

The Book of Romans

By Doug Hamilton

Introduction to the Book of Romans

The Author, Location and Date of Writing

It was written by the apostle Paul (1:1) while at the tail end of his Third Missionary Journey. Paul said in Romans 15:19 *“in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”* In that verse he was outlining the extent of his evangelistic range, which would have been established during the Third Mission. Illyricum is the northwestern side of Greece, across from Italy on the other side of the Adriatic Sea. It is modern day Albania and Yugoslavia. He had not yet made a trip to Rome, but was *“longing”* to do so (1:11). Paul’s goal was to stop in Rome on his way to Spain (15:24). He likely wrote it while in Corinth during the winter, for he still needed to go Jerusalem first (15:25). Acts 19:21 says that by the time he had reached Ephesus it was already confirmed he would make a missionary trip to Rome. It says he *purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”* This gives us understanding as to why he commends a servant named Phoebe (16:1-2), whom happened to dwell in Cenchrea, a port city of Corinth. This would place the time of the writing to be the winter of A.D. 57.

The Occasion

Paul is about to depart for Jerusalem and there is much at stake. He has earned a reputation for reaching out to the gentiles (Acts 23:21) with the gospel and it has caused much concern with the Jews of Jerusalem. The integration of gentiles into a Judeo/Christian culture was quite a challenge and brought hard feelings.

There was no better example in the Roman Empire of Jewish/gentile tension than in the church in Rome. Acts 2:10 confirms there were visitors from Rome in Jerusalem during Pentecost. It was likely some of those visitors were converted and as a result took the gospel to Italy. The result were congregations in Rome filled with Jewish converts. They were leaders in the church and many gentiles were also being converted. There were also many stiff-necked Jews who refused to reason the gospel (Acts 28:24). And they became troublemakers.

In A.D. 49 Emperor Claudius had enough and kicked all the Jews out of Rome for five years, including the Jewish Christians. As a result, the only Christians in Rome were gentile converts. They had to step up their responsibilities in the mission work and many more gentiles were converted. When the Jews were allowed to come back to Rome in A.D. 54, they were no longer running the show. This caused great strife between the Jewish and gentile Christians. With the work threatened with division, Paul sent off a letter to the church in Rome in order to encourage them to resolve their differences. He wanted to communicate to them that there is no difference for the plan of salvation, the faith they were to have and the rewards of that faith.

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The Opening Greeting (1:1-17)

Because Paul did not start the church in Rome nor visited, he would need to write a lengthier greeting, for they had no personal experience with him.

A) It was a Revealing Greeting

Romans 1:1-7 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, ⁴ who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; ⁷ to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called *as* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the opening of the greeting we learn not only about Paul, but also Jesus and the Roman Christians.

Paul was...

1. A Bond-servant of Christ Jesus: This is a willing slave, one whom has sold themselves to their master. If one does not enslave their selves to Jesus, then they cannot have Him as their Master.
2. An Apostle of Jesus: The word *apostle* means to be sent out with a message. From the very moment of confrontation on the Road to Damascus Paul was *one sent out with a message*. Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel..."* He was called for this role even from his mother's womb (Gal 1:15). God always knew Paul would be a messenger for Him.
3. Set Apart for the Gospel of God: Paul was set aside for the work of the gospel. The gospel simply means *good news*. Paul's life would be dedicated to the gospel from beginning to the end in his covenant with Jesus. *1 Cor 9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel*. His goal in life was sharing the good news of Jesus.

Jesus is...

1. A Descendent of David: It says of Jesus in Matthew 1:1 that He was the son of David and the son of Abraham. Matthew not only was attempting to present Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy, but also of humanity. It is the latter which Paul is communicating of Jesus, *"according to the flesh"*. Jesus was born of a woman, just like us. He was an infant, just like us. He grew up, just like us. He was tempted just like us, though without sin (Heb. 4:15). It is a comforting thought knowing we share so much with our Savior.

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2. The Son of God: We are all the son of someone, but Jesus was the Son of God. The devil in Matthew 4:3 tempted Jesus to demonstrate His power in order to prove He was the Son of God. Again when demonstrating His power to walk on the water, the apostles recognized Him as the Son of God. In Mark 3:11 the unclean spirits which tasted the power of Jesus confirmed that He was the Son of God. Being the Son of God means sharing the power of God. What is the supreme miracle for the Son of God? According to Paul it was through the resurrection from the dead (1:4). This is what makes us Christians, for if Jesus did not have the power to be raised from the dead, then we would have no hope of doing the same (1 Cor 15:14). He is the Son of God!
3. The Lord: To recognize Jesus as Lord is to acknowledge Him as Master of our universe. He is our Creator, our Redeemer, our Protector, our All in All. He is our Everything, for He is Lord.

The Roman Christians were...

1. The Called: The word for church in the NT is *ekklesia*, meaning *called out*. In the ancient Greek culture it was necessary to gather the people to make major decisions. They would call out the residents to a public meeting of the people to carry out business at hand. God *called you out of darkness into His marvelous light* (1 Peter 2:9). The Roman Christians were called out of their dark world and into the kingdom of God.
2. The Beloved: They are the recipients of God's love. His love was poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). He loved them while they were yet sinners (Rom 5:8). He works together all things to them who love Him (Rom 8:28). They were more than conquerors through Him who loved them (Rom 8:37). Nothing could separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39). They were the "Beloved of God".
3. The Saints: The word *saint* is defined as a *separated one*. They were separated from God, but He separated them from their sins (Rom 6:17-18). As a result they were to live a life separated from the world with the behavior (Romans 6:4). They were to be separated from the world. The phrase *saints* is an accurate one for they were to be separated in every way.

B) It was an Emotionally-Connected Greeting

Romans 1:8-10 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. ⁹ For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the *preaching of the* gospel of His Son, is my witness *as to* how unceasingly I make mention of you, ¹⁰ always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.

To be effective with others, it is important for them to know that you are emotionally connected to their lives. Paul exposes three steps in his greeting which communicates this.

1. He was thankful for them. Paul was incredibly thankful to God for them. He was thankful that the gospel had already reached Rome. He was thankful for fine brothers and sisters who were in the work at Rome. He was thankful for the opportunity to evangelize the

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most powerful city in in the world at that time. The mission of Christ had reached levels never imagined by ordinary man. When a person is extremely thankful to for others, it communicates an emotional connection.

2. He publically had praise for them. Paul apparently was openly proclaiming the faith of the Roman church to others throughout the “*whole world*”. Imagine as this word makes it back to them, not only through Paul, but also through other Christians making their way back to Rome. Would it not be encouraging to them to know it? Would they not feel emotionally connected to Paul? Public recognition and praise for others is often the octane that is needed to energize and empower our goals and ambitions in Christ.
3. He consistently prayed for them. There is nothing in this world that communicates an emotional connection more than fervent prayer for another. Paul offered this to God on the behalf of the Roman Christians. I have personally been endeared to others when they leave a message that they have been praying for me. It is such a joy when you think you are all alone just to know that someone, somewhere and at some time was offering to God their intercessory offering to God on my behalf. If you want to be emotionally connected to another, then pray for them consistently.

C) It was a Long-Anticipated Greeting.

Romans 1:11-13 For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you *while* among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine.

¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Paul had longed to see them, but why? Was it to just hang out or was it much deeper? He gives three longings.

1. He longed to spiritually be with them. Paul wanted to be there together with them to savor the spirituality of Christ. He wanted to share in their dreams and passions for the Lord. He wanted to share with them in the spiritual blessings of God. Just informing them that he longed to see them would be encouraging to the souls. We live in a world that neglects quality fellowship with others. If we are a people who love God with all our hearts, souls and minds, then we will want to spend time together. We should see each other as a refuge from the things of this world.
2. He longed to impart a spiritual gift to them. Paul wanted to impart a spiritual gift to them, but what does this mean. Jesus told the apostles in John 14:26 that He would send the Holy Spirit to them so they could recall all that He spoke to them. He said the Spirit will testify to others that the word which they spoke was from God (John 15:26-27; John 16:7-ff). There was a manifestation of the Spirit in the first century which confirmed the words of the apostles (Acts 2:22; Heb 2:4).

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This was first demonstrated through Christ in His ability to do miracles. He passed this on to the apostles beginning at the day of Pentecost when He poured out His Spirit upon them (Acts 2:3-4). They began speaking in languages never learned, praising God and proclaiming the gospel (Acts 2:8). They could do many other things like healing the sick, casting out demons, understand scripture which had not been studied, discern who was lying and who was speaking the truth, do many other miracles and even bringing people back from the dead. These were referred to as the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8-10) and was there to prove they spoke the truth about Christ. This was the reason we have the Bible today because the miracles, for they confirmed the word by the signs (Mark 16:20). The apostles also possessed the ability to transfer this power to the next generation through the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:18; 2 Tim 1:6), but others could not do this. This was to facilitate the work of the early church until the letters of our New Testament were penned, appreciated and kept. When the perfect word of God was complete, then that which was temporary would be done away with (1 Corinthians 13:10).

I am persuaded that since an Apostle had not yet come to Rome to dispense a spiritual gift, Paul was ambitious to equip them in such a way. He longed to give them something to further their progress in the work. What would it be like if we imparted to others the things they needed to be empowered in the work of Christ? We give of our funds, our knowledge, love and time. These are all investments to further Christ in the lives of others.

3. He longed to obtain spiritual fruit from them. Paul wanted them to bring forth spiritual fruit for the kingdom. God does not save us to waste, but to be fruitful (Luke 13:6-9). He saves us by grace through faith to bring forth a life of good works (Eph 2:8-10). These are the things which we should be longing for. These are the things which let us know they are on the right track. These are the things which pay dividends for years to come. Long to obtain fruit from each other.

D) It was a Gospel-Obligated Greeting

Romans 1:14-17 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

The Christian is defined by the message of the gospel. It is what we heard and obeyed. It is what saves us. It is to be the passion of our life. It is our goal for others in this life.

1. He wanted to preach the gospel. Paul wanted to preach the gospel more than anything in this life. He determined to know nothing, but Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). His feet was shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15). He did all things of the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:23). He

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was so excited just imagining himself in Rome preaching that message of hope, sharing in the participation of the gospel (Philippians 1:5).

2. He was proud of the gospel. He was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. He would outright boast about the gospel (Gal 6:14). He would change the methods, but he never changed the message. The word for *power* is *dunamis*. It is the word from which we derive *dynamite* in the English. To Paul the gospel was the most powerful message ever to roll off the tongue of men. It did not matter who he was in front of, whether the common man, philosophers or kings, he boldly preached the gospel of Christ (Acts 19:8).
3. He desired the righteousness of the gospel. Righteousness is the quality of being in the right. Everybody wants to be right in their thinking and right in their actions. People like to say, "I told you I was right!" We love to proclaim we are right in our ways, but all have sinned and fall short in this category (Rom 3:23). There is none righteous, no not one (Rom 3:10). God is the One who is truly righteous, not us (Dt 32:4). God is RIGHT and we are WRONG! This is an eternal conflict needing reconciliation.

This is where Jesus comes in. 1 John 2:1-2 says *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ² and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.* Jesus is the righteous Mediator. It was a righteousness not found in the Law, but through faith in Jesus Christ (Phil 3:9). Romans 3:25-26 tells us that God displayed "*of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*"

Paul desires the righteousness of the gospel to be the Romans Christian's lives because God wanted the same. We are only right because we agree with God for the need to be cleansed and walk in the newness of life. If Jesus is your Savior, then He is your Mediator of righteousness and the righteousness of the gospel dwells in you.

There is a lot to be said in the greetings we extend to one another. Paul's example of a greeting to the Roman Christians would serve us well to pattern ourselves after.