by substituting other objects in his place.)

D. The Righteous Judgment of God—2:1-16

1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Most scholars believe that Paul has moved from discussing the Gentiles to confronting the Jews, who might have been smugly confident.

a. Judging and Hypocrisy

You have no excuse . . . because you do the same things.

Read Matthew 7:2-5

Are Paul and Jesus telling us NOT to name sin or call people to account? Why or why not?

If we are to name sin or call on people to change, what must we do first?
(note Matthew 7:5)

- i. we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.

"By this Paul simply means that God's judgment is reached on the basis of reality, not on appearances."

- ii. "Do you think you will escape God's judgment?"

Why are we so far-sighted that we cannot see our own faults and failures?

- iii. Or do you **show contempt** (NRSV Or do you despise) for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Murray: "To "despise" is to underestimate the significance of something, to think lightly of it and thus fail to accord to it the esteem that is due. . . . scorning and contempt."

Ecclesiastes 8:11: When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong.

Why do you think people despise or show contempt for God's requirements when judgment doesn't happen quickly? Why do we take God's forbearance as excusing us rather than giving us a chance to repent?

iv. How does understanding God's kindness, etc., lead us to repentance?

- b. 5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 God "will repay each person according to what they have done." 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 11 For God does not show favoritism.

How would you characterize "stubbornness and unrepentant heart"? What does that look like?

"But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil"
What truth is Paul speaking of?

"The good works that believers perform do not bring them salvation, but they attest to the salvation they have received by faith (6:22; Eph 2:8-10)." (Exp.)

c. 12 All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. 14 (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) 16 This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

i. Sin is sin—law or not.

ii. But I follow the law, do good things, etc.

“Paul's purpose is to undercut the position of those Jews who are counting on their (limited) obedience to the law for acceptance with God.”

iii. V. 14-15—Can people be saved who don't have a witness to Jesus?
Rabbinic teaching was that Abraham followed the laws of Sinai long before they were given, talking about laws written in the heart

(Jeremiah 31:33: “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.)

iv. V. 16—What we do that may seem praiseworthy may be wrongly motivated, and some things that don't seem good might be approved because the intention was praiseworthy.

E. The Jews and the Law vv. 17-29

a. ¹⁷ But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God ¹⁸ and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law, ¹⁹ and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth, ²¹ you, then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You that forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You that abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

i. What are the "advantages" of the Jews Paul lists in verses 17-20?

ii. How did they respond to their "advantages," according to Paul? Did it make them better or not, according to the following verses? "Paul has succeeded in exposing Jewish pride and boasting as utterly ridiculous." (Expositors)

Read Luke 18:9-14 What is the real sin here?

iii. Why do you think they were so blind to their own selves and rebellion? How are we sometimes like the Jews in our approach to living out our faith?

iv. Paul quotes Isa 52:5: The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. As Christian believers, we tend to lean toward religious pride and sometimes arrogance. How can we protect ourselves from this same error?

b. ²⁵ Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

How can circumcision become uncircumcision? What do you think Paul is saying here?

c. ²⁶ So, if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you that have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. ²⁹ Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.

i. Paul contends that the symbol must be accompanied by faithfulness: circumcision and observing the law cannot be separated.

What are some of the things in our experience that become to us like circumcision and the law did to the Jews?

ii. “the physically uncircumcised will condemn you . . . “
“. . . a specialized use of the word "condemn" to indicate the effect created by one who surpasses another despite his inferior status or limited advantage (cf. Mt 8:11-12; 12:41).” (Expositor’s)

- iii. Paul says “a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart.”
Read Dt 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25-26

What are the outward signs of being a Christian? How can Paul’s words apply to the church?