

## I. Introduction

### A. THE AUTHOR

Although there is no dispute about Pauline authorship, it may be helpful to rehearse, in brief, why that is the case.

#### 1. EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

The ancient writers regularly included Romans in their list of authentic documents. Marcion, the Muratorian fragment, and a steady stream of patristic writers beginning with Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus all assume its Pauline authorship without defense.

#### 2. INTERNAL EVIDENCE

“From the postapostolic church to the present, with almost no exception, the Epistle has been credited to Paul. If the claim of the apostle to have written the Galatian and Corinthian letters is accepted, there is no reasonable basis for denying that he wrote Romans, since it echoes much of what is in the earlier writings, yet not slavishly.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, once we adopt *some* letter claiming Paul as its author (on grounds which are unassailable), then we have a standard of comparison. The Corinthian letters and Galatians have been just such benchmarks of authenticity. And Romans fits in with their style and theological viewpoint; further, it poses no historical or other (e.g., ecclesiological) problems for Pauline authorship.

### B. DATE AND PLACE OF ORIGIN

This epistle can be dated with relative certainty. It was written between 56 and 57 CE. Paul states in 15:26-28 that he has just completed the raising of funds for the poor believers in Jerusalem after visiting the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. This corresponds to [Acts 20:1-2](#), identifying the time of composition as the year after Paul left Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Harrison states succinctly:

Fixed dates for the span of Paul’s labors are few, but one of them is the summer of A.D. 51, when Gallio arrived in Corinth to serve as proconsul of Achaia. After this the apostle stayed in the city “some time” ([Acts 18:18](#)). Possibly in the spring of 52 he went to Caesarea and Jerusalem, stopping

at Antioch on the way back and probably spending the winter of 52 there. Presumably, his return to Ephesus was in the spring of 53, marking the beginning of a three-year ministry there ([Acts 20:31](#)). At the end of 56 he spent three months in Corinth ([Acts 20:3](#)), starting his final trip to Jerusalem in the spring of 57. When he wrote Romans the fund of the Jerusalem church seems to have been finally completed ([Rom. 15:26ff.](#)). This may indicate a date in early 57 rather than late 56 for the writing of the letter. (The fund was incomplete when Paul, on the way from Ephesus to Corinth, wrote [2 Cor. 8-9](#).)<sup>2</sup>

Paul was in Greece when he wrote the letter, most likely in Corinth. This is seen in two incidental comments: (1) Phoebe of neighboring Cenchrea was apparently the letter-bearer (16:1-2) and (2) Gaius, who is Paul's host (16:23), was a prominent Christian leader at Corinth ([1 Cor. 1:14](#)).

### C. DESTINATION/AUDIENCE

[Romans 1:7, 15](#) identify this letter as being sent to the Christians at Rome. They were predominantly Gentile believers as is evidenced by Paul's statements to that effect in 1:5, 12-14 and 11:13. But there was probably a strong Jewish element as well because (1) the heavy use of the OT suggests this and (2) since Paul did not found this church, most likely the Jewish element would be stronger than in one of his congregations.

### D. OCCASION AND PURPOSE<sup>3</sup>

The occasion and purpose are so intertwined for this epistle that they must be treated as one. Paul expressed his desire to go west all the way to Spain (15:22-24, 28). Since he had already proclaimed the gospel in the major centers in the east, it now seemed good to him to go west. But as was his custom, he needed an "emotional home," a base of operations. Antioch had provided that in the east and Ephesus had in Asia Minor; Paul was hoping that Rome would in the west. Consequently, he wrote this letter, explaining his gospel carefully and fully, in the hopes that the Roman Christians would embrace him and it completely. Further, since his life had already been in much danger from the Jews ([Acts 17:5, 13; 20:3](#)), Paul may have sensed the need to pen his thoughts about the gospel in a systematic way, rather than due to occasional circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

All of the above explain why Paul wrote what he wrote to whom he wrote—except for chapters 9–11. Baur suggested that this was the heart of the epistle, while most today do not know what to do with it. Recently, Paul B. Fowler, formerly of Reformed Seminary, argued that “Paul’s primary purpose in writing Romans was to dispel anti-Semitism”<sup>5</sup> He based his argument on (1) many internal clues (11:13ff., etc., where Gentile pride has cropped up; cf. the whole thrust of chs. 9–11); (2) one main external clue (the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Claudius a few years earlier—which would certainly continue to have rippling effects, even within the church); and (3) a chiasmic pattern unfolding some of the structure of the book (viz., in chapter 3 Paul asks five questions which are unfolded in reverse order throughout chapters 3–11). What is intriguing is that, concerning this last point (the chiasmic structure), although Paul answers in brief the question of 3:1 (“What advantage has the Jew?”) in the next verse, he really expands on it in chapters 9–11. Although Fowler goes too far in seeing a response to anti-Semitism as the *primary* purpose of Romans, I think he is right that this forms part of the purpose. Perhaps, in fact, it may be precisely because Paul’s treatment of Israel’s future occupies his mind so much in this letter that he leaves out other eschatological issues found in his other *Hauptbriefe*.

In sum, Paul’s occasion-purpose for writing Romans is threefold: (1) he was going west and needed to have a base of operations in a church that shared both his vision and his theology; (2) he knew that his life was in danger and wanted to give something of a more balanced, systematic presentation of his gospel, to leave as a memorial; and (3) he detected anti-Semitism arising in the Roman church through the influence of Claudius’ edict and wanted to give a theologically-based correction to this attitude.

## E. SPECIAL PROBLEMS

### 1. THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

In light of [Rom 15:20](#), there is no doubt that the church at Rome was not founded by an apostle. This suggests that Peter was not yet in Rome. Most likely, the church came into existence through the converts who returned to Rome from Jerusalem after the feast of Pentecost in 33 CE ([Acts 2:10](#)).<sup>6</sup> But this church would not have been very well indoctrinated. As we suggested in our introduction to Mark, Mark may well have gone to Rome in the early 50s both to precede Paul’s coming and to shore up any doctrinal holes in the converts.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. UNITY OF THE EPISTLE

There are good internal and external arguments which seem to indicate that Romans ended at chapter 15 (or 14) rather than at chapter 16. These need to be weighed carefully.

(1) Even though Paul had never visited Rome, chapter 16 is filled with personal greetings. This may indicate that chapter 16 was part of a letter originally sent to Ephesus (where Paul had ministered for three years).

(2) Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila (16:3), who shortly before Romans was written were in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19). Further, when Paul wrote to Timothy, they are again in Ephesus (2 Tim 4:19).

(3) In 16:5 Paul greets Epaenetus, “the first convert in Asia.” This would be a natural greeting if Epaenetus were still in Asia.

(4) Rom 15:33 seems to be a fitting conclusion to a letter (“The God of peace be with you all. Amen.”).

(5) The earliest Pauline MS, P<sup>46</sup>, places the doxology of Rom 16:25-27 after 15:33. Further, though normally dated at c. 200 CE, Yung Kyu Kim in 1988 argued, on palaeographical grounds, that this papyrus should be dated *before* the reign of Domitian (c. 70s CE)!<sup>8</sup> Not only this, but the doxology is found in other MSS at the end of chapter 14 (especially L and Y).<sup>9</sup>

(6) Marcion’s text apparently did not contain chapters 15 and 16.<sup>10</sup>

These data can be variously interpreted. Some suggest that a letter to Ephesus has been appended to a letter to the Romans. Hence, the laundry list of names in chapter 16. Although this is possible, one wonders why the husk (greetings-list) of a letter (sent to Ephesus) would be preserved while its grain (the doctrinal and ethical core) was not. Further, the only other letter in which Paul greets many people by name is Colossians—sent to a church he had not visited. Further, even though P<sup>46</sup> places the doxology at the end of chapter 15, it still has chapter 16. In fact, no extant MS lacks these last two chapters.

Others have suggested, primarily on the various locations of the doxology, that two editions of Romans had been published by Paul—the longer one sent to the Romans, the shorter one sent out as a circular letter. Hort went so far as to suggest that the shorter edition was created by a later writer for liturgical (lectionary reading) purposes. Again, although this is possible, it falls shipwreck on the rocks of textual evidence. Every known MS has all 16 chapters of Romans.

Something, however, must account for the migrations of the doxology. As we have said, there is evidence that Marcion's text did not contain these last two chapters. Further, Marcion was wont to excise any material which did not suit his theological leanings—and there is plenty of material in chapters 15-16 which would bring on Marcion's scalpel.<sup>11</sup> If any copies of his mutilated Romans survived, his fingerprints would not be nearly as detectable as his other mutilations, for the epistle could easily end at chapter 14 or chapter 15. Consequently, in the earliest period, scribes copying Romans might not be fully cognizant of Marcion's work. As time progressed, the last two chapters (or last chapter) were added to these short editions, but without the concomitant replacement of the doxology.

## F. THEME

As the most systematic of all Paul's letters, Romans addresses in detail the Pauline kerygma. [Romans 1:16-17](#), which concludes the salutation/introduction, best articulates the theme of the whole book: "the righteous revelation of God in the gospel."

## II. Argument

Paul opens his epistle to the Romans with the longest introduction of any of his canonical works (1:1-17). Here he greets the saints (1:1-7) whom he had never met, and expresses both thanks for them (1:8-10) and a deep desire to visit them (1:11-15). The theme of the epistle (dealing with the righteousness of God), at the end of this introduction (1:16-17), serves as a bridge into the body of the book.

The transition is especially seen in comparing vv. 17 and 18: in both something from God is revealed. In v. 17 it is God's righteousness; in v. 18, in order to establish the *need* for this righteousness, God's wrath is revealed. This second section of the epistle (1:18–5:11), whose theme

is the imputation of righteousness (i.e., forensic justification) essentially deals with two issues: sinners and salvation. Paul first elaborates on the sinfulness of humanity (1:18–3:20), demonstrating the universal need of righteousness. He begins by picking the most obvious example: the guilt of the Gentiles (1:18-32). The reasons for this guilt are first mentioned: they have suppressed the knowledge of God (1:18-23). The result of such suppression is God’s releasing them to the consequences of their sins (1:24-32). But lest the Jews think that they are any less guilty, Paul addresses their sin (2:1–3:8). In fact, he argues that, if anything, they are more guilty than the Gentiles because they have revelation from God and are his privileged people (3:1-8), yet they are hypocritical about true, internal righteousness (2:17-29). Paul concludes the first half of this major section with proof from scripture that “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (3:9-20).

Now that Paul has established the need for righteousness for all people, he demonstrates its provision (3:21–5:11). First, it has been revealed through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, being granted to all who put their trust in him (3:21-26). Second, the terms for bestowal of this righteousness (namely, faith) are the same for all, because God is One (3:27-31). Third, Paul backs up this astounding assertion with proof from the life of Abraham (4:1-25). In essence, Abraham is seen to be father both of the Jews and of the Greeks—that is, he is a type of those who are saved by faith. This is illustrated by evidence that Abraham was not justified by works (4:1-8), nor by circumcision (4:9-12), but exclusively by faith in the promises of God (4:18-25). So too his spiritual offspring are justified by faith rather than by law (4:13-17, 23-25). Thus Abraham is seen to be the universal forefather of all believers, whether Jew or Greek.

Paul transitions the faith of Abraham to our faith in Christ (4:23-25), then concludes the section on justification with the implications of this justification (5:1-11). But the “therefore” in 5:1 reaches back behind the illustration of Abraham. In many ways, 3:21–4:25 is an apologetic with 5:1-11 being the application. Since all are sinners and since there is no partiality with God (3:22-23), both Jews and Gentiles must obtain this righteousness in the same way and the same God must be God of all (3:27-31). This new revelation of God’s righteousness is affirmed by the OT (3:21) and illustrated by Abraham’s example (4:1-25). There is no getting around it: if a man has Christ, he has peace with God right now—and the Law adds nothing to his salvation (5:1-2). Consequently, he exults in the hope of the glory of God (5:1-5). This salvation is truly marvelous, for sinners *qua* sinners were

completely unable to deal with their sin. But Christ came at the right time and died for such (5:6-8). The eschatological result of this will be escape from God's wrath (5:9-11).

Having established the basis of God's pleasure in us, viz., the *imputation* of righteousness (or forensic justification), Paul now discusses the *impartation* of righteousness, or sanctification (5:12–8:39). This is the third major section of the epistle. In some ways there is a neat trilogy found in these first eight chapters. The apostle first discusses *justification* which is salvation from the *penalty* of sin (3:21–5:11). Then he deals with *sanctification* or salvation from the *power* of sin (5:12–8:17). Finally, he addresses *glorification* which is salvation from the *presence* of sin (8:18-39).<sup>12</sup>

Paul lays out his views on sanctification using the twin themes of reigning and slavery. He begins by contrasting the reign of grace with the reign of sin (5:12-21). Although many NT students would place 5:12-21 under the second major section (i.e., under “Justification”), “the words ‘just,’ ‘justice’ and ‘faith’ coming from the first part of the quotation [[Hab 2:4](#) in [Rom 1:17](#)] as given by Paul, are of very frequent occurrence from 1:17 to 5:11, and almost entirely absent thereafter. On the other hand, the terms signifying ‘life’ (and ‘death’) occur regularly in chapters 5:12 to 7:1.”<sup>13</sup> Thus the apostle seems to be signaling that he is now picking up a new topic.

In 5:12-21 Paul moves beyond the legal issue of justification. What is essential to get here is that *imputed righteousness addresses the condemnation of the law while imparted righteousness addresses the inability of the flesh*. That is to say, justification is forensic, stating emphatically that our *position* before God is one of righteousness. But justification, like the Law, can do nothing against the flesh. That is why Paul now turns to imparted righteousness and gives the basis as our union with Christ. Our union with Christ is more than forensic; it is *organic*.<sup>14</sup> As Adam was our representative in sin, bringing death to all (5:12), so also Christ is our representative in righteousness, bringing life to all (5:18).<sup>15</sup>

Since believers are in Christ—and therefore they are assured of their salvation, why should they not continue sinning? Paul answers this in the second portion of this section (6:1-23). First, they should not continue (εἰς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν) in sin because of their union with Christ—union in his death and his life (6:1-14). Second, they should not sin at all (ἀποφεύγοντες τὴν ἁμαρτίαν) because such an act leads to

enslavement to sin (6:15-23). This is especially heinous because our release from sin's slavery means redemption for the service of God (6:22), since we have been bought with a price.

Having established the reasons why we should not sin, Paul now turns to the issue of *how* not to sin (7:1–8:17). Negatively, neither our flesh nor the Law can do anything for us in this endeavor (7:1-25). Positively, we are sanctified through the ministry of the Spirit (8:1-17).

Chapter seven is notoriously difficult to interpret. Is Paul speaking here (using “I”) in an autobiographical sense? If so, is he speaking about his former life as an unbeliever or his present life as a Christian? (Can both chapters seven and eight be true of him at the same time?). Or is he speaking figuratively—either of believers in general or unbelievers in general?

In my understanding Paul is primarily dealing with the issue of how one deals with the problem of present sin—regardless of whether he is a believer or unbeliever. This is seen in the following way. The most consistent exegesis of this pericope sees the “I” as the same person throughout 7:7-25.<sup>16</sup> If so, then he is the unbeliever *before the Law was ever given* (v. 9: “once I was alive apart from the law”; cf. 5:13)—And therefore *not* a Jewish unbeliever. But he is also the unbelieving Jew: “We know that the Law is spiritual; I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” (7:14). Further, Paul had just gotten done saying that believers are not under the Law (7:5). But he is also the believer (v. 25: “I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law”; v. 18: “I have the desire to do what is good”; cf. also vv. 21-22; *contra* 3:12).<sup>17</sup> In light of this evidence it seems that Paul is not arguing *chronologically* in 3:20–8:17 (as if to say, “after salvation, we will deal with sanctification”). Rather, he is dealing with two distinct, though intertwined issues: the imputation of righteousness and the impartation of righteousness. Chapter seven is supremely, then, dealing with the issue of how one fights indwelling sin—and how one attempts to please God. It has its application for all people who attempt to fight sin/please God by subjecting the flesh to external commands, as if this will accomplish anything.

The apostle begins chapter seven, however, with a reminder to believers: we are dead to the Law (7:1-6). Since this is so, we do not have to attempt to please God by knuckling under to its commands. But does this mean that the Law is bad? No, it is simply powerless over sin (7:7-13). The Law may be likened to a sterile spoon dipped into a glass of water with sediment on the bottom



(which represents our flesh). When the spoon stirs up the sediment it does not *produce sin*; rather, it merely reveals it (7:13). But at the same time, it is powerless to clean out the sediment.<sup>18</sup>

As good as the Law is, the flesh is equally bad (7:14-25). And it, too, is powerless to obey the Law. The point of 7:7-25 is that regardless of who attempts to fight sin—whether he is a believer or unbeliever—if his method is to subject the flesh to the Law he will fail. Focusing on the Law, an objective, cold standard, necessitates subjecting the flesh to it, because the Law is the handmaiden of the flesh. But since believers are dead to the Law, they are able to gain victory over the flesh (7:6, 24-25).<sup>19</sup>

Now comes the good news: those who are organically connected with Christ are not only not condemned (8:1), but also are set free from the law which could only produce sin and death (8:2). How is this accomplished? By the Spirit of God who enables believers to gain progressive victory over sin (8:1-8), death (8:9-11), and slavery (8:12-17). The Spirit is not an external, objective, cold standard, but a warm, internal witness to our hearts that God is our Father (8:14-17)—proving that we are organically connected to God the Father, not just judiciously excused by God the Judge.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Paul concludes this section by discussing the goal of sanctification (8:18-39), which is our future glory—based, as it is, both on forensic justification and organic union with Christ (8:28-30). This glory needs to be kept in mind especially during the present sufferings we face simply because the world is not a perfect place (8:18-27). But lest anyone give up, thinking that his participation in glory is in jeopardy, Paul concludes with a hymn of assurance (8:31-39).

The fourth major section now turns to an issue which would have been in the back of his readers' minds: If God is so righteous, how could he give Israel so many privileges (including unconditional promises) and then reject his chosen people? Chapters 9–11 deal with this issue (note especially 9:6—“It is not as though God’s word has failed”), the vindication of God’s righteousness in relationship to Israel.

Although Paul’s primary concern is to vindicate God’s righteousness, he prefaces his remarks by expressing his own deep sorrow over Israel’s unrepentant state (9:1-5). Then he details how God has dealt with the nation in the past (9:6-33). In essence, God’s choice was completely sovereign and

gracious (9:1-29), as can be seen in Israel's very history (9:6-13), as well as on the basis of the principle of God's sovereignty (9:14-29). Further, they have rejected their Messiah by clinging to the Law (9:30-33).

God's present dealings with Israel, then, can only be interpreted on the basis of the past (10:1-21). Once again, Paul prefaces his remarks by expressing his desire for Israel's salvation (10:1). For the present time, Jew and Gentile have equal access to God (10:1-13). Yet the nation is still unrepentant even though they repeatedly heard the message (10:14-21).

This still does not answer the question of God's unconditional covenants with his chosen people. Will Israel persist in their disobedience, or will there come a time when they will repent? Paul answers this in chapter 11. He points out, first, that God's rejection of the nation is not complete, for God still has his remnant in the nation (11:1-10). Further, the rejection is not final (11:11-32). Indeed, the present "grafting in" of Gentiles not only functions to bring salvation to Gentiles, but also should arouse the jealousy of the Jews, hopefully even spurring them on to seek Christ (11:11-24). Once the number of Gentiles is full, then Israel will turn back to God (11:25-32). For this, all believers should be grateful, since the open window of salvation will not last forever. And God is to be praised for his infinite wisdom in how he deals with both Jews and Gentiles (11:33-36).

What remains to be said about God's righteousness? Only the very pragmatic matter of how it should be applied by believers (12:1-15:13). First, it should be applied among fellow believers (12:1-21). This is accomplished by a consecration of our lives to God, in light of all that he has done for us (12:1-2). Once we have committed ourselves to him, we can begin to serve others. This service should be done by the employment of spiritual gifts for the benefit of the body (12:3-8), and with an attitude of sincere love—both for believers and unbelievers (12:9-21).

Second, the righteousness of God should be applied in the state (13:1-14). We demonstrate God's righteousness by submitting even to pagan authorities (13:1-7), and by loving our neighbors (13:8-10). The urgency for such action is due to the fact that "our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (13:11)—that is, because of our hope of the Lord's return (13:11-14).

Third, those believers whose faith is strong and who have a good grasp on their death to the Law should not be judgmental on weaker brothers (14:1–15:13). Neither the weak nor strong brother should condemn the other, but instead should recognize the freedom that all have in Christ (14:1-12). But his freedom should not become a stumbling block to the weak: liberty must give way to love (14:13-23). That is to say, one believer's freedoms should not cause another brother to sin by the latter's imbibing in something against his conscience (14:23). Ultimately, the strong believer (as well as the weak) should imitate Christ in his selflessness (15:1-13), rather than using liberty as a means to please oneself.

Paul concludes his epistle (15:14–16:27) with a brief explanation of his mission, both in general (15:17-21) and specifically with reference to the Romans (15:22-33), followed by final greetings (16:1-27).