



# ALL THINGS TO ALL CULTURES

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EDITORS

PAUL AMONG JEWS, GREEKS, AND ROMANS

# All Things to All Cultures

*Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans*

*Edited by*

Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs

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## 8. The Letter to the Romans

*Michael F. Bird*

This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.

Martin Luther, *Preface to Romans*

Paul's Letter to the Romans stands arguably as the pinnacle of Pauline thought. It is the longest letter in the Pauline corpus. Not only that, but it is arguably his most theologically erudite and pastorally applicable set of teachings about faith in Jesus Christ and all its implications. It is a letter that has had a monumental impact in the history of Christian thought. The rediscovery of Romans, time and again, has led to reformation and renewal in the Christian church.<sup>1</sup>

While spending time in Milan in A.D. 386, Augustine heard the words "Take up and read, take up read" from the chanting of a small boy or girl. He immediately looked for a Bible and opened it up at Romans, specifically to Rom 13:13-14, and there found rebuke for his behavior and hope for his soul. Soon after both he and his son were baptized by Ambrose of Milan. Martin Luther was Professor at Wittenberg and during 1515–1516 he began expounding Romans to his students, and so discovered that the "righteousness of God" was not the righteousness that condemned him, but the righteousness that acquitted him by faith alone. He wrote: "The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven." John Wesley once

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. D. Godsey, "The Interpretation of Romans in the History of the Christian Faith," *Int* 34 (1980): 3-16; Gerald Bray, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary: Romans* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998); Mark Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle: A History of Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Jeffery P. Greenman and Timothy Larsen, eds., *Reading Romans Through the Centuries: From the Early Church to Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005); Kathy L. Gaca and L. L. Welborn, eds., *Early Patristic Readings of Romans* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005); William S. Campbell, Peter S. Hawkins, and Brenda D. Schildgen, eds., *Medieval Readings of Romans* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007); Kathy Ehrensperger and R. Ward Holder, eds., *Reformation Readings of Romans* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008).



described how his heart was “strangely warmed” one evening at a Moravian meeting in Aldersgate on 24 May 1738 when he heard someone read the introduction to Luther’s commentary on Romans. The effect it had upon Wesley was such that, “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” A suicidal young man named William Cowper was committed to St. Alban’s Insane Asylum in 1763. Finding a Bible lying on a bench in the garden he read over Rom 3:21-26 and in his diary he wrote: “Immediately I received the strength to believe it, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel.” And so began the career of one of Britain’s finest hymn writers. In 1921 Dumitri Cornilescu, a deacon in the Orthodox church, translated Romans into his native Romanian and through it he learned that God, in Christ, had secured salvation for him. His translation of the Bible is still used in Romania to this day. After the First World War a young Swiss pastor named Karl Barth rocked the theological faculties of twentieth-century Europe with his theological interpretation of Romans first published in 1919. Barth saw in Romans not the immanence of God in human society, but testimony to the transcendent God who was at work in Paul’s gospel to reconcile sinful humanity to himself through Jesus Christ. According to Karl Adam, Barth’s *Römerbrief* “fell like a bombshell on the playground of the theologians.”

Studying Romans, then, is immensely profitable for theological reformation and spiritual renewal. However, engaging Romans is hard work as it requires concerted effort to analyze the text, purposes, argument, and themes of the letter. There are highly disputed matters in the letter such as the meaning of the “righteousness of God” (Rom 1:17; 3:21), the identity of the “wretched man” (Rom 7:24), the place of Romans 9–11 in the overall argument, and the very intention of the letter itself to name a few points of debate. In what follows, I will set out the context of how Christianity came to Rome, identify key critical issues that affect interpretation, and provide a summary of the argument of the letter.

## 1. How Christianity Came to Rome

Paul did not establish any churches in Rome. How then did Christianity come to Rome? Very probably it came through Jewish Christians travelling to Rome. Contact between the Jews of Palestine with Rome existed as early as 161 B.C. when Judas Maccabeus established an alliance between Rome and the Judean state (1 Macc 8:17-32; cf. 12:1-4; 14:24; 15:15-24). We also know that in 139 B.C. the Jews were expelled from Rome as part of a wider policy of expelling foreigners on account of spreading their rites and religion among the

inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> There was a large influx of Jews into Rome as a result of Pompey's conquest of Palestine (68 B.C.) with many Jews brought to Rome as slaves, many of whom were later manumitted and gained Roman citizenship.<sup>3</sup> Herod the Great and his dynasty secured Roman patronage that included Herod being declared "King of the Jews" by the Romans senate and the Herodian family were closely connected to the imperial household.<sup>4</sup> Archaeological evidence has uncovered several Jewish synagogues and funeral inscriptions indicating a vibrant Jewish community in Rome in the first century.<sup>5</sup> The fortunes of the Jews in Rome were positive under Julius Caesar and Augustus who granted them rights like freedom from participation in Roman religion, exemption from military service, and overall treated them fairly and with respect to their national customs.<sup>6</sup> Things were considerably poorer under Tiberius (with his anti-Jewish advisor Sejanus) who in A.D. 19 deported four thousand Jews to Sardinia to fight bandits, and other Jews were banished from Rome as part of a suppression of foreign cults.<sup>7</sup> The short reign of Gaius Caligula (A.D. 37–41) was traumatic for Jews in Egypt and Palestine. At this time there were anti-Jewish riots in Alexandria and Caligula attempted to have a statue of himself placed in the Jerusalem temple with only his death preventing its occurrence.<sup>8</sup> The reign of Claudius (A.D. 41–54) was less tumultuous, but not less problematic for Jews in Rome, and it is probably during this time that Christianity first emerged in Rome. It may well have been travelling merchants like Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:1-16), or Roman Jews who visited Palestine for feasts like Pentecost and then returned to Rome, who brought Christianity to Rome (Acts 2:10-11).<sup>9</sup>

At an early point in Claudius' reign, Cassius Dio narrates how Roman Jews lost the right to assemble (ca. A.D. 41). Later (ca. A.D. 49) Suetonius reports how Claudius "expelled from Rome Jews who were constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus."<sup>10</sup> The banishment of the Roman Jews is attested by Luke who reports that when Paul came to Corinth he met Aquila and Priscilla who had recently left Italy "because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome."<sup>11</sup> We do not know why the Roman Jews lost the right to assemble. Nor do we know for sure if this "Chrestus" is a Latin

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<sup>2</sup> Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium* 1.3.3.

<sup>3</sup> Philo, *Legat.* 155; cf. *Pss. Sol.* 2.6-7; 17.11-14.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus, *B.J.* 1.284, 388; *A.J.* 18.179-94.

<sup>5</sup> Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995); Peter Lampe, *Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (London: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Philo, *Legat.* 156-58.

<sup>7</sup> Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.85.4; Suetonius, *Tib.* 36; Cassius Dio, *Hist. Rom.* 57.185.5; Josephus, *A.J.* 18.81-84; Philo, *Legat.* 159-60.

<sup>8</sup> Philo, *Legat.* 188; Josephus, *A.J.* 18.257-309; *B.J.* 2.184-203.

<sup>9</sup> Though Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 2.14.6) thinks that it was Peter who brought Christianity to Rome, more realistic is Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1–2 Corinthians: Ambrosiaster* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009) who wrote: "Those of them [i.e., Jews] who believed in Christ passed this belief on to the Romans, so that they too might keep the law by confessing Christ."

<sup>10</sup> Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 18:1-2.

variation of “Christus” meaning “Christ.”<sup>12</sup> What seems plausible is that many of the disputes within the Jewish communities in Rome were centered upon divisive issues occasioned by the influx of Jewish Christians to Rome, who began sharing their faith with fellows Jews, God-fearers, proselytes, and even pagans in Rome.

In addition, given that Paul writes largely to the Gentiles in Rome (see Rom 1:6, 13; 11:13; 15:16, 27), and that a number of the names in Rom 16:3-16 were probably of Gentile origin, we may assume that Jewish Christians won over a number of converts probably from the ranks of Gentile proselytes and God-fearers. The expulsion of Jews and Jewish Christians in A.D. 49, until their return in A.D. 54 at Claudius’ death, may have impacted the shape of Christianity in Rome during that intervening period. We do not know for sure how connected Christian groups were with local synagogues and whether “all Jews” were really in fact expelled. Though the Gentile Christians could have become slightly more independent in the absence of their Jewish Christian colleagues, we have no firm reason to belief that Christianity became entirely Gentilized during the years following Claudius’ expulsion.

## 2. Textual Issues

Before plunging into the argument of Romans we have to first recognize that the text of Romans constitutes a unique set of text-critical problems that require comment. These problems include possible interpolations, the absence of “in Rome” from Rom 1:7, 15 in some manuscripts, the place of the doxology in the letter, and the integrity of Romans 16.<sup>13</sup>

Since the nineteenth century some critical scholars have argued that Paul’s letters comprise of an amalgamation of shorter letters artificially joined together, or include secondary glosses, and interpolations by subsequent editors of Paul’s writings (esp. in 2 Corinthians and Philippians). Romans has not escaped conjecture in this area. Some have argued that Marcion’s text of Romans was considerably shorter than canonical Romans and thus more original with additions made to Romans in response to Marcion’s text.<sup>14</sup> Walter Schmithals advocated that Romans was a composite of two letters

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<sup>12</sup> On identifying “Chrestus” with “Christ” see Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 29-39.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 446-77; Harry Gamble, *A Textual History of the Letter to the Romans: A Study in Textual and Literary Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); Robert K. Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 4-18; Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 15-42.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g., P-L. Couchoud, “Reconstitution et classement des Lettres de Saint Paul,” *RHPR* 87 (1923): 8-31; P-L. Couchoud, “La première édition de Saint Paul,” *RHPR* 94 (1926): 242-63; W. C. van Manen, *De Brief aan de Romeinen* (Leiden: Brill, 1891); W. C. van Manen, *Die Unechtheit des Römerbriefes* (Leipzig: G. Strübing [M. Altmann], 1906).



written to Gentile believers in Rome with two different purposes.<sup>15</sup> Though several interpolations have been proposed for Romans perhaps the most widely favored is that Rom 1:18–2:29 is secondary to the letter.<sup>16</sup>

There are a number of problems with these theories. First, concerning Marcion's text of Romans, it is quite possible that he was working with a shorter text than canonical Romans (there is a good chance that Rom 1:19–2:1 may not have been in his edition of Romans).<sup>17</sup> But the fragmentary and secondary nature of Marcion's text of Romans as we have access to it through the church fathers, and the fact that Marcion was suspected of excising parts of Romans that were not conducive to his interests, means that a Marcionite edition of Romans is not the surest grounds to build an edifice for the textual history of the letter. Second, on the compilation hypothesis, while in theory I think this possible, we are left with the question of why anyone would think to, want to, or need to compress separate letters together.<sup>18</sup> Third, with respect to Rom 1:18–2:29 being an interpolation, I find this quite improbable. For a start the themes and theology of Rom 1:18–2:29 are of a piece with what we find later in the letter. For instance, Rom 2:13–16 is expounded at length in Rom 8:1–16, while Rom 2:25–29 is arguably a compressed summary of Romans 9–11. In addition, the apparent non-Pauline style of Rom 1:18–2:29 needs to be countenanced with the fact that Paul is perhaps drawing on some traditional Jewish material (note especially the similarities with Wisdom of Solomon 11–15) and engaging in a diatribe rhetorical style with an imaginary Jewish interlocutor which accounts for the uniqueness of the language.<sup>19</sup> Fourth, our earliest papyrological evidence from ca. A.D. 200–250 (esp. P<sup>46</sup> P<sup>40</sup> P<sup>10</sup> P<sup>26</sup>) provide no textual grounds for supporting the interpolation theses concerning the earliest chapters of Romans.

The identification of the addresses in Rom 1:7, 15 is complicated by the fact that several textual witnesses (G 1739<sup>mg</sup> 1908<sup>mg</sup> it<sup>g</sup> Origen) omit the phrase ἐν Ῥώμῃ (“in Rome”). Such an omission was probably deliberate and intended to render the letter universal rather than local in significance and

<sup>15</sup> Walter Schmithals, *Römerbrief als historisches Problem* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1975).

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Loisy, *The Origins of the New Testament* (trans. J. P. Jacks; New Hyde Park: University Book, 1962 [orig. 1936]), 250; J. C. O'Neil, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1975), 40–56; William O. Walker, *Interpolations in the Pauline Letters* (JSNTSup 213; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 166–89.

<sup>17</sup> Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanon* (2 vols.; Erlangen: Deichert, 1888–1892), 2:516; Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God* (trans. J. E. Steeley and L. D. Bierman; Durham: Labyrinth, 1990 [orig. 1924]), 34.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* (CITM 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 835.

<sup>19</sup> There are also other cogent explanations as to why Rom 1:18–2:29 might appear to be unique within the text of Romans. E. P. Sanders (*Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 129) thinks Rom 1:18–2:29 was based on a synagogue sermon with no distinctively Pauline imprint; Douglas A. Campbell (*The Deliverance of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009]) supposes that Paul is engaging in a speech-in-character that allows Paul to create a perspective on law and Sin attributed to false teachers in Rome only to invalidate it in the rest of the letter.

general rather than particular in relevance.<sup>20</sup> Textual support for the inclusion of ἐν Πρώμῃ is very strong (P<sup>10, 26vid</sup> & A B C D<sup>abs1</sup> K L P ψ 6 33 81 88 104 181 256 330 424 436 451 459 614 629 1175 1241 1319 1506 1573 1739 1852 1877 1912<sup>vid</sup> 1962 2127 2200 2464 2492 vg sy<sup>p,h,pal</sup> sa bo arm eth geo slav Ambst Pel Aug). The Christians in Rome were undoubtedly then the addressees of the letter.

More problematic is the place of the doxology (Rom 16:25-27) in the original autograph. There are different text forms of Romans concerning the place of the doxology in the letter and none of them correspond to the current form of Romans as we have it in the NA<sup>27</sup>, USB<sup>4</sup>, and English versions. Traditionally the doxology has been printed after Rom 16:24 in vv. 25-27, but in some witnesses the doxology occurs after Rom 14:23, in other witness after Rom 15:33, and in other witnesses after Rom 16:23. What is more, several witnesses have it at the close of both Romans 14 and Romans 16, and in other witnesses it does not appear at all. Metzger tabulates the data like this:<sup>21</sup>

(a) 1.1–16.23 + doxology	P <sup>61vid</sup> a B C D 81 1739 it <sup>d, 61</sup> vg syr <sup>p</sup> cop <sup>sa, bo</sup> eth
(b) 1.1–14.23 + doxology + 15.1–16.23 + doxology	A P 5 33 104 arm
(c) 1.1–14.23 + doxology + 15.1–16.24	L Y 0209 <sup>vid</sup> 181 326 330 614 1175 Byz syr <sup>h</sup> mss <sup>acc. to Origenlat</sup>
(d) 1.1–16.24	F <sup>gr</sup> G (perhaps the archetype of D) 629 mss <sup>acc. to Jerome</sup>
(e) 1.1–15.33 + doxology + 16.1-23	P <sup>46</sup>
(f) 1.1–14.23 + 16.24 + doxology	vg <sup>mss</sup> Old Latin <sup>acc. to capitula</sup>

One scenario is that: (1) the doxology was added in the second century to round off a version of Romans known to end at Romans 14; (2) the doxology was then placed at different locations in some manuscripts; and (3) the benediction in 16:24 was added to function as a bridge between 16:23 and the addition of the doxology at 16:25-27.<sup>22</sup> Another possibility is that the doxology is genuinely Pauline and echoes themes found in Romans 1–14. Afterwards the doxology was moved to 16:25-27 from an earlier point in the letter.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 446–47; Gamble, *Textual History*, 29–33; Longenecker, *Romans*, 31–32.

<sup>21</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 471.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Kurt Aland, *Neutestamentliche Entwürfe* (Munich: Kaiser, 1979); Gamble, *Textual History*, 123–24; Peter Lampe, “Zur Textgeschichte des Römerbriefs,” *NovT* 27 (1985), 273–77; Jewett, *Romans*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> In defense of the integrity of the doxology in Romans (though not necessarily its placement at 16:25–27) see Larry W. Hurtado, “The Doxology at the end of Romans,” in G. D. Fee and E. J. Epp, eds., *New Testament Textual Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 185–99; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996),

The integrity of Romans 15–16 has been questioned given that its unity with Romans 1–14 is interrupted in some witnesses by the appearance of the doxology. F. C. Baur regarded Romans 15–16 as the interpolation of a Paulinist trying to smooth over Paul’s tensions with Judaism.<sup>24</sup> Some scholars propose that Paul made two copies of Romans: Romans 1–15 sent to Rome and Romans 1–16 sent to Ephesus, rendering Romans 16 an appendix to a second copy.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that a shortened version of Romans 1–14 existed prior to Marcion as a “Romans-lite” meant for universal circulation as a general letter (and without the addresses “in Rome” in 1:7, 15).<sup>26</sup> More likely is the testimony of Origen that Marcion “took out the innermost part of this epistle”<sup>27</sup> and excised Romans 15–16 precisely because it was too Jewish. That is strengthened on the grounds that all complete textual witnesses include a sixteen chapter letter. What is more, Romans 14:1–15:13 constitute a literary unity that cannot be accidentally foisted as a secondary compilation. The recommendation and greetings in Romans 16 are far more appropriate if addressed to a group that Paul did not know from first hand acquaintance, rather than written to a church like the one in Ephesus that he knew intimately. Finally, the ending in Rom 16:22–23 constitutes a proper ending for the letter given ancient epistolary conventions.

### **3. Purpose of Romans**

A deeply contested area of opinion is why Paul actually wrote Romans. It is roughly ten times longer than your average letter (like Philemon or 3 John). It is more like a letter-treatise than merely a piece of personal correspondence. Generally speaking, two primary questions have driven discussion: (1) Was the letter occasioned by circumstances specific to Paul’s own situation and ministry? or (2) Was the letter occasioned by the perceived need to deal with some kind of internal problem in the Roman house churches? A such, several purposes for Romans have been proposed.

#### **3.1. A Theological Treatise**

The Muratorian Canon regards Romans as written “concerning the plan of the Scriptures showing that their foundation is Christ.” Among the Reformers, Luther said in his preface to Romans, that Paul “wanted to compose a summary of the whole of Christian and evangelical teaching which would also

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937; I. Howard Marshall, “Romans 16:25–27: An Apt Conclusion,” in N. T. Wright and S. K. Soderlund, eds., *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 170–84.

<sup>24</sup> F. C. Baur, *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine* (2 vols.; trans. E. Zeller; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1846), 1:352–65.

<sup>25</sup> See list of advocates in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 57.

<sup>26</sup> Gamble, *Textual History*, 113.

<sup>27</sup> Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 10.43.

be an introduction to the whole Old Testament.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Luther’s friend Melancthon in his *Loci Communes Theologici* of 1521, labeled Romans a “compendium of Christian doctrine.” John Calvin, in his introduction to Romans, regarded the letter as a methodological exposition of justification by faith.<sup>29</sup> Anders Nygren argued that Romans was a “doctrinal writing” or a “theological treatise” given in the form of a letter.<sup>30</sup> J. Christiaan Beker advocated that Romans is “in some sense a ‘dogmatics in outline,’ it is not a timeless theological product but a ‘treatise.’”<sup>31</sup> Douglas Campbell even believes that in Romans 5–8, Paul “provisionally articulates a systematic theology.”<sup>32</sup> While Romans is the most theologically intense and logically coherent writing on the Christian faith, it is unlikely to be a theological treatise for several reasons: (1) It fails to say much about key *loci* such as the Holy Spirit, Church, and Eschatology; (2) Paul’s letters were always situational and Romans is no different as seen in the beginning (1:1-15) and ending (15:14–16:27) of the letter that focus on the details of Paul’s ministry, his travel plans, digressions, warnings, and defensive remarks. Though Romans has great utility for Christian dogmatics, it is chiefly a situation letter.<sup>33</sup> That should be unsurprising because theological traction follows on from social reality.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2. A Summary of Pauline Teaching

Another view is that although Romans is not a complete summary of the Christian faith, it is clearly a summary of Paul’s articulation of the faith in the light of disputes that he had in Antioch, Galatia, and Corinth. That is why there are so many connections between Romans and Paul’s other letters. For instance, there are similarities with Galatians, Philippians, and Romans 1–4 concerning justification, and similarities between 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14–15 concerning disputed matters of food and fellowship. William Sanday and Arthur Headlam regarded Romans as a conscious summing up of his past experiences.<sup>35</sup> Günther Bornkamm proposed that Romans was Paul’s “Last Will and Testament,” a summary and development of his doctrine as well as a dress rehearsal for the defense of his teaching as he prepared to go to

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<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. J. Theodore Miller; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), xxvi.

<sup>29</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans* (ed. Henry Beveridge; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), xxiii–xxxi.

<sup>30</sup> Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. C. C. Rasmussen; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 6–8.

<sup>31</sup> J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 77.

<sup>32</sup> Douglas A. Campbell, “Christ and the Church in Paul: A New ‘Post-New Perspective’ Account,” in Michael F. Bird, ed., *Four Views of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 141.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, 321–81.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Philip F. Esler, *New Testament Theology: Communion and Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), xlii.

Jerusalem to deliver the collection.<sup>36</sup> Eduard Lohse labels Romans a “summation of the gospel” as it takes up and utilizes motifs Paul had already used in his previous letters.<sup>37</sup> There is something right about this view since it reflects, in part, the theology of the Pauline mission in its mature form.<sup>38</sup> It does reflect key Pauline themes that have appeared in his earlier letters. In fact, James Dunn avers: “Paul’s primary objective . . . was to think through his gospel in the light of the controversies which it had occasioned and to use the calm of Corinth to set out both his gospel itself and its ramifications in writing with a fullness of exposition which the previous trials and tribulations had made impossible and which would have been impossible to sustain in a single oral presentation.”<sup>39</sup> However, there are also subtle differences. For instance, in Romans 6–8, Paul clearly has a more nuanced and positive view of the law, calling it “holy, righteous, and good” (Rom 7:12) compared to his rather point blank remarks that the law is not based on faith, it came indirectly through a mediator, it was like a penal colony, and obedience to its precepts is a form of slavery (Gal 3:15–4:12). Perhaps this change of tack in Romans was necessary because Paul was required to defend himself from suspicions that he was antinomian based on news of his views about the Mosaic law reaching the Roman house churches that were, in varying degrees, still entrenched in the Jewish way of life.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, while 1 Corinthians 8 deals with food sacrificed to idols and consuming meals at temples, Romans 14 is concerned with vegetarianism, wine, and holy days.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, parts of the letter, like the analogy of the Olive Branch addressed to Gentiles (Rom 11:13–31), his remarks about taxes and government (Rom 13:1–7), and the warnings concerning false teachers (Rom 16:17–18), cannot emerge from Paul’s context, or be part of his notes for an *apologia* in Jerusalem. So while Romans is a distillation of his missional theology, it still contains a specificity that cannot be explained purely by his reflections, or by his preparations to defend himself in Jerusalem.

### ***3.3. A Letter of Introduction to the Roman Churches***

Robert Jewett regards Romans as an “ambassadorial letter,” akin to Agrippa’s letter to Gaius that Philo records, mixed with paraenetic, rhetorical, and philosophical texturing. Paul advocates on behalf of the power of God to gain their support for a cooperative mission to evangelize Spain. Paul rehearses the

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<sup>36</sup> Günther Bornkamm, “The Letter to the Romans as Paul’s Last Will and Testament,” in K. P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 16–28. Jacob Jervell (“The Letter to Jerusalem,” in Donfried, *The Romans Debate*, 53–64) also emphasizes the role of Romans as a preparation for Paul’s collections speech in Jerusalem.

<sup>37</sup> Eduard Lohse, *Der Brief an Die Römer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 46.

<sup>38</sup> N. A. Dahl, “The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans,” in *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 70–94.

<sup>39</sup> Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 867.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric in its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 76–78.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Charles H. Talbert, *Romans* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 311–13.



gospel to be proclaimed and lived out there.<sup>42</sup> Though Paul does indeed introduce himself to the Romans and thought of himself as an “ambassador of Christ” (2 Cor 5:20; Eph 6:20), the style of letter is hardly diplomatic. There is a sense in which Paul wants, in all sincerity, to meet the Romans, to bless them by his ministry (Rom 15:29), so that they will reciprocate and help his mission. To that end, they can mutually help one another (Rom 1:10-12; 15:29-30). As such, Paul is also concerned with how the gospel is received and lived out in Rome, particularly given the challenges that Gentile believers face there.

### 3.4. *A Letter Soliciting Support for the Pauline Mission*

Paul probably lost Antioch as his base of missional operations in the east and had to rely on his own converts in Ephesus and Greece for support. As he intended to move westwards, he evidently required the support of the Roman churches for a mission to Spain (Rom 15:24-28). Several scholars have thought of Romans as principally designed to induce the Romans to support Paul’s evangelistic endeavors in Spain.<sup>43</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson goes so far as to call Romans, in essence, a fund raising letter.<sup>44</sup> The problem of course is whether such an elaborate and lengthy letter would be required to solicit funds. In Philippians, Paul renews the bonds of fraternity with the audience and urges them to provide continued financial assistance to him, but with nowhere near as much theological density as Romans. Granted, that in order to get the support of the Roman churches, Paul would have to lay out his gospel at length to demonstrate its conformity to Scripture and to the Jewish Christian tradition, thus accounting for Romans 1–8. But such a purpose hardly warrants the inclusion of Romans 9–11 that deals with the problem of Israel’s rejection of the message and the Gentiles’ acceptance of it. Neither does it require the exhortations in Romans 12–15 that take on very specific character. The latter half of Romans must be explained by circumstances and exterior to Paul’s own situation. Most likely, Paul writes such things because he has caught wind of events transpiring in Rome that he wishes to address before he arrives there. So I affirm a missionary purpose, but there is something else going on in Rome that occasions Paul’s letter and its specific construction, apologia, and exhortations.

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<sup>42</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 44.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. e.g., G. Schrenk, “Der Römerbrief als Missionsdokument,” in *Studien zu Paulus* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1954), 81-106; W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (trans. H. C. Kee; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 312-13.

<sup>44</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 6-9; Luke Timothy Johnson with Todd C. Penner, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (3rd ed.; London: SCM, 2003), 344-45.

### 3.5. A Letter to Bring Unity to the Roman Churches

There is a diverse array of suggestions that Paul wrote Romans in order to bring the potentially divisive ethnic groups in the Roman churches together. We have to remember that Romans is not Galatians. It was not written to attack Jewish Christian teachers for either their particularism or legalism.<sup>45</sup> There is a complete absence of specific names, peoples, or targets that Paul polemicizes against.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, in light of Romans 14–15, some see Paul as trying to bring reconciliation between the “strong” and the “weak.” Also, in light of Romans 9–11, some perceive that Paul urges Gentile Christians not to imitate the anti-Judaism of Roman cultural elites.<sup>47</sup>

Wolfgang Wiefel, using a mixture of exegesis, archaeological data, and sociological analysis, argues that the ban of Jewish meetings and the expulsion of the Jews from Rome under Claudius significantly impacted the shape of Christianity in Rome between A.D. 49 and 54. Christianity came to Rome and to Gentiles via the synagogues, causing controversy within them over devotion to Christ, resulting in a ban on meetings, and then in an expulsion of Jewish Christians (or at least their leaders) in A.D. 49.<sup>48</sup> In the proceedings years, until the return of the Jewish Christians in A.D. 54, the Christian movement became largely separated from the synagogues and developed a largely Gentile leadership in house churches. The return of the Jewish Christians created internal tensions over the Jewish law and Jewish leadership of the Gentile house churches. The Roman house churches now included a Gentile majority, consisting of many of whom had never been involved with the synagogues. Paul wrote Romans to effect a reconciliation between them. The situation of the letter is that it was written to “assist the Gentile Christian majority, who are the primary addressees of the letter, to live together with the Jewish Christians in one congregation, thereby putting

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<sup>45</sup> Contra Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, 1:309; Douglas A. Campbell, *Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 499; see further Stanley E. Porter, “Did Paul Have Opponents in Rome and What were they Opposing?” in Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Paul and His Opponents* (Pauline Studies 1; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 149–68.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 148.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Minear, *The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1979); Wolfgang Wiefel, “The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity,” in Donfried, *The Romans Debate*, 85–101; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (2 vols.; Dallas: Word, 1988), lvi–lviii; Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 873–74; N. T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” *NIB* 10:406–8; J. P. Sampley, “The Weak and the Strong: Paul’s Careful and Crafty Rhetorical Strategy in Romans 14:1–15:13,” in L. M. White and L. Yarbrough, eds., *The Social World of the First Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 40–52; W. L. Lane, “Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity During the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva,” in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 196–44 (esp. 199–202); Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 133.

<sup>48</sup> For critical analysis of the sources and circumstances of the edict, see Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 157–201.

an end to their quarrels about status.”<sup>49</sup>

Many scholars have argued similarly about divisions in Rome among Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul Minear maintained that Paul wrote Romans as part of his preparation for his mission to Spain, but also to deal with disputes that arose in Rome that had been reported to him by some of those persons listed in Romans 16. Paul is trying to unite no less than five different groups in Rome according to Minear.<sup>50</sup> W. B. Russell saw Paul as opposing an ethnocentrism that exuded from both Jewish and Gentile elements. Russell contends that Paul exhorted the Romans to unity where God is glorified (Rom 12:1–15:7) and the revealing of the righteousness of God removes any smug racial superiority (Rom 1:18–8:39).<sup>51</sup> J. C. Walters acknowledges Paul’s intent to solicit support for his mission. However, Christianity in Rome was not unified, and Paul’s ministry was controversial. Therefore, Paul expounded upon the universality of the gospel and the priority of Israel. His argument served to deflate Gentile boasting and to quiet Jewish Christian concerns.<sup>52</sup> Francis Watson engaged in a mirror reading and sociological analysis of Romans where he proposed that Romans 14:1–15:13 presupposed two congregations in Rome separated by mutual hostility and shared suspicion over the question of Torah. Jewish Christianity came to Rome as a reforming movement and the character of relationships between both Jewish and Gentile groups was adversely effected by the banishment and return of the Jewish Christians under Claudius. According to Watson, Paul is commending to Jewish and Gentile believers a shared identity based on faith rather than law, and hopes that these two groups will worship together.<sup>53</sup>

The strengths of this thesis are that it identifies a plausible social context for the content in Romans 9–15, it demonstrates that the arguments in Romans 14–15 cannot be explained as general paraenesis based on 1 Corinthians 8 since the disputed issues are different,<sup>54</sup> and it makes sense of the emotive exhortations that appear at the end such as Paul’s concern that his audience pursue the things of peace (Rom 14:19) and accept one another as Christ accepted them (Rom 15:7). There are, however, a few problems that plague this view. First, we cannot be certain that the “weak” were Jewish Christians and the “strong” were Gentile Christians. Paul (a Jewish Christian) considers himself to be one of the “strong” (Rom 15:1) and similar language concerning the “weak” was used in a Gentile majority church in Corinth (1 Cor 8:7, 10). There could be Gentile Christians with strong scruples about food, drink, and

<sup>49</sup> Wiefel, “Jewish Community in Ancient Rome,” 96.

<sup>50</sup> Minear, *The Obedience of Faith*.

<sup>51</sup> W. B. Russell, “An Alternative Suggestion for the Purpose of Romans,” *BSac* 45 (1988): 174–84.

<sup>52</sup> J. C. Walters, *Ethnic Issues in Paul’s Letter to the Romans: Changing Self-Definition in Earliest Roman Christianity* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993).

<sup>53</sup> Francis Watson, “The Two Roman Congregations: Romans 14:1–15:13,” in Donfried, *The Romans Debate*, 203–15; Paul, *Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 163–91.

<sup>54</sup> Contra Robert J. Karris, “Romans 14:1–15:13 and the Occasion of Romans,” in Donfried, *The Romans Debate*, 65–84.

idolatry, just as there could be Jewish Christians who became lax in similar matters.<sup>55</sup> In fact, some scholars think that the entire letter is meant for digestion *within* Gentile churches in Rome.<sup>56</sup> Second, the equation of *Chrestus* with “Christ” in Suetonius (with *Chrestus* a mistranslation for the proper *Christus*) remains disputed, so there is no clear evidence for intra-Jewish rivalries in Rome about “Christ.” Moreover, Acts depicts Paul arriving in Rome and meeting the Jewish leaders who turn out to be only vaguely aware of the messianic sect and are curious about Paul’s gospel (Acts 28:21-22). That does not bode well for the presupposition that “Christ” was a hotbed of controversy amongst Roman Jews in the 40s. Third, the significance and extent of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 is over played. For a start, Paul nowhere mentions the expulsion explicitly or implicitly in the letter. It is also more likely that the ringleaders of those few synagogues known to be tumultuous were penalized with expulsion, not necessarily every Jew in Rome (some of whom were Roman citizens). It is unlikely that the expulsion of more than 50,000 Jews from Rome was complete and policed, since such expulsions were commonplace and primarily about political posturing and cultural pandering. The notion of a Jewish vacuum followed by a Gentile majority thereafter is more assumed than demonstrable.<sup>57</sup>

### 3.6. *A Letter to Bring Unity to Christians and Jews in Rome*

Mark Nanos innovatively proposed that Paul writes to urge the Gentile Christians in Rome to live in respectful harmony with non-Christian Jews.<sup>58</sup> As such, Paul was a Jewish teacher who functioned within the context of Judaism, he gave priority to Israel, and rallied against the ethnocentric exclusivism of his countrymen that prohibited Gentiles entering the community of the righteous. According to Nanos, the Gentile Christians in Rome were deeply embedded in the Jewish synagogues and Paul is not attempting to safeguard them from judaizing. Rather, Paul is concerned about the gentilizing of the Gentile Christians which would result in the fermentation of anti-Israel sentiment and render them as non-law observant. In

<sup>55</sup> Cf. F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (rev. ed.; Leicester: IVP, 1985), 236; Dunn, *Romans*, 2:802; Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, 175, 184; Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 144-45; Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizers in the First and Second Centuries* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 29-100.

<sup>56</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 202, 263-64 (a Gentile audience for Romans is also advocated by Paul Achtemeier, Neil Elliott, Stanley Stowers, and Lloyd Gaston to name a few).

<sup>57</sup> Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 333; J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concern in the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 33-34; John M. G. Barclay, “Is it Good News that God is Impartial? A Response to Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*,” *JSNT* 31 (2008): 91-94; Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, 102-6; Bruce N. Fisk, “Synagogue Influence and Scriptural Knowledge Among the Christians of Rome,” in S. E. Porter and C. Stanley, eds., *As It is Written: Studying Paul’s Use of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 160-71.

<sup>58</sup> Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

this sketch, the “weak” in Romans 14 are not Jewish Christians, but rather non-Christian Jews. What makes them weak is their failure to believe that through Christ, God has accepted the Gentiles. Thus, Nanos claims that Paul is seeking to restrain Gentile Christian freedom *halakhically* by ensuring that their practices remain within the orbit of accepted Jewish practices for Gentiles. Paul must do this because the Gentiles have an important role in enabling the restoration of Israel.

Intriguing as Nanos’ position is, several pertinent criticisms have been leveled against it. Nanos’ contention that the “weak” are non-Christian Jews is not convincing because Paul implies in Rom. 14:1–15:13 that the “strong” are in a position of ascendancy over the “weak.”<sup>59</sup> In fact, Rom 14:23 suggests that the “strong” could get their way in forcing the “weak” to eat against their conscience. It is highly improbable to imagine Gentile Christians succeeding in getting Jews connected with a synagogue to abandon their law observances. The Pauline principle in Rom 14:14 also implies a complete relativization of the Jewish purity code, which Jews unfamiliar with the Jesus tradition (see Mark 7:15, 19), would be unlikely to accommodate. If the faith of the “weak” includes an attachment to Jewish boundary markers, then the absence of any mention of circumcision in Rom 14:1–15:13 is peculiar. Additionally, analogous language is used in 1 Corinthians 8, but without an intra-Jewish context.<sup>60</sup>

Purposes for Romans can be multiplied almost endlessly.<sup>61</sup> Sufficient criteria to determine a suitable purpose is hard to come by.<sup>62</sup> My own view, admittedly an eclectic one, is that Paul’s reason for writing to the Romans includes both his own missionary situation and the pastoral circumstance of his audience.

### 3.7. *An Eclectic Proposal*

In my estimation, the reason for Romans are multiple and complex. Paul writes to the Roman churches, primarily to the Gentiles, but knowing full well that Jewish Christians in the city will hear about the letter, perhaps even from his delegate Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2). Paul wants the financial support of the Roman Gentiles for his planned journey to Spain and he also wants to return

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<sup>59</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Why the ‘Weak’ at Rome Cannot be Non-Christian Jews,” *CBQ* 62 (2000): 64-82; Ben Witherington, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2004), 330-33.

<sup>60</sup> Michael F. Bird and Preston Sprinkle, “Jewish Interpretation of Paul in the Last Thirty Years,” *CBR* 6 (2008): 365-67.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, *The Reason for Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation* (JSNTSup 55; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); George Smiga, “Romans 12:1-2 and 15:30-32 and the Occasion of the Letter to the Romans,” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 257-73; James C. Miller, “The Romans Debate: 1991–2001,” *CR:BS* 9 (2001): 306-49; James C. Miller, *The Obedience of Faith, the Eschatological People of God, and the Purpose of Romans* (SBLDS 177; Atlanta: Scholars, 2000); Das, *Solving the Romans Debate*, 26-52.

<sup>62</sup> Wedderburn, *Purpose*, 64; Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 128-33.



to Jerusalem to deliver the collection with all of the Gentile churches firmly behind him as the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 1:13; 15:24-25). In order to win their financial favor and their willingness to voluntarily come under his apostolate, Paul has two implied tasks. First, he must win them over to his version of the gospel that is announced to both Jews and Greeks (Rom 1:9, 15-16; 2:16; 15:15-21; 16:25). He does that by setting out his gospel at theological depth in order to better “establish” them (Rom 1:16; 16:25). He appeals to shared traditions (e.g., Rom 1:3-4, 3:22-25; 4:25; 6:17; 15:15) and makes apologetic remarks where necessary to assure them that he is not antinomian or anti-Israel, but is a kosher advocate of the Jewish Christian gospel about Israel’s Messiah (Rom 3:8; 6:1-2; 9:1-5).<sup>63</sup> Paul’s strength is that he is able to provide sophisticated scriptural and rhetorical arguments explaining how God, through the Messiah, welcomes Gentiles into the family of Abraham, and how believing Jews and Gentiles in the Messiah should equally welcome one another (Rom 4:16; 5:8-11; 15:6-7). Paul, in effect, “gospelizes” them, by which I mean that he endeavors to conform them to the evangelical character of his vision for Christian communities.<sup>64</sup> Paul wants to make the Romans a pristine example of a “faithful obedience” among the Gentiles (Rom 1:5; 16:26) which is precisely what his opponents believed that his converts lacked (Rom 3:7; Jas 2:14-26). Since Paul cannot be there in person to impart a spiritual gift to them, or reap a full harvest by preaching the gospel in Rome just yet, he does the next best thing. He imparts to them the blessing of his gospel, hoping that it will strengthen and encourage them, and also place them in his debt, a debt that will be repaid when he arrives in Rome (Rom 1:9-13).<sup>65</sup> This way we account for the themes of apostleship, Gentiles, gospel, mission, Rome, and Spain, which are so prominent at the beginning and end of the letter. A second implied task is some preventive pastoral care. Paul knows the dangers that the churches in Rome face. The possibility of anti-Paulinists arriving in Rome (Rom 16:17-18), the fragmentation of the house churches over Torah and halakhah perhaps exacerbated by the departure and return of Jewish Christians to Rome (Romans 14), the need for a strategy for negotiating the perils of living in a pagan society (Romans 12–13), preemptively countering the possibility of Gentile Christians imitating the rancorous anti-Judaism of Roman cultural elites (Romans 9, 11), affirming the interlocking nature of Jewish and Gentile missions (Rom 1:16; 10:14-21; 11:13-33; 15:8-9, 27), demonstrating a way of explaining to Jewish neighbors a messianic theodicy for the victory of God over suffering (Rom 8:18-39; 16:20),<sup>66</sup> and expositing God’s faithfulness to Israel and his impartiality

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<sup>63</sup> On the apologetic nature of Romans, see Wedderburn, *Purpose*, 104-12; Peter Stuhlmacher, “The Purpose of Romans,” in Donfried, *The Romans Debate*, 238-42; Dunn, *Romans*, lvi; Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 126, 148-54.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Eduard Lohse, “Das Evangelium für Juden und Griechen,” *ZNW* 92 (2001): 168-84.

<sup>65</sup> Bruce Lowe, “1½ Reasons for Romans (Debt Owed Turned to Debt Owning)” (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, Washington, 18 November 2006).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 53; Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 151.

towards Jews and Greeks in Jesus Christ (Romans 1–4, 9–10, 14:9–10). In sum, Romans is a word of exhortation,<sup>67</sup> a masterpiece of apologetics, missionary theology, christological exegesis, pastoral care, theological exposition, and artful rhetoric—all designed to win over the audience to Paul’s gospel, to support his mission in Spain, to draw Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome closer together, to strengthen them in the faith despite the perils of Roman culture, and for his audience to identify with the Apostle to the Gentiles as he goes to Jerusalem.

#### 4. Structure

The structure of Romans is, for the most part, fairly agreed on with minor differences. Contentious points focus on whether Romans 5 belongs with Romans 1–4 concerning “justification,” or whether Romans 5 belongs more properly with Romans 6–8 concerning “transformation.” Most likely, Romans 5 is somewhat of a bridging section that summarizes what precedes it and prepares for what follow after.<sup>68</sup> Although Romans 9–11 is a recognizably distinct unit on its own, it also remains firmly connected with Romans 8 concerning eschatology and the people of God, and thus Romans 8 and 9–11 need to be closely aligned together.<sup>69</sup> Romans is not a rhetorical speech per se, but it contains a clear familiarity with several rhetorical forms. For instance, Rom 1:16–17 functions much like a *propositio* as a thesis statement and the entire letter has a feel of deliberative rhetoric in trying to persuade the audience to adopt Paul’s view of the gospel and to support his mission.<sup>70</sup> An outline of Romans can be constructed as follows:

1. Salutation (1:1–7)
2. Thanksgiving (1:8–12)
3. *Narratio* (1:13–15)
4. *Propositio* (1:16–17)
5. Argument 1: The Shared Condemnation of Jews and Gentiles under God (1:18–3:20)
6. Argument 2: The Shared Justification of Jews and Gentiles by Faith in Jesus Christ (3:21–4:25)
7. Bridge Section 1: Peace and Reconciliation in Christ and the Beginnings of a New Humanity (5:1–21)
8. Argument 3: The Transforming Righteousness in Christ by Spirit not law (6:1–8:17)

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<sup>67</sup> David E. Aune, “Romans as a *Logos Protrepitkos*,” in Donfried, *The Romans Debate*, 278–96.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 1:242–44.

<sup>69</sup> Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric*, 254–72.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric*, 79–98; Michael F. Bird, “Reassessing a Rhetorical Approach to Paul’s Letters,” *ExpT* 119.8 (2008): 374–79; Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 16–22; Ben Witherington III, *New Testament Rhetoric* (Eugene: Cascade, 2008), 94–157; Jewett, *Romans*, 23–46; Craig S. Keener, *Romans* (Eugene: Cascade, 2008), 2–9.

9. Bridge Section 2: The Victory of the Messiah over Suffering (8:18-39)
10. Argument 4: God's Faithfulness to Israel and the Interlocking Destiny of Israel and the Gentiles (9:1–11:36)
11. Argument 5: The Love-Ethics of the People of God in a Pagan City (12:1–13:14)
12. Argument 6: The Unity of the People of God within Halakhic Diversity (14:1–15:13)
13. Paul's Apostolate to the Gentiles (15:14-22)
14. Paul's Plan to Visit Rome (15:23-33)
15. Personal Greetings (16:1-16)
16. Concluding Exhortation (16:17-20)
17. Postscript (16:21-23)
18. Doxology (16:25-27)

## **5. Argument**

Paul begins by announcing his apostolic call and expositing the gospel of God as containing the royal announcement about the identity of the risen Jesus as Son of David and Son of God in fulfillment of the scriptural promises (1:1-4). Paul's apostolic office was a grace given to him to bring the Gentiles to "the obedience of faith," and the Roman readers also belong to Jesus the Messiah. Thus, from the outset, the story of salvation is the story of Israel's Messiah, who is equally Lord of the nations (1:5-7).

Paul gives thanks for the news of the faith of the Roman churches and mentions his own prayers for them. Paul recounts that his prayers include the hope to visit them, to further establish them, and to impart a spiritual gift to them, so that he and they are mutually encouraged (1:8-12). As to why he has not visited already, Paul explains in a *narratio* how his previous plans to visit have been thwarted. Even so, he still intends to visit Rome in order to preach the gospel there and to have a harvest among the Barbarians and Greeks in the city (1:13-15).

Paul then sets forth the central thesis of the letter, namely, that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes it, both Jew and Greek. What is more, Paul is not ashamed of this gospel, possibly a jibe against those who think that he should be. What makes the gospel so powerful is that in the gospel the "righteousness of God is revealed." Here the righteousness of God could be an objective genitive (righteousness from God, righteousness that avails before God) or a subjective genitive (righteous character of God, righteous activity of God). Most likely it is a subjective genitive that denotes the character of God embodied and enacted in his saving actions which means vindication for believers and condemnation for the wicked. This righteousness is apocalyptically revealed, an invasive power from God, which rectifies the status and state of believers, and conforms them

to the reality of the new creation.<sup>71</sup> The purpose of the gospel is salvation and its scope includes both Jews and Gentiles. A near identical point is made in 15:8-9 where Christ became a servant of the circumcision in order to confirm the promises given to the Patriarchs and so that the Gentiles would glorify God for his mercy. I would argue that Romans has a double *inclusio*: salvation of the Gentiles through Israel's Messiah (1:2-4, 16-17; 15:8-9) and the obedience of faith as the goal of the gospel for Gentiles (1:5 and 16:26). Finally, this saving power of God is received by faith. A point emphasized with a citation of Hab 2:4, demonstrating the conformity of Paul's gospel to the pattern of Scripture.

Paul then identifies the punitive aspects of God's righteousness in the ongoing revelation of God's wrath against those who suppress the truth of God's revelation of himself in the created order. The idolatry and immorality of the pagan world fall under the judgment of God (1:18-31). Paul next shifts his focus from the Gentiles to the Jews in a *diatribe* where he makes four vital points about an imaginary Jewish opponent. For the Jew, even an acculturated Hellenistic Jew, has no claim to superiority due to God's impartiality. That implies that the Jewish interlocutor cannot appeal to a moral superiority based on performance of law due to his hypocrisy (2:1-11). He cannot appeal to his possession of law due to the existence of (Christian) Gentiles who fulfil the law in a manner superior to many Jews (2:12-16). Neither can inherited privileges of the Jewish people (2:17-24), nor even the badge of circumcision (2:25-29), establishes a claim before God for justification.<sup>72</sup> The priority of the Jew over the Greek is restated, but in negative terms, as the Jew is the one who stares first into the face of judgment (2:9).

So that Paul is not misunderstood, he immediately affirms the advantage of the Jew, the benefit of circumcision, and God's faithfulness to Israel (3:1-4). Paul also takes issue with a hypothetical objection that God is unjust to condemn those who by their iniquity and lying give occasion for God to prove his righteous character. God is not fickle, otherwise he could not judge the world (3:5-7). Unrighteous behavior may bring to the surface God's righteous judgments, but that in no way exonerates the guilty or gives anyone, even Paul, a license for sin (3:8). As Paul has now shown, Jews and Gentiles are equally under the power of sin and co-equally condemned in the economy of God's righteous wrath (3:9). This is proved with a cantata of citations from the Psalms (Ps 14:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; 36:1) and Isaiah (Isa 59:7-8), which reinforces the wickedness of all human beings (3:10-18). The law speaks to those under its jurisdiction and it affirms the liability of the whole world to the judgment of God (3:19). This point is validated on the grounds that no "flesh" can make a claim before God to be justified on the basis of works of the law. Rather, the law brings knowledge of sin (not a means of release from sin).

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<sup>71</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification, and the New Perspective* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 12-18; *Bird's-Eye View of Paul: The Man, His Mission, and His Message* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 93-98.

<sup>72</sup> Kent Y. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment* (SNTS 105; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 162-63.

Thus, Paul ends by affirming the faithfulness of God to Israel and the liability of Jews and Gentiles to the judgment of God (3:20).

Paul then begins to expound the central thesis initially set forth in 1:16-17, concerning the revelation of the “righteousness of God” (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) in the gospel (3:21-16). Wrath and condemnation are not the final words as God has done something dramatic to deliver believers from the power and penalty of sin. There is a logical and temporal contrast with the words “but now” (see Rom 16:23; Gal 4:9; Eph 2:13; 5:8; Col 1:22, 26) indicating a new epoch of redemptive history that brings salvation to those who have sinned and lack God’s glory. The saving power of God (i.e. “the righteousness of God”) is manifested apart from the covenantal strictures of the law, yet also intimated by the law and prophets. It is revealed through the πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (faith of Jesus Christ), which could mean either the “faithfulness of Christ” or “faith in Christ.”<sup>73</sup> More likely, it refers to human faith in the Christ event that includes the faithfulness of God operating through the faithfulness of Christ to bring salvation to believers. This deliverance is then described with three different types of metaphors: (1) a slave market metaphor: redemption; (2) a cultic sacrificial metaphor: propitiation; and (3) a legal metaphor: justification. Consequently all boasting, in election, ethnicity, or effort, are excluded because justification comes through faith not by works of the law. Righteousness by faith rules out any idea of a meritorious salvation, and it equally rules out a Jewish ethnocentrism that restricts salvation exclusively to ethnic Jews (Rom 3:27-31).

Paul’s introduction of Abraham into his argument serves a dual role by establishing that faith is the mechanism for entrance into salvation and for determining membership in God’s people. Thomas Schreiner comments that, “Paul is interested in the inclusion of Gentiles and the basis of their inclusion.”<sup>74</sup> Paul insists that Abraham stood in the position of a Gentile when he was justified and was partner in a covenant wholly apart from circumcision. Paul cites Gen 15:6 and Ps 32:1-2 to reiterate what he has already said in 3:21-26, God justifies/credits righteousness by faith apart from works. By stressing that God justifies the “ungodly,” Paul also refutes the attempt to cram Abraham’s subsequent acts of obedience into his justification (see 1 Macc 2.52) or the notion that Abraham had a private revelation of the Mosaic law that he obeyed (see Sir 44:19-21; Jub 23.10; 2 Bar 57.1-2). Abraham’s faith was credited as righteousness without law obedience and given by sheer grace. This is a clear rejection of a work-for-reward view of salvation as one can imagine, but is also a penetrating riposte at those who contend that salvation is tied to Israel’s covenantal election to the exclusion of Gentiles (Rom 4:1-8).

Paul repeats the theme of 3:29-30 that righteousness by faith applies equally to Jew and Gentile because Abraham was justified when he was still yet uncircumcised. Circumcision was the sign of the promise that was

<sup>73</sup> On this debate see Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, eds., *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical and Theological Studies* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 228.



received by faith; circumcision did not establish the relationship or mark out who inherits the Abrahamic promises.<sup>75</sup> The Abrahamic narratives are enlisted in order to drive home the point that Gentiles are justified in the same way as Abraham and those who emulate the Abrahamic faith belong in the Abrahamic covenant. This justifying faith is directed at the life-giving power of God who raised Jesus from the dead. (4:9-17).<sup>76</sup> Following the Isaianic script, Jesus was handed over to deal with sins, and raised for the justification of believers (4:18-25).

Romans 5 is somewhat of a transition section which summarizes 3:21–4:25, while at the same time previewing Rom 6:1–8:17 where the sin-death-law nexus is broken. In 5:1-2, Paul recapitulates his *propositio* with reference to “having been justified by faith” and the “hope of glory” (5:1-2). Then he begins to admix themes of assurance in God’s saving power and the virtues created by persevering under suffering. He introduces the imagery of reconciliation and reflects on the magnitude of divine grace and divine love. God justifies and reconciles the unrighteous by Christ’s death and saves them on account of Christ’s risen life (5:3-11). The Adam/Christ typology of 5:12-21 is really an extended commentary on 1 Cor 15:56: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.” Paul moves to demonstrate how the law did not redeem Adam’s fallen nature, but served only to antagonize the power of sin, activate sinful desire, and affirm the sentence of death due to Adam’s progeny. Paul situates his argument about God’s saving righteousness in the scope of humanity condemned and then justified, humanity enslaved in sin and set free in Christ; so that justification creates not only a world-wide Abrahamic family, but also a renewed humanity. Believers shift from the epoch of sin, death, and condemnation associated with Adam’s transgression to the epoch of righteousness, life, and justification associated with the obedience of the new Adam.

The burden of Romans 6–7 is to anticipate several objections to Paul’s message. If the law is not a means to attaining righteousness, and if law no longer marks out who are the children of Abraham, then it is legitimate to ask: what is the motivation for righteous behavior and what was the point of giving the law in the first place? The exhortation to righteousness in Romans 6 is predicated on one crucial premise: the transforming power of the gospel and the new obedience created by union with Christ. By union with Christ, believers are emancipated from the old age of sin and death and are uniquely empowered by baptism into Christ to live their lives in complete service to God. This thought is expressed most aptly as the indicative and imperative of Pauline ethics: because you have been united to Christ and died to sin, you need not offer your body into the service of sin; instead you are free to cultivate obedience that leads to righteousness (Rom 6:1-23).

<sup>75</sup> The discussion of Romans 4 by Peter T. O’Brien (“Was Paul Converted?” in D. A. Carson, Mark A. Seifrid, and Peter T. O’Brien, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 2: The Paradoxes of Paul* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 376-88) is particularly helpful here.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, 168-94.

Romans 7 addresses the issue of the role of the law in redemptive history and the believer's freedom from the law. The metaphor of a marriage covenant annulled by the death of the husband is used as an example of the believer's freedom from the law (Rom 7:1-5). The Christian has died from the age of sin and death that the law served. Paul is adamant though that this is no license for lawless behavior and believers are indebted to "bear fruit to God" (Rom 7:4) and to serve in the "new way of the Spirit" (Rom 7:6). The "wretched man" soliloquy in Rom 7:7-25 is among the most problematic sections of Romans and the most intellectually straining passage of the entire Pauline corpus. I am persuaded that this passage is not autobiographical of Paul either pre- or post-conversion,<sup>77</sup> but underscores the plight of the Jew under the law apart from Christ and the dark vestiges of the "Adamic self."<sup>78</sup> But such a plight is only evident when viewed retrospectively through the lens of faith. The purpose of the law was to mark out sin as sin; but law has no power to effect either redemption or transformation. In that sense the law points to salvation but does not provide it.

Romans 8 encapsulates a kaleidoscope of themes and arguments about the efficacy of God's saving righteousness, the outworking of righteousness in the life of the believer through the Spirit, and the vindication of God's people at the final assize. Paul begins by again recapitulating his *propositio* but in slightly different terms. Instead of "justification" we are presented with the obverse side, "no condemnation" for those in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). It is Spirit rather than law that sets believers free from sin and death. Whereas the law was impotent to effect anything on account of sin, God achieved it by sending his own Son to deal with the sin of humanity by condemning it in human flesh (Rom 8:1-3). Life in the Spirit effects the salvation and transformation of humanity that many thought the law would bring (Rom 8:4-11). Further to that, receipt of the Spirit is proof that believers have been adopted into God's family and possess the status of sons (Rom 8:12-17). In light of that, the sufferings that believers endure must be put into proper perspective (see earlier 5:3). Believers possess hope in the face of adversity because they are participants in the story of God's triumph over the world in Jesus Christ. Paul works out a messianic theodicy, so that the problems of death and affliction find their resolution in the atonement, resurrection, and new creation. The hope of believers is that they are part of God's eternal plan executed in Christ and nothing in the universe can thwart that plan (8:18-39).

This brings us to Romans 9–11 which are among the most disputed parts of Paul's letter. We can dismiss the view that these chapters are designed to give Paul's teaching on the election of individuals unto salvation (though I do think that Romans 8–9 certainly is of relevance for formulating a doctrine of predestination).<sup>79</sup> It was once common to think that these chapters constitute

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<sup>77</sup> Bird, *Bird's-Eye View of Paul*, 140–43.

<sup>78</sup> Leander E. Keck, *Romans* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 180.

<sup>79</sup> John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 56–73; Richard H. Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9–11* (WUNT 2.63; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck],

an excursus or a digression in Paul's train of thought.<sup>80</sup> Others argue that this section is in fact the climax of the epistle.<sup>81</sup> This section is neither "peripheral" nor "central," but is more accurately "integral" to Paul's argument.<sup>82</sup> Those who think that Romans 9–11 is the climax of the letter have mistaken the steepest incline for the peak, or make the assumption that after the most arduous terrain comes the summit. The bad news is that the peak of Romans is still four chapters away. Romans 9–11 is a false crest in the arduous yet scenic journey to the pinnacle of the letter in 15:8–9.<sup>83</sup> Whatever gravity we assign to Romans 9–11 we need not think of Romans 1–8 as a mere "preface."<sup>84</sup> There is an indelible connection between Romans 9–11 and what has gone before. Earlier Paul intimated the priority of the Jew in the gospel, Israel's disobedience of the law, and the faithfulness of God to Israel (1:16–17, 2:1–29; 3:1–4). Paul now brings those themes to a dramatic resolution. In addition, Romans 8 also ends on a triumphant note echoing the certainty of God's saving purposes and the inseparability of the believer from the love of God. That of course begs the question about the state and fate of Israel. In other words, can anyone really trust God and expect him to be faithful if the people of his promise are currently alienated from him? Running through the text then we find Paul's construction of a theodicy for God's faithfulness to Israel. In addition, an outstanding task for Paul is to reconcile the priority and privilege of the Jews with the impartiality of God and the universality of salvation. Paul's reflection on Israel comes in three distinct phases: (1) Israel in the past (9:6–29); (2) Israel in the present (9:30–10:21); and (3) Israel in the future (11:1–36).<sup>85</sup>

Despite the recalcitrance of national Israel, Paul takes solace from the fact that there is indeed a remnant of faithful Jews who have embraced God's

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1994), 175–78; Charles H. Talbert, *Romans* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 230–31; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation," in T. Schreiner and B. Ware, eds., *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will: Biblical and Practical Perspectives on Calvinism* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 1:89–106.

<sup>80</sup> W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), 225; C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 148–49; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; trans. K. Grobel; London: SCM, 1952), 2:132; Otto Kuss, *Der Römerbrief* (3 vols.; Regensburg: Pustet, 1963–1978), 3:644–45.

<sup>81</sup> Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, 1:327–28; Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 4, 28, 85; J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 87; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:lxii; 2:518–21; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 539–43 (esp. 541); M. D. Hooker, "Introduction," in *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3; N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 234; Wright, "Romans," 10:620–26; Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996), 282; John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 129; A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defence of God's Righteousness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 87; Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in its Contexts*, 102.

<sup>82</sup> Talbert, *Romans*, 241.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. William J. Dumbrell, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 21.

<sup>84</sup> Stendahl, *Paul*, 29.

<sup>85</sup> Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric*, 321.

grace, a grace that is now even extended to the Gentiles (9:6-29). In 9:30–10:4, we observe one of the crux passages as to whether or not Paul is denigrating “nationalism” or “legalism.”<sup>86</sup> Contextually the passage is framed by an *inclusio* in 9:30-32 and 10:19-21 concerning the Gentiles’ incorporation into the people of God set against the attitudes and activity of ethnic Israel. Paul’s main point is not to compare Israel, who pursued salvation by works, with Gentiles, who pursued salvation by faith. Israel’s biggest problem is not legalism but is their “stumbling” (9:32-33) and “ignorance” (10:3) of Christ. Paul has in mind Jews who have heard the kind of message outlined in 1:16–8:39 and yet still trust in the covenantal status quo and in their own law obedience.<sup>87</sup> Israel is “seeking to erect their own righteousness from the law.”<sup>88</sup> A righteousness that is theirs by fact of obedience and a righteousness that is *exclusively* theirs by fact of election.<sup>89</sup> They are ignorant of God’s impartiality as displayed towards Jew and Gentile and they have rejected the one who inaugurates salvation and brings the covenant to its appointed goal (10:4). Israel’s privileged position and her performance of the law will ultimately amount to nothing, for she is unable to find in the law what the law does not have: life!

Paul focuses on the eschatological singularity of salvation in Christ for Jews and Gentiles without distinction (10:1-13) and the necessity of a continued mission to Israel because of the necessity of hearing the word of Christ (10:14-21). Yet Paul is quick to point out that Israel’s rejection of the gospel does not entail God’s rejection of Israel. God’s call is irrevocable. Proof of that is a remnant of Jewish Christians who have believed in Jesus Christ (11:1-5, 29). Israel’s failure is not final, but the salvation of Gentiles will drive Israel to jealousy so that “all Israel” may yet be saved. Since Israel’s rejection of the message brought reconciliation to the Gentiles, their acceptance of the message will be a miracle on par with resurrection from the dead (11:15, 26). Paul counters a supersessionist ecclesiology with an analogy of an olive branch whereby some natural branches have been broken off and other wild olive branches have been grafted in. Paul makes several points from the analogy: If God can graft in the wild branches (Gentiles), how much more can he re-attach the natural branches (Israel); the root (Israel) supports the branches (Gentiles) and not the other way around; and if God can break off the natural branches due to unbelief (Israel), he can also do the same to the unnatural branches (Gentiles) which is a warning against unbelief (11:16-32). In the end it appears that: “The purposes of God are reducible to his will, a will that initially appears equally set to harden or to save, but turns out on closer inspection, and in the end, to harden only in order to save, to hate only in order to love, and to consign all to disobedience only in order to have

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<sup>86</sup> Contrast Wright, *Climax*, 240-44 with Moo, *Romans*, 634-36.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 239; Terence L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 129-30.

<sup>88</sup> T. Dan 6.10-11 and Wis 2.11 refer to a “righteousness of the law.”

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Colin Kruse, *Paul, the Law and Justification* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 225.

mercy on all.”<sup>90</sup> That in turn is followed by a burst of doxological praise to the greatness and glory of God (11:33-36).

Romans 12–15 tease out the paramount implications of the preceding arguments as to how Paul’s gospel is lived out among Jewish and Gentile Christians in the house churches and synagogues of Rome. This section constitutes Paul’s blueprint for how an ethnically diverse, cosmopolitan community with competing convictions on law and liberty can live and worship together for the glory of God. His solution is that justification by faith implies fellowship by faith, therefore, accept those who have faith, be it strong or weak. Learn to differentiate between areas of conviction and areas of command, because the one Lord, Jesus Christ, is Lord of all.<sup>91</sup>

The gospel is fundamentally about transformation, the transformation of persons so that they become identifiable by their sacrificial service and worship to God over and against the pattern of the dominant culture around them (12:1-2). That transformation is worked out within the believing community by their humility and service rendered to each other in the body of Christ which makes them mutually interdependent upon one another (12:3-8). The central ingredient in the Christian life is the virtue of love and loving behavior. A praxis driven by love means redefining the way they understand honor, hospitality, grief, vengeance, and the triumph of good over evil (12:9-21). Paul then provides exhortations about how believers are to regard the governing authorities. It is difficult to discern the background to Paul’s remarks here, whether he has in mind certain religious enthusiasts who no longer think of themselves as under the authority of the state, or perhaps Jewish Christians who have imbibed anti-Roman sentiments from Judea. In any case, Paul makes the point that government is divinely instituted, and rulers should be obeyed and respected (13:1-7). The reference to taxes leads Paul to remind his readers that they are indebted to love one another. Love is the fulfillment of the law (or at least the second half of the Decalogue). In particular, the Christian love ethic is lived out in the context of an eschatological expectation for the return of the Lord Jesus (13:8-14).

Paul next offers a plea for unity in a cluster of churches with contentions and suspicions of each other’s commitment to the Jewish way of life and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The “weak” simply means those whose consciences are more easily offended by certain scruples, while the “strong” are those who have a more robust ability to exercise their freedom on the same matters. Paul pleads with them not to condemn each other over matters that he determines to be secondary, because they will all inevitably answer to the one Lord (14:1-12). He therefore urges believers to exercise their convictions about disputable matters (meat, holy days, or wine)<sup>92</sup> in a way that avoids causing others to

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<sup>90</sup> John Barclay, “Two Versions of Grace: Romans 9–11 and the Wisdom of Solomon” (paper delivered at the British New Testament Conference, Durham, September 2008).

<sup>91</sup> Wright, “Romans,” 10:733.

<sup>92</sup> Importantly these were a key means of avoiding idolatry in a pagan majority city. Meat was usually sacrificed to idols, wine was used in libations, and Sabbath and Roman holy days were days to be observed or ignored by faithful Jews in Rome.



stumble, but also prevents them from being bullied into adhering to regulations that impinge upon their freedom. Kingdom values and serving Christ ultimately transcends tertiary matters of food and drink (14:13-23). Paul makes a special exhortation to the “strong” to put the “weak” first, because this is the example given in Christ who did not please himself, but pleased God by bearing the shame of others. Crucial to the exhortation are his words: “[W]ith one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (15:6-7). Paul wants them to work for unity and a mutual acceptance of each other. Believers should receive one another because Christ received them. Paul affirms the priority of Israel in God’s plan by noting that Christ himself became a servant to the circumcised, so that the promises made to the patriarchs would be confirmed, promises that pertained to the Gentiles receiving mercy and glorifying God. Scripture lays down a clear pattern for the Gentiles to come to the God of the patriarchs in faith and praise (15:7-13).

The foregoing arguments and exhortations are a reminder to his audience of the grace of Paul’s apostleship to the Gentiles. Paul recounts the geographical arc of his ministry from Jerusalem to Illyricum and his continuing desire to preach Christ where Christ is not known (15:14-21). That explains Paul’s future travel itinerary which involves visiting Jerusalem, Rome, and Spain. Paul also asks for their prayers for his safety in Jerusalem and his refreshment with the Roman believers (15:22-33). Paul begins a list of greetings including a commendation of Phoebe, a deacon from Cenchreae, the bearer of his letter (16:1-2). Greetings are passed on to several Roman Christians of whom Paul knows either directly or indirectly (16:3-16). That is followed with a final series of remarks that includes a warning against divisive teachers, an exhortation for continued obedience, and a promise of God’s final victory over the Satan (16:17-20). There is a final greeting from Paul’s companion and scribe, Tertius (16:21-23). The letter closes with a doxology about the plan of God revealed in the gospel for the glory of God (16:25-27).

## **6. Basic Themes**

The main themes of Romans can be summarized around the two nodes of proclamation and praxis. First, in terms of proclamation, we could identify an overarching theme in Romans as “the apocalyptic power of the gospel for the salvation of Jews and Gentiles.” The subject of Romans is not the “road” of salvation for individuals. It addresses the fundamental reality of God’s faithfulness to Israel, God’s impartiality in judging Jews and Gentiles, and the singularity of his salvation in Jesus Christ for Jews and Gentiles. The identity and deliverance of the people of God from sin, evil desire, and judgment remains a consistent theme throughout. God calls and creates a people in the Messiah from among both Jews and Greeks. Once we accept that Paul is narrating an apocalyptic story with corporate concerns it follows that the

matter of fellowship between Jews and Gentiles cannot be regarded as ancillary to a more pervasive motif of the individual standing before God.<sup>93</sup> For Paul's Roman audience, they learn that "Evangelical persuasion rather than political and military power is thus the means whereby the salvation of the world is now occurring."<sup>94</sup> For Jews, God's faithfulness is demonstrated in the obedience, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the salvation of "all Israel." For Greeks, despite their idolatry and immorality, they have been engrafted into Israel in order to prompt Israel to jealousy and conversion. The message of the gospel—bringing rectification, reconciliation, and redemption—must be lived out thereafter in Spirit-driven righteousness and in the unified fellowship of the messianic community that confesses the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The history of interpretation is rather illuminating when it comes to highlighting how Romans is about how the gospel has come to both the Jew and the Greek. John Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 349–407) preached through Romans in his homilies. The Greek presbyter stated: "For these two things were what confused the Jews; one, if it were possible for men, who with works were not saved, to be saved without them, and another, if it were just for the uncircumcised to enjoy the same blessings with those, who had during so long a period been nurtured in the law."<sup>95</sup> Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430) regarded Romans as a commentary on 2 Cor 3:6, "For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The Letter to the Romans was Augustine's key weapon to undermine the works-salvation scheme of Pelagius. However, Augustine also knew the big picture of Romans, namely, the redemptive-historical context in which the gospel came to Gentiles:

The Letter of Paul to the Romans, in so far as one can understand its literal content, poses a question like this: whether the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ came to Jews alone because of their merits through the works of the law, or whether the justification of faith that is in Christ Jesus came to all nations, without any preceding merits for works. In this last instance, people would believe not because they were just, but justified through belief; they would then begin to live justly. This then is what the apostle intended to teach: that the grace of the Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ came to all people. He thereby shows why one calls this "grace," for it was given freely, and not as a repayment of a debt of righteousness.<sup>96</sup>

In the modern era, the British philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), in his paraphrase and notes on Paul's letters, made this comment on Rom 3:26: "God rejected them [i.e. the Jews] for being his people, and took the Gentiles into his church, and made them his people jointly and equally with the few

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<sup>93</sup> Contra Moo, *Romans*, 27–29.

<sup>94</sup> Jewett, *Romans*, 141.

<sup>95</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. Rom.* 7.

<sup>96</sup> Cited in Paula Fredriksen Landes, *Unfinished Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Text and Translations 23; Early Christian Literature Series 6; Chico: Scholars, 1982), 53.

believing Jews. This is plainly the sense of the apostle here, where he is discoursing the nation of the Jews and their state in comparison with the Gentiles; not of the state of private persons. Let anyone without prepossession attentively read the context, and he will find it to be so.”<sup>97</sup> Benjamin Jowett (1817–1893), a scholar of Plato, turned his hand to studying Paul’s letters and found Romans not to be a doctrinal treatise, but fundamentally concerned with the unity of Jews and Gentiles: “it is union with Christ which breaks down all other ties of race and language, and knits men together into a new body which is His church.”<sup>98</sup> Chrysostom, Augustine, Locke, and Jowett (as mere examples) show that it is possible to see a letter like Romans addressing an anthropological issue of human sin and divine redemption without divorcing it from the wider redemptive-historical theme of how the promises given to Israel result in the salvation of the Gentiles.

In the practical sense, Paul’s two key exhortations are: “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (14:19) and “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (15:7). Paul labors to provide a theological rationale for a community to fully live out unity in diversity and to promote harmony with each other as a pathway to glorifying God. Paul’s mandate for unity is not made in the abstract. The charge to “accept” one another (14:1) is rooted in God’s acceptance of *both* those who eat and abstain from certain foods (14:3) and part of emulating Christ who “accepted you” (15:7).<sup>99</sup> The ultimate goal is the glorification of God by a community that is unified and in one mind.<sup>100</sup> Paul is showing that ethnicity and attitudes to legal observances, things that many Jews and their clientele of adherents treasured, do not establish any privilege over others. Similarly, many Gentiles may have accepted the message that most Jews rejected, but that does not entail a whole scale or permanent rejection of Israel. Christ was a servant to Israel, Jewish Christians brought the message to Rome, and the nation of Israel will yet return to the Lord at the final day. There are not two plans for two peoples. There is one covenantal promise running through Abraham to Moses to Christ. This singular purpose of God includes the interlocking destiny of Jews and Gentiles in Israel’s Messiah. The community that confesses Christ must work out in its midst a way to embrace those whom God has embraced. An inherent bias against the Gentile world, or a cultural prejudice against the Jewish people, is not the means to God’s glory. The gospel is about the lack of διαστολή (“difference”) between Jews and Gentiles in salvation (Rom 3:22; 10:12), which should therefore result in an attitude of ἀδιάφορα (“indifference”) to things that are not essential to their faith and fellowship (Rom 14:1; 1 Cor 8:8-9; Col 3:17). What matters is the common promises and

<sup>97</sup> John Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul to the Galatians, First and Second Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians* (Cambridge: Brown, Shattuck, & Co., 1832), 277.

<sup>98</sup> William Baird, *History of New Testament Research* (2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1:356.

<sup>99</sup> Keener, *Romans*, 170.

<sup>100</sup> Keck, *Romans*, 352.

mutual identity created by those who have been “baptized into Christ” (Rom 6:3) and have “put on Christ” (Rom 13:14).

## 7. Conclusion

Romans is the precipice of Pauline theology and the summit of early Christian thought. The challenge for contemporary readers of Romans is to get inside the story of the letter, to become conversant with its various background contexts, and to imagine the situation behind the text that called for its composition. Laboring hard in the vineyard of exegesis and theological interpretation of Romans will hopefully lead to a fruitful harvest of new wine for thirsty minds to drink. Then believing readers, having wrestled with Romans, may try to be like Paul and “glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God” (Rom 15:17).

## Recommended Reading

- Jewett, Robert. *Romans*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007.
- Keener, Craig S. *Romans*. Eugene: Cascade, 2009.
- Lampe, Peter. *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*. Translated by M. Steinhausen. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Moo, Douglas. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Oakes, Peter. *Reading Romans in Pompeii*. London: SPCK, 2009.
- Reasoner, Mark. *Romans in Full Circle*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.
- Rutledge, Flemming. *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: Sermons from Paul’s Letter to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.