

**Gospel Doctrine**  
**Lesson: Romans**  
**Reading: Romans**

PDF version of the lesson notes.

**I. Introduction**

These notes are rather limited in scope, but I can't devote any more time to this set of notes.

Teaching a lesson about Paul's epistle to the Romans is somewhat intimidating. As Craig Hill notes:[1]

Romans is one of the eminent texts of Western History. From Augustine to Luther, from Wesley to Barth, Christian thinkers of every era have been profoundly shaped by this, the longest Pauline epistle. Romans is commonly regarded as Paul's supreme work, the consummate expression of his mature theology.

Additionally, there seems to be some hesitancy among us, as Mormons, to fully embrace the letter to the Romans. Maybe it is the density of the letter or that it reminds us of charges of pelagianism or semi-pelagianism and a general uncomfortableness with Protestant readings of Romans. Finally, the task is made even more difficult by that fact that we cover the entire epistle of Romans in one week.

**Authorship:** Paul is the author of this letter and the authenticity is not doubted by scholars.[2] The unity of the letter is also doesn't seem to be questioned with the exception of chapter 16.[3] Some scholars think that chapter 16 is a remnant from a different Pauline letter to the Romans.

**Date Written:** Romans is the first Pauline letter by New Testament ordering but the order in the New Testament is determined by length. In the view of scholars it is the last of the undisputed letters written by Paul.[4] The letter was probably written in the mid 50s.[5]

**The Recipients:** Paul tells us about the recipients at the beginning of the letter (Romans 1:7):

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

What do we know about Rome during this time period? Well, it is probably hard to overstate its importance as a city. It was, of course, the Roman capital during this period. Additionally, scholars estimate that there was a substantial Jewish population in the city during this time period: 20,000 to 50,000 people.[6] Also, there may have been Jewish-Christian tension in the city: "According to Suetonius, 'the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus', probably a mistake form of the word, Christus (Christ)."[7]

**II. Some Overview Questions**

- How does the letter to the Romans differ from the other Pauline letters that we have read: Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians? How is it similar?
- Do you or did you find this letter difficult to read? Why or why not? What do you like about the letter? How or why is the letter difficult?
- What is the purpose of the letter? What does Paul hope to accomplish by writing the letter?

### III. The Gospel

Read Romans 1:1-7:

1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, 2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) 3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made 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 By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: 6 Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ:

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

- Why does Paul mention his status as a servant/slave of King Jesus the Messiah?
- The phrase, "called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God" strikes me as interesting. In the NRSV the phrase is "called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." What does it mean that Paul was set apart for the gospel of God?
- Paul mentions that the scriptures (the Old Testament) promised the coming of King Jesus. Now we can (and usually do) think of specific verses as prophetically promising the coming of Jesus. On the other hand, is that what Paul is referring to here in these verse? Is it possible that he has in mind an overarching narrative in the scriptures? An overarching narrative that promises or points to King Jesus rather than specific verses that prophecy of Jesus and his coming? If so, how would you characterize that narrative?
- Why does Paul mention David in these verses given that he is writing to people (mostly gentiles?) in Rome? Why might the kingship of David be important even in a Roman context?
- NT Wright makes the following observation about how Paul uses the term gospel (good news) in these verses:[8]

The 'good news' is not, first and foremost, about something that can happen to us. What happens through the 'gospel' is indeed dramatic and exciting: God's good news will catch us up and transform our lives and our hopes like nothing else. But the 'good news' which Paul announces is primarily the good news about something that has happened, events through which the world is now a different place. It is about what God has done in Jesus, the Messiah, Israel's true king, the world's true Lord.

Do you agree with the preceding? Why or why not? Even if you agree is the distinction that NT Wright makes important?

- Why does Paul call the recipients of the letter, "beloved of God?" Why single them out this way?

#### **IV. I Long to See You**

Read Romans 1:8-13:

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. 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; 10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; 12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. 13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

- What do these verses tell us about Paul's purposes and goals?
- What does Paul tell us about the recipients of the letter? What does he think of them?
- What does verse 8 tell us about the congregation? About its size? About its importance? About its prominence?
- What do you think Paul means when he says, "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established?"
- The NRSV of verses 12-13 is the following:

11 For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-- 12 or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

Does the preceding change how you understand these verses?

## V. Salvation

Read Romans 1:14-17:

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. 15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

- Paul mentions that Greeks and the Barbarians in these verses. Why does he mention the Greeks and not the Romans given he is writing to Romans?
- Malina and Pilch, cultural anthropologists, explain the context for "Greek" as follows:[9]

Some find it curious that in this whole letter "to the Romans," Paul never mentions the Romans! The Greek of this verse begins by directly noting the social groupings to whom Paul is indebted: Greeks and Barbarians, the wise and the foolish. They form the categories of people in the Israelite quarter of Rome and the other Gentile cities Paul visited. In the first century C.E. there was no country called Greece and no nation called the Greeks. The word "Greek" (or alternate translation "the Hellenized") meant "civilized."

### A. *God's Power*

- What themes does Paul introduce in these verses?
- In what sense is the "good news" God's power? Is it important to answer this question in light of the way you think Paul uses the term gospel in chapter 1?
- Do you think that Paul is saying that salvation comes to everyone who believes or something a bit different than that?
- What is meant by salvation in this context?
- NT Wright suggests the following about salvation in this context:[10]

But this 'salvation', as Paul often makes clear, isn't only in the future, though that's where its full glory will be seen. It makes its way forwards into the present, rescuing people from the state of sin, and rescuing God's people from trouble and persecution. 'Salvation' is a present reality as well as a future hope. Indeed, when this salvation breaks into someone's life it becomes an event in itself to which they can then look back in the past. They were saved; they are being saved; they will be saved.

Ben Witherington III suggests something similar:[11]

[O]ne can say "I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved" but not "I am saved," if by that one means that the process of salvation is already complete. There is always the working out of salvation with fear and trembling to be done while one lives in the flesh (Phil 2:12), and there is also the matter of deliverance from final judgment or through Christ's judgment in the future.

Do you agree with the preceding quotes (and if so does it makes sense of Paul's use of salvation in this context)? Why or why not? Does this discussion suggest would should take fairly extreme contextual care when we encounter "salvation" in the scriptures?

- What does it mean when Paul says that the gospel of Jesus Christ does not cause him shame?
- Paul W. Meyer suggests the following context for this expression of a lack of shame:[12]

This somewhat surprising expression has little to do with moral disgrace or with personal pride. In the Septuagint (LXX), "to be put to shame" is to have the hope or expectation disappointed, a confidence proven to be misplaced.

Does the preceding affect or change how you understand Paul's proclamation?

### ***B. God's Righteousness***

What does Paul mean by the righteousness of God in verse 17? How does verse 16 relate to the revealing of the righteousness of God? What exactly reveals the righteousness of God?

- Would it be fair to describe the righteousness of God as the "covenantal faithfulness" of God? Why or why not?
- Read 3:21-26:

(21) But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: (23) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (25) Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (26) To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Or from the NRSV:

(21) But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, (22) the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, (23) since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; (24) they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (25) whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; (26) it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

- What do these verses in chapter 3 tell us about Paul's definition of the "righteousness of God?"
- Do these verses signal that God's righteousness is different than justice or God's justice?
- NT Wright argues for the following about God's righteousness in this context:[13]

God's covenant with Abraham was always intended as the means by which the creator God would rescue the whole world from evil, corruption and death. God intends to keep to this purpose and this promise, so that he can bring his restorative justice to the whole world. That is, in the end, what 'God's righteousness' or 'God's justice' means. I have translated the word as 'God's covenant justice' here in order to hold all these ideas together. As itâ s one of the central themes in the letter, it's vital that we get it straight.

Do you agree with the preceding and if so how does it affect your understanding of these verses?

### ***Faith to Faith***

What does the phrase, from "faith to faith" mean in verse 1:17?

I think there are multiple possibilities:

- It could refer to the preeminence of faith in terms of salvation. Could it refer to faith's unique role (e.g., justification by faith)?
- Could it refer to the exclusiveness of faith? Note, this seems to be how the NIV translators understand the phrase because they render it as, "faith from first to last."
- Could Paul actually be referring to God's faithfulness in this verse? That, God's

righteousness is revealed in his faithfulness? What might be meant by God's faithfulness?  
How is this faithfulness manifested?

- Ben Witherington III argues for the following:[14]

This brings us back to the phrase "from faith unto faith." I would suggest it means "From the faithful one unto those who have faith." "The faithful one" may be God, or it may be Christ, since he is seen as the means through or from which the revelation of God's righteousness comes. Proof we are on the right track in reading the phrase this way is found in the very similar phrase in 3:22 ...

- What possibility do you think is the most likely?

### Endnotes

1. *Oxford Bible Commentary*, 1083.
2. *Oxford Bible Commentary*, 1084.
3. *Oxford Bible Commentary*, 1084.
4. *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, 1038.
5. *Oxford Bible Commentary*, 1084.
6. *Oxford Bible Commentary*, 1084.
7. *Oxford Bible Commentary*, 1084.
8. Wright, NT, *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part One*.
9. Malina, Bruce, and John Pilch, 2006, *Social Science Commentary on the Letter of Paul*, Fortress Press, 225.
10. Wright, NT, *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part One*, 12.
11. Witherington III, Ben, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 51.
12. *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, 1042.
13. Wright, NT, *Paul for Everyone: Romans, Part One*, 14.
14. Witherington III, Ben, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 56.