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# ROMANS

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Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Romans

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Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc.

6316 Peake Road

Macon, Georgia 31210-3960

1-800-747-3016

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Printed in the United States of America.

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The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials. ANSI Z39.48–1984 (alk. paper)

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Talbert, Charles H.

Romans / Charles H. Talbert.

p. cm. — (Smyth & Helwys Bible commentary, 24)

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 1-57312-081-2

1. Bible. N.T. Romans—Commentaries. I. Title. II. Series.

BS2665.53 .T35 2002

227'.1077—dc21

Library of Congress Control Number: 2002015327



SMYTH & HELWYS BIBLE COMMENTARY

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# ROMANS

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*Sharyn Dowd*  
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TO BETTY W. TALBERT  
“SHE HAS BEEN A HELPER OF MANY  
AND OF MYSELF AS WELL.”

# ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS COMMENTARY

Books of the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and New Testament are generally abbreviated in the Sidebars, parenthetical references, and notes according to the following system.

## *The Old Testament*

Genesis	Gen
Exodus	Exod
Leviticus	Lev
Numbers	Num
Deuteronomy	Deut
Joshua	Josh
Judges	Judg
Ruth	Ruth
1–2 Samuel	1–2 Sam
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kgs
1–2 Chronicles	1–2 Chr
Ezra	Ezra
Nehemiah	Neh
Esther	Esth
Job	Job
Psalms (Psalms)	Ps (Pss)
Proverbs	Prov
Ecclesiastes	Eccl
or Qoheleth	Qoh
Song of Solomon	Song
or Song of Songs	Song
or Canticles	Cant
Isaiah	Isa
Jeremiah	Jer
Lamentations	Lam
Ezekiel	Ezek
Daniel	Dan
Hosea	Hos
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Obadiah	Obad
Jonah	Jonah
Micah	Mic

*Abbreviations*

Nahum	Nah
Habakkuk	Hab
Zephaniah	Zeph
Haggai	Hag
Zechariah	Zech
Malachi	Mal

*The Apocrypha*

1–2 Esdras	1–2 Esdr
Tobit	Tob
Judith	Jdt
Additions to Esther	Add Esth
Wisdom of Solomon	Wis
Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach	Sir
Baruch	Bar
Epistle (or Letter) of Jeremiah	Ep Jer
Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three	Pr Azar
Daniel and Susanna	Sus
Daniel, Bel, and the Dragon	Bel
Prayer of Manasseh	Pr Man
1–4 Maccabees	1–4 Macc

*The New Testament*

Matthew	Matt
Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke
John	John
Acts	Acts
Romans	Rom
1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Cor
Galatians	Gal
Ephesians	Eph
Philippians	Phil
Colossians	Col
1–2 Thessalonians	1–2 Thess
1–2 Timothy	1–2 Tim
Titus	Titus
Philemon	Phlm
Hebrews	Heb
James	Jas
1–2 Peter	1–2 Pet
1–2–3 John	1–2–3 John
Jude	Jude
Revelation	Rev

Other commonly used abbreviations include:

BC	Before Christ
(also commonly referred to as BCE = Before the Common Era)	
AD	<i>Anno Domini</i> (“in the year of the Lord”)
(also commonly referred to as CE = the Common Era)	
v.	verse
vv.	verses
C.	century
c.	<i>circa</i> (around “that time”)
cf.	<i>confer</i> (compare)
ch.	chapter
chs.	chapters
d.	died
ed.	edition or edited by or editor
eds.	editors
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> (for example)
et al.	<i>et alii</i> (and others)
f./ff.	and the following one(s)
gen. ed.	general editor
ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> (in the same place)
i.e.	<i>id est</i> (that is)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
lit.	literally
n.d.	no date
rev. and exp. ed.	revised and expanded edition
sg.	singular
trans.	translated by or translator(s)
vol(s).	volume(s)

Selected additional written works cited by abbreviations include:

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint = Greek Translation of Hebrew Bible
<i>MDB</i>	<i>Mercer Dictionary of the Bible</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIV	New International Version
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OGIS</i>	<i>Orientalis graeci inscriptiones selectae</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SP	Sacra pagina
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TEV	Today's English Version
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The opportunity to write this commentary came to me in a roundabout fashion. It was originally assigned to Robert Sloan when he was a member of the Baylor University Department of Religion. When Dr. Sloan became Dean of Truett Seminary and then President of Baylor, his administrative duties precluded his work on this project. It was at that time that Alan Culpepper asked me to undertake the task. It was an enterprise on which I was eager to work. When I began my teaching at Wake Forest University in 1963, I taught Romans on a regular basis for over a decade before moving on to other Pauline letters. When I joined the Baylor faculty in 1996, it was understood that my responsibilities were the Pauline and Johannine writings in the New Testament. This focus gave me an opportunity to join my research on Romans with the teaching of my doctoral seminars. A number of graduate students have made invaluable contributions to my work: Andy Arterbury, Eddie Ellis, Travis Frampton, Barbara Griswold, Derek Hogan, Galen Johnson, Annie Judkins, Pamela Kinlaw, Charles Ramsey, John Vast-Binder, Jeff Wilson, and Richard Young. Fellow learners, I thank you very much.

Working on Romans again has allowed me to try to come to terms with the numerous fresh perspectives on ancient Judaism that have emerged over the past generation and with their impact on Pauline studies. How my thinking on these issues has evolved may be seen in my presidential address before the Catholic Biblical Association in August, 2000, "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists," which has been published in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Volume 63 (January, 2001). It is this synthesis that serves as the presupposition for much of my reading of Romans. My intent has been to deal with Paul the Christian Jew and with his Jewish milieu with integrity. My readers will have to decide whether or not I have succeeded.

The editors have granted me the freedom to treat Romans as a theological document in the Connections sections and sidebar boxes as well as in the Commentary proper. For this I am deeply grateful. Paul's theological perspective is counter to the moralism that is the bane of most contemporary hermeneutics, teaching, and preaching, whether on the left or on the right. Not to have moralistic Connections and sidebars laid on top of an antimoralistic Commentary is clearly correct procedure.

I must express special gratitude to my wife, Dr. Betty W. Talbert, Director of Spiritual Formation at Truett Seminary, not only for her personal support of my efforts but also for her influence on my thought at points that should be obvious to the discerning reader. She should not be held accountable, however, for the many theological and ethical directions that are my responsibility alone.

*Charles H. Talbert*  
*Labor Day, 2001*

## SERIES PREFACE

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* is a visually stimulating and user-friendly series that is as close to multimedia in print as possible. Written by accomplished scholars with all students of Scripture in mind, the primary goal of the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* is to make available serious, credible biblical scholarship in an accessible and less intimidating format.

Far too many Bible commentaries fall short of bridging the gap between the insights of biblical scholars and the needs of students of God's written word. In an unprecedented way, the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* brings insightful commentary to bear on the lives of contemporary Christians. Using a multimedia format, the volumes employ a stunning array of art, photographs, maps, and drawings to illustrate the truths of the Bible for a visual generation of believers.

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* is built upon the idea that meaningful Bible study can occur when the insights of contemporary biblical scholars blend with sensitivity to the needs of lifelong students of Scripture. Some persons within local faith communities, however, struggle with potentially informative biblical scholarship for several reasons. Oftentimes, such scholarship is cast in technical language easily grasped by other scholars, but not by the general reader. For example, lengthy, technical discussions on every detail of a particular scriptural text can hinder the quest for a clear grasp of the whole. Also, the format for presenting scholarly insights has often been confusing to the general reader, rendering the work less than helpful. Unfortunately, responses to the hurdles of reading extensive commentaries have led some publishers to produce works for a general readership that merely skim the surface of the rich resources of biblical scholarship. This commentary series incorporates works of fine art in an accurate and scholarly manner, yet the format remains "user-friendly." An important facet is the presentation and explanation of images of art, which interpret the biblical material or illustrate how the biblical material has been understood and interpreted in the past. A visual generation of believers deserves a commentary series that contains not only the all-important textual commentary on Scripture, but images, photographs, maps, works of fine art, and drawings that bring the text to life.

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* makes serious, credible biblical scholarship more accessible to a wider audience. Writers and editors alike present information in ways that encourage readers to gain a better understanding of the Bible. The editorial board has worked to develop a format that is useful and usable, informative and pleasing to the eye. Our writers are reputable scholars who participate in the community of faith and sense a calling to communicate the results of their scholarship to their faith community.

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* addresses Christians and the larger church. While both respect for and sensitivity to the needs and contributions of other faith communities are reflected in the work of the series authors, the authors speak primarily to Christians. Thus the reader can note a confessional tone throughout the volumes. No particular “confession of faith” guides the authors, and diverse perspectives are observed in the various volumes. Each writer, though, brings to the biblical text the best scholarly tools available and expresses the results of their studies in commentary and visuals that assist readers seeking a word from the Lord for the church.

To accomplish this goal, writers in this series have drawn from numerous streams in the rich tradition of biblical interpretation. The basic focus is the biblical text itself, and considerable attention is given to the wording and structure of texts. Each particular text, however, is also considered in the light of the entire canon of Christian Scriptures. Beyond this, attention is given to the cultural context of the biblical writings. Information from archaeology, ancient history, geography, comparative literature, history of religions, politics, sociology, and even economics is used to illuminate the culture of the people who produced the Bible. In addition, the writers have drawn from the history of interpretation, not only as it is found in traditional commentary on the Bible but also in literature, theater, church history, and the visual arts. Finally, the *Commentary* on Scripture is joined with *Connections* to the world of the contemporary church. Here again, the writers draw on scholarship in many fields as well as relevant issues in the popular culture.

This wealth of information might easily overwhelm a reader if not presented in a “user-friendly” format. Thus the heavier discussions of detail and the treatments of other helpful topics are presented in special-interest boxes, or Sidebars, clearly connected to the passages under discussion so as not to interrupt the flow of the basic interpretation. The result is a commentary on Scripture that

focuses on the theological significance of a text while also offering the reader a rich array of additional information related to the text and its interpretation.

An accompanying CD-ROM offers powerful searching and research tools. The commentary text, Sidebars, and visuals are all reproduced on a CD that is fully indexed and searchable. Pairing a text version with a digital resource is a distinctive feature of the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*.

Combining credible biblical scholarship, user-friendly study features, and sensitivity to the needs of a visually oriented generation of believers creates a unique and unprecedented type of commentary series. With insight from many of today's finest biblical scholars and a stunning visual format, it is our hope that the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* will be a welcome addition to the personal libraries of all students of Scripture.

*The Editors*



# HOW TO USE THIS COMMENTARY

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* is written by accomplished biblical scholars with a wide array of readers in mind. Whether engaged in the study of Scripture in a church setting or in a college or seminary classroom, all students of the Bible will find a number of useful features throughout the commentary that are helpful for interpreting the Bible.

## **Basic Design of the Volumes**

Each volume features an Introduction to a particular book of the Bible, providing a brief guide to information that is necessary for reading and interpreting the text: the historical setting, literary design, and theological significance. Each Introduction also includes a comprehensive outline of the particular book under study.

Each chapter of the commentary investigates the text according to logical divisions in a particular book of the Bible. Sometimes these divisions follow the traditional chapter segmentation, while at other times the textual units consist of sections of chapters or portions of more than one chapter. The divisions reflect the literary structure of a book and offer a guide for selecting passages that are useful in preaching and teaching.

An accompanying CD-ROM offers powerful searching and research tools. The commentary text, Sidebars, and visuals are all reproduced on a CD that is fully indexed and searchable. Pairing a text version with a digital resource also allows unprecedented flexibility and freedom for the reader. Carry the text version to locations you most enjoy doing research while knowing that the CD offers a portable alternative for travel from the office, church, classroom, and your home.

## **Commentary and Connections**

As each chapter explores a textual unit, the discussion centers around two basic sections: *Commentary* and *Connections*. The analysis of a passage, including the details of its language, the history reflected in the text, and the literary forms found in the text, are the main focus

of the *Commentary* section. The primary concern of the *Commentary* section is to explore the theological issues presented by the Scripture passage. *Connections* presents potential applications of the insights provided in the *Commentary* section. The *Connections* portion of each chapter considers what issues are relevant for teaching and suggests useful methods and resources. *Connections* also identifies themes suitable for sermon planning and suggests helpful approaches for preaching on the Scripture text.

### **Sidebars**

The *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* provides a unique hyper-link format that quickly guides the reader to additional insights. Since other more technical or supplementary information is vital for understanding a text and its implications, the volumes feature distinctive Sidebars, or special-interest boxes, that provide a wealth of information on such matters as:

- Historical information (such as chronological charts, lists of kings or rulers, maps, descriptions of monetary systems, descriptions of special groups, descriptions of archaeological sites or geographical settings).
- Graphic outlines of literary structure (including such items as poetry, chiasm, repetition, epistolary form).
- Definition or brief discussions of technical or theological terms and issues.
- Insightful quotations that are not integrated into the running text but are relevant to the passage under discussion.
- Notes on the history of interpretation (Augustine on the Good Samaritan, Luther on James, Stendahl on Romans, etc.).
- Line drawings, photographs, and other illustrations relevant for understanding the historical context or interpretive significance of the text.
- Presentation and discussion of works of fine art that have interpreted a Scripture passage.

Each Sidebar is printed in color and is referenced at the appropriate place in the *Commentary* or *Connections* section with a color-coded title that directs the reader to the relevant Sidebar. In addition, helpful icons appear in the Sidebars, which provide the reader with visual cues to the type of material that is explained in each Sidebar. Throughout the commentary, these four distinct hyperlinks provide useful links in an easily recognizable design.



### **Alpha & Omega Language**

This icon identifies the information as a language-based tool that offers further exploration of the Scripture selection. This could include syntactical information, word studies, popular or additional uses of the word(s) in question, additional contexts in which the term appears, and the history of the term's translation. All non-English terms are transliterated into the appropriate English characters.



### **Culture/Context**

This icon introduces further comment on contextual or cultural details that shed light on the Scripture selection. Describing the place and time to which a Scripture passage refers is often vital to the task of biblical interpretation. Sidebar items introduced with this icon could include geographical, historical, political, social, topographical, or economic information. Here, the reader may find an excerpt of an ancient text or inscription that sheds light on the text. Or one may find a description of some element of ancient religion such as Baalism in Canaan or the Hero cult in the Mystery Religions of the Greco-Roman world.



### **Interpretation**

Sidebars that appear under this icon serve a general interpretive function in terms of both historical and contemporary renderings. Under this heading, the reader might find a selection from classic or contemporary literature that illuminates the Scripture text or a significant quotation from a famous sermon that addresses the passage. Insights are drawn from various sources, including literature, worship, theater, church history, and sociology.



### **Additional Resources Study**

Here, the reader finds a convenient list of useful resources for further investigation of the selected Scripture text, including books, journals, websites, special collections, organizations, and societies. Specialized discussions of works not often associated with biblical studies may also appear here.

### **Additional Features**

Each volume also includes a basic Bibliography on the biblical book under study. Other bibliographies on selected issues are often included that point the reader to other helpful resources.

Notes at the end of each chapter provide full documentation of sources used and contain additional discussions of related matters.

Abbreviations used in each volume are explained in a list of abbreviations found after the Table of Contents.

Readers of the *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* can regularly visit the Internet support site for news, information, updates, and enhancements to the series at <[www.helwys.com/commentary](http://www.helwys.com/commentary)>.

Several thorough indexes enable the reader to locate information quickly. These indexes include:

- An *Index of Sidebars* groups content from the special-interest boxes by category (maps, fine art, photographs, drawings, etc.).
- An *Index of Scriptures* lists citations to particular biblical texts.
- An *Index of Topics* lists alphabetically the major subjects, names, topics, and locations referenced or discussed in the volume.
- An *Index of Modern Authors* organizes contemporary authors whose works are cited in the volume.

# INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul, to whom thirteen letters in the New Testament are attributed, occupies a tenuous position within the canon of many modern people. In the nineteenth century his detractors were legion. None was more pointed than Ernest Renan. Near the end of his *The History of the Origins of Christianity, Book III: Saint Paul*,<sup>1</sup> Renan summarized his estimate of the apostle.

After having been for three hundred years the Christian doctor in an eminent degree, thanks to orthodox Protestantism, Paul seems in our day near the end of his reign: Jesus, on the contrary, is more living than ever. It is no more the Epistle to the Romans which is the recapitulation of Christianity, it is the Sermon on the Mount. True Christianity which will last eternally comes from the Gospels, not from the Epistles of Paul. The writings of Paul have been a danger and a stumbling block, the cause of the chief faults of Christian theology. Paul is the father of the subtle Augustine, of the arid Thomas Aquinas, of the sombre Calvinist, of the bitter Jansenist, of the ferocious theology which condemns and predestinates to damnation.

The distaste of people like Renan for Paul in the nineteenth century has its parallels today. Paul is often dismissed both for his theology and for his ethics. On the one hand, his theology runs counter to the dominant cultural trends. For many persons it is easier to adapt the historians' Jesus to the norms of political correctness than Paul. His teaching about justification apart from law is often viewed as a doctrine directed against Judaism. If he abrogated the Law, then he abrogated Judaism, so the argument goes. The Paul who advocated a law-free gospel is, therefore, wrongly regarded as anti-Jewish. Consider the following rhetorical question (with an assumed answer of NO):

Can a Paul who devotes his energies to the creation and maintaining of sectarian groups hostile to all non-members, and especially to the Jewish community from which in fact they derived, still be seen as the bearer of a message with profound universal significance?<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, a misreading of Pauline positions on women and a correct reading of Paul's stance on homosexuality have gained him the hatred of many feminists<sup>3</sup> and prohomosexual advocates. Even those who do not openly oppose Paul often denigrate him by neglect.

**Paul**

The Apostle Paul is shown to have many faces as depicted throughout the history of art. In this painting by Velázquez, St. Paul is pensive and not overly invested in posing for a photo-op. In the various art depictions of Paul, he is almost always shown holding or somehow engaged with a book, which has become an attribute of his epistles.

Diego Rodríguez Velázquez. (1599–1660). *Saint Paul*. Museu d'Art de Catalunya. Barcelona, Spain.  
(Credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

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Churches that follow the lectionary in their worship and preaching may become essentially Synoptic Gospel churches. The lectionary, which was touted as a means of avoiding a canon within a canon, in those cases ends up creating that very thing. Paul, along with the Gospel of John, is marginalized in some Christian preaching. In effect, Paul is excluded from the *de facto* canon. Paul's treatment today is in some ways analogous to that accorded to the Revelation

to John: despised and/or ignored. In order for there to be a rehabilitation of the apostle Paul in contemporary churches, we must take the long view. The New Testament scholar, Ernst Käsemann, has categorized “the real” Paul’s religious significance this way.

This Paul remains confined in seven letters and for the most part unintelligible to posterity, not only to the ancient Church and the Middle Ages. However, whenever he is rediscovered—which happens almost exclusively in times of crisis—there issues from him explosive power. . . . It is never long, to be sure, until orthodoxy and enthusiasm again master this Paul and banish him once more to his letters. However, the church continues to preserve his letters in her canon and thereby latently preserves . . . the one who for the most part only disturbs her.<sup>4</sup>

The historian Sydney Ahlstrom has described Paul’s theological influence this way: “Just as the European philosophical tradition, in Whitehead’s famous phrase, consists of a series of footnotes to Plato, so Christian theology is a series of footnotes to St. Paul.”<sup>5</sup> Looking back over the history of the church, as regards Paul’s Roman epistle one can see that Paul’s letter to the Romans has had remarkable renewing power in Christian history.<sup>6</sup>

Augustine (AD 354–430), struggling with his sexual addiction, at best could pray, “Give me chastity and continence, but not yet.”<sup>7</sup> Then one day while reading Paul’s letters, he heard a child chanting, “Take up and read; take up and read.” Opening the book, the first thing his eyes fell upon were the words of Romans 13:13-14: “not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Augustine puts his response thusly: “No further would I read; nor needed I; for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused in my heart, all the darkness . . . vanished away.”<sup>8</sup> After his conversion in 386, he was baptized at Easter of 387. Paul’s letter to the Romans had done its work.

Martin Luther’s *Lectures on Romans* (1516) reflect the change that occurred in his life as a result of his encounter with Paul. Luther was accustomed to think of the righteousness of God as something to be feared. In his reading of Psalm 30, the phrase “in your righteousness deliver me” caused him to turn to Romans 1:16-17. Instead of the punitive righteousness of God, Luther now saw a reference to God’s forgiving righteousness by which in mercy God makes us just. He says of his experience: “Then it seemed to me as if I were born anew and that I had entered into the open gates of

Paradise. The whole Bible suddenly took on a new aspect for me.”<sup>9</sup> Out of this encounter with Romans, the German Reformation was born. Of Romans, Luther said it is so important “that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, (and) occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul.”<sup>10</sup>

In *John Wesley’s Journal*, Wesley recounts his experience on 24 May 1738. He says that in the evening he

went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where someone was reading from Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my 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.<sup>11</sup>

Once again Romans functioned as a catalyst for renewal.

While studying at the Orthodox Theological Seminary in Bucharest, Dumitru Cornilescu began his search for spiritual vitality. It led him to the study of the Scriptures. He determined to translate the Scriptures into Romanian. He began this project in 1916 and completed it within six years. This involved him in a study of Romans. As a result of this study he came to believe matters previously unknown to him. All are sinners; the wages of sin is death; sinners may be justified freely through Christ because of God’s atonement in Jesus’ blood. “I took this forgiveness for myself,” he said; “I accepted Christ as my living Saviour.” From that point on, Cornilescu was assured that he belonged to God. His translation of the Scriptures (1921) became the standard Bible Society text for Romanians.<sup>12</sup>

In 1918 a young Swiss pastor named Karl Barth produced a commentary on Romans that reflected his encounter with the text of Paul’s letter. In it he protested in the name of Paul against the premises of the liberal theology of his day. In the Preface to the second edition, he held up Calvin as a model for reading Romans.<sup>13</sup> Calvin, he said, set himself to rethink the whole material and to wrestle with it until the walls that separated the sixteenth century from the first became transparent. In this way, Calvin and the modern reader are brought face to face with the subject matter of the Scriptures: the Godness of God and the sinfulness of humanity. As a result of his encounter with Romans, Barth launched a major reorientation of theology in the twentieth century.

What can be illustrated with examples from noteworthy people in the church's history is confirmed by the experience of countless everyday Christians. The Pauline letter to the Romans has the potential to renew individuals, the church, and its theology.<sup>14</sup> A fresh reading of this seminal document holds the promise of new life. The experience of new life as a result of a reading of Romans offers the necessary legitimization of Paul's place in the canon. Such a reading begins with an attempt to situate Romans in its original historical context.

### **The Social Context of Romans**

Knowledge of the history of the Jews in Rome is indispensable if one is to understand anything about the origins of Christianity in the city. We may begin in the second century BC. Judas Maccabeus sent envoys to Rome about 160 BC to establish an alliance and peace with the Romans,<sup>15</sup> a proposal agreed to by the Roman Senate.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps Jews were moving back and forth between Jerusalem and Rome by this time. The earliest Roman evidence for Jews in Rome comes from Valerius Maximus.<sup>17</sup> He said that in 139 BC the Praetor Hispalus expelled from Rome the Jews, the Chaldeans, and the Asiatic astrologers, that is, religious practitioners from the Orient. After 63 BC Pompey brought a great number of Jews, including a member of the ruling family, to Rome as captives.<sup>18</sup> In Cicero's time, Cicero defended one Flaccus against the charge that the Praetor had misappropriated funds of Asiatic Jews intended for the temple in Jerusalem. Roman Jews at that time were so numerous and influential that they tried to determine the outcome of the trial.<sup>19</sup> Cicero's defense utilized anti-Jewish prejudice. The number of Jews, he said, was large, they stuck together, were influential in political assemblies, and adhered to a barbarian superstition.<sup>20</sup> Julius Caesar sent a letter to the people of Parium about the Jews. In it he said that even in Rome Jews were not forbidden to assemble and live according to their religious customs.<sup>21</sup> At the death of Julius Caesar, Roman Jews provided an honor guard at his gravesite for several nights.<sup>22</sup> When Herod the Great died, more than 8,000 Roman Jews escorted the Palestinian legion that arrived in Rome to protest the rule of Archelaus.<sup>23</sup> Even if Josephus's numbers are exaggerated, they show the Jewish community was sizable by the end of the first century BC. Philo said that in the time of Augustus the Jews occupied the large section of Rome across the Tiber and that most were free Roman citizens.<sup>24</sup> [Roman Emperors]

### Roman Emperors



Paul's ministry was carried out in the context of Roman imperial power. He would have lived as a Christian Messianist under four different emperors: Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. A list of Roman emperors from Augustus through Hadrian enables one to position Paul more accurately.

Augustus (27 BC–AD 14)

Tiberius (AD 14–37)

Caligula (AD 37–41)

Claudius (AD 41–54)—Priscilla and Aquila were among those expelled from Rome in AD 49. According to Acts 18:1-2, they came to Corinth and met Paul during this period.

Nero (AD 54–68)—Romans was written and Paul went to Rome in this period. Priscilla and Aquila were back in Rome at this point. Tradition locates the martyrdoms of both Peter and Paul in Nero's reign.

Galba, Otho, Vitellius (AD 69)

Vespasian (AD 69–79)

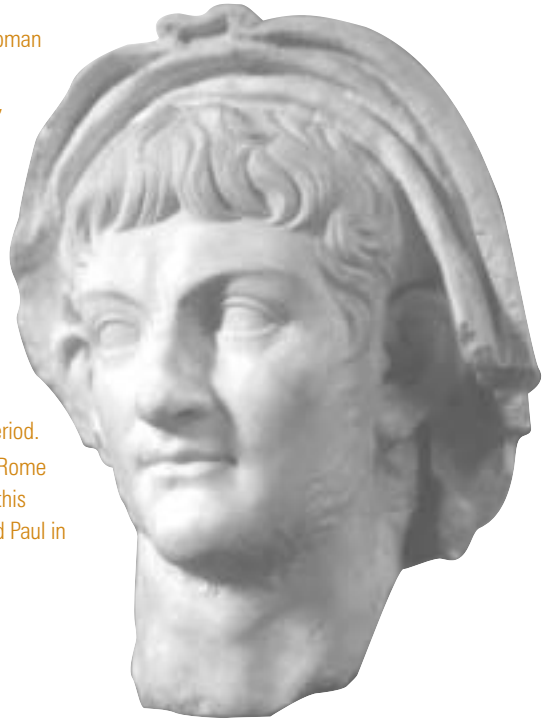
Titus (AD 79–81)

Domitian (AD 81–96)

Nerva (AD 96–98)

Trajan (AD 98–117)

Hadrian (AD 117–138)



*Bust of Nero.* AD 54–68. Marble. Ancient Corinth Archaeological Museum. Corinth, Greece. (Credit: Mitchell Reddish)

In AD 19 Tiberius expelled the Jews and the followers of Isis from the city.<sup>25</sup> Inscriptions nevertheless reveal many synagogues in the city, mostly using Greek. Inscriptional evidence indicates that there may have been ten to thirteen synagogues in Rome in the first century.<sup>26</sup> No single, controlling organization supervised the individual synagogues. This loose structure provided an essential prerequisite for Christian Judaism's early penetration of Rome. In AD 49 Claudius expelled the Jews because of their disturbance of the public order.<sup>27</sup> **[Jewish Synagogues in Rome]** As a result, Jewish Christians also had to leave the city. Aquila and Priscilla, for example, arrived in Corinth and there became coworkers with Paul.<sup>28</sup> In Nero's reign, the Jews returned to Rome in great numbers. Their influence increased, in part because Nero's wife, Poppaea, was friendly to them.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Jews were generally objects of derision by the Romans. They were depicted as beggars,<sup>30</sup> fortune-tellers,<sup>31</sup> lazy folk,<sup>32</sup> people of superstition<sup>33</sup> and sexual lust,<sup>34</sup> with a tendency toward proselytism.<sup>35</sup> The Gentiles of Rome did not like the Jews.

The origins of Christianity in Rome are unclear. The association of Peter and Paul with the founding of the church by Irenaeus<sup>36</sup> is legend<sup>37</sup> but Christians certainly existed in Rome prior to the Claudian expulsion of AD 49. [Extracanonical Traditions about Paul.] The fourth-century commentator Ambrosiaster says that the Romans had early embraced the faith of Christ but in a Jewish form.<sup>38</sup> This fits with the evidence. After the expulsion of Jewish Christians in 49, only Gentile Christians remained in Rome. When Jewish Christians who had been expelled returned early in the reign of Nero, they found a dominant Gentile Christianity in place.

There is no reason to assume this Gentile Christianity was all of one type. Both Jewish and Gentile Christianity manifested significant diversity in the first century. Raymond Brown has argued that the NT reflects at least four types of Christians, distinguished by their attitudes towards the law. First, there were Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who insisted on full observance of the Mosaic Law, including circumcision (e.g., Gal 2:4; Paul's opponents in Galatia; Acts 15:5). Second, there were the Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who did not insist on circumcision but did require some Jewish observance, such as that related to food laws (e.g., those from James and Peter in Gal 2:11-14; James in Acts 15). Third, there were Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who did not insist on circumcision and did not require observance of food laws (e.g., Paul's attitude toward his Gentile converts). Fourth, there were Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who did not insist on circumcision, observance of the food laws, and who saw no abiding significance in the Jewish cult and feasts (e.g., the Hellenists in Acts 6:1-6; 6:8-7:60; Fourth Evangelist; Hebrews).<sup>39</sup> It is possible that the Roman Gentile Christians had representatives from each of these four options among them. They would not, of necessity, have been reduced only to a Gentile Christianity that shared the Roman disdain for Jews generally and adhered to position four. Those Jewish Christians who returned, moreover, were not all of the same stripe. Some, such as Priscilla and Aquila, had become Pauline-type Christians; others remained more in the mold of Christians



### Jewish Synagogues in Rome

No remains of specific synagogues have been located within the city of Rome proper, although many are known to have existed. During the reign of Claudius (AD 41–54), extensive renovation was done to Rome's port at Ostia. Among the buildings that can be dated to this period is a Jewish synagogue. The earliest phase of the Ostia synagogue pictured here exhibits brickwork typical of Claudian-period construction. The edict of Claudius that expelled Jews from Rome may not have mandated their departure from all of Italy. Conceivably, Jewish Christians, including Priscilla and Aquila, may have met in this synagogue.



Ostia synagogue. (Credit: Scott Nash)

### Extracanonial Traditions about Paul



Later Christian authors offered certain alleged information about Paul. Examples include the following:

- Jerome, in his *Commentary on Philemon*, says: “We have heard this story. They say that the parents of the Apostle Paul were from Gischala, a region of Judaea, and that, when the whole province was devastated by the hand of Rome and the Jews scattered throughout the world, they were moved to Tarsus, a town of Cilicia.” The historicity of this tradition is possible but not certain. (Murphy-O'Connor)
- The *Acts of Paul* gives a legendary description of Paul's appearance: “a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness.” The historical value of this description is doubtful.
- A number of early Christian traditions claim Paul was beheaded under Nero (*Acts of Paul* 10; *Acts of Peter* 3.1; Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 36; Eusebius, *Church History* 2.22.1-2; 2.25.5-8). This claim is widely regarded as historical.

True to the compositional excesses of Mannerism, this painting by Tintoretto captures the dramatic moment of beheading through the use of stark contrasts of light and shadow. The executioner's head is couched in the darkness of the cloud and his sword, moments from release, is aligned on the same plane as the head of Paul, which is, by contrast, radiant in light. Paul's armor is shown at the feet of the executioner. However, judging by the aura of light that bathes his head and the rays of light streaming down upon him, Paul is not naked as he has now put on the “armor of light” (Rom 13:12).



Jacopo Tintoretto. 1518–1594. *Decapitation of Saint Paul*. S. Maria dell'Orto, Venice, Italy. (Credit: Camerphoto/Art Resource, NY)

associated with James and were suspicious of Paul.<sup>40</sup> When Paul wrote Romans, therefore, at least three types of Christians were in the city: conservative Jewish and Gentile Christians (Brown's positions 1 and 2), Gentile Christians impatient with Jewish ways (Brown's position 4), and Pauline-type Christians from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds (Brown's position 3).

These Christians were scattered in small house churches with no central governing authority.<sup>41</sup> Recent scholarship has identified at least five churches or cell groups reflected in Romans 16:<sup>42</sup> (1) 16:5a—the church in the house of Prisca and Aquila; (2) 16:10b—those who belong to the household of Aristobulus; (3) 16:11b—those in the household of Narcissus; (4) 16:14—the

brothers; and (5) 16:15—the saints. And these were just the ones about which Paul had knowledge! They were, moreover, often in tension with one another.<sup>43</sup> Recognition of this elementary diversity allows the reader to make sense of the fact that Paul wrote to Gentile Christians (1:5-6, 13-15; 11:13; 15:15-16) on the one hand and the fact that much of his argument sounds as if it was addressed to Jewish and Jewish Christian people on the other. Some Gentile Christians could be Judaizing, while some could be impatient with Judaism.<sup>44</sup>

That Paul wrote Romans no one doubts. Who was this one called Paul? In the first place, he was a Jew. In Romans 11:1 he described himself as “an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.” In Philippians 3:5 he referred to being “of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee.” In 2 Corinthians 11:22, 24, he identified himself as a Hebrew, an Israelite, and of the seed of Abraham. From his letters it is clear that he was competent in Greek. He could use both the Hellenistic diatribe form of argument and Jewish methods of interpreting Scripture. In the second place, he had become a devotee of Christ when God’s Son was revealed to him (Gal 1:15-16; 1 Cor 15:7; 9:1). He then became an evangelist, a missionary, and a church planter in areas untouched by the gospel (1 Cor 15:10; Gal 1:16; 2 Cor 10:16; Rom 15:18-20). In the third place, he remained a Jew. W. D. Davies has observed:

In accepting the Jew, Jesus, as the Messiah, Paul did not think in terms of moving into a new religion but of having found the final expression and intent of the Jewish tradition within which he himself had been born. . . . He would not have conceived of himself as having ceased to be a Jew.<sup>45</sup>

How can this be? The many Judaisms that existed between the third century BC and the second century AD are often called Middle Judaism.<sup>46</sup> The genus Middle Judaism encompassed a variety of species: Pharisaism, Essenism, apocalyptic, mystical Judaism, Christian Messianists, and many more. As a result of the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in AD 70 and again in AD 135, most of these species perished. The two forms of Middle Judaism that have survived to this day are rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. According to Alan Segal, both would

consider themselves to be the heirs to the promises given to Abraham and Isaac and they are indeed fraternal twins emerging from the

nation-state of second commonwealth Israel. As brothers often do, they picked different, even opposing ways to preserve the family's heritage.<sup>47</sup>

Paul, then, fits into Middle Judaism before AD 70. He represents a form of Hellenistic Christian Messianic Judaism. His conversion, therefore, was from one form of Judaism (a nonmessianic Pharisaism with an apocalyptic-mystical cast to it) to another (Christian Messianism). Consequently, as James D. G. Dunn points out, "his writings can still be classified as Jewish literature."<sup>48</sup>

Many of the positions held by Paul were held by other Jews of the time. For example, other ancient Jews beside Paul did not regard circumcision as necessary for Gentiles to be saved (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.2.3-4+34-48; the Noahide commands).<sup>49</sup> Others Jews did not regard literal observance of the ceremonial laws as necessary for God's people (Philo, *Migration of Abraham* 89-93). Other Jews did not believe ancestry/ethnicity guaranteed inclusion in the Israel to be saved (John the Baptist; Qumran). Other Jews did believe an individual's beliefs and behavior would determine one's inclusion/exclusion from God's people and the coming age (*m. Sanh* 10:1-4, read in its entirety). Other Jews did not make Moses central to Jewish identity (e.g., *History of the Rechabites* and *4 Baruch*, neither of which mentions Moses or the Law and both of which portray an optional religious authority). Daniel Boyarin asserts, "There is no reason, a priori, . . . why believing that Jesus was the Messiah would be considered as beyond the pale of rabbinic Judaism, any more than Rabbi Akiva's belief in Bar Kolchba as Messiah rendered him a heretic."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, his distinctive religious synthesis would have seemed "strange" to most other Jews.<sup>51</sup>

Two issues especially help clarify Paul's position within the Judaism of his time. First, the two forms of Judaism with which Paul was involved were very different in their anthropological assumptions.<sup>52</sup> The anthropology underlying Pharisaism/rabbinic Judaism was optimistic. Humans, it was assumed, have free will. Its soteriology, therefore, was synergistic. Salvation depends partly on good works.<sup>53</sup> Paul's anthropology, at least for the time after he became a Messianist and probably before, was pessimistic. Humans, he contended, did not have free will in the area of soteriology. His soteriology, therefore, was *sola gratia* (by grace alone). Good works arose out of God's action in and through the Christian. This difference did not mean Paul rejected Judaism. He did not see himself as ceasing to be Jewish but as having found the

true form of Judaism. His argument in Romans operates within Judaism and contends for a specific understanding of what the Scriptures of Israel really teach.

Second, Paul's relation to non-Christian Judaism has been understood in a variety of ways. (1) Judaism was legalistic; Paul was right in recognizing and opposing it. (2) Judaism was not legalistic; Paul or his interpreters got it wrong. The apostle either did not oppose Jewish legalism, or, if he did, he was misrepresenting ancient Judaism. (3) Judaism was not legalistic but some Jewish adherents got it wrong and were legalists (e.g., *4 Ezra*; *T. Abr.*; *Ap Zeph*); Paul was right about the latter group. (4) Middle Judaism was diverse. (a) Some were legalistic (e.g., Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to become Jews = part of God's people; cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.17-48). (b) Many were synergistic. They advocated covenantal nomism. A Jew got into the covenant by God's grace but remained in the covenant, and got in the New Age beyond the resurrection, by works of the Law (e.g., 1 QS; 2 Bar 41, 42, 51; *m. Sanh* 10:1-4). (c) Some held to *sola gratia* (by grace alone) insofar as both Gentile and Jew were concerned (e.g., LXX Jer 38:31-34; LXX Isa 2:1-4 and Tob 14:6-7; *Ap Abr*). This piety held that one not only got in by grace but also remained in the people of God by grace and ultimately got into the New Age beyond the resurrection by grace. I regard the fourth position to be the most accurate of this group. It will be the position of this commentary that Paul criticized (a) and (b) in the name of (c). His critique was an intra-Jewish argument. There was one genus: Judaism. Within that genus, a number of species were in tension with one another over who represented the true tradition with reference to the Scriptures of Israel. Paul was an example of one of those species of Middle Judaism. His critique was also an intra-Christian argument. The diversity of non-Christian Judaism about the role of the Law was reflected in early Christian messianic Judaism as well. Paul, then, was also a critic of Christian messianists who fell into categories (a) and (b).

Paul wrote Romans at the end of his mission in the Aegean area just as he was about to embark on a journey to Jerusalem with the collection for the saints there.<sup>54</sup> [Pauline Chronology] The letter was likely sent from Corinth or its environs.<sup>55</sup> Paul's secretary was one Tertius.<sup>56</sup> It was probably delivered by Phoebe.<sup>57</sup> The letter is now generally considered to be a unity. Chapter 16 is believed by most to belong with 1-15 as an integral part of the letter.<sup>58</sup> When Paul wrote Romans, he had to address the various types of Christians in Rome. Romans 1:5-6, 13; 11:13-32; chapter 14; and 15:15-16

reflect Gentile Christians who are independent of Paul's perspective. Romans 14:2,3,5,21 reflect Jewish and Gentile Christians of a different mind from Paul. Romans 16:3,5 reflect Christians of a Pauline persuasion, whether Jewish or Gentile Christian.

### **The Stated Aims of Romans**

In Romans Paul had at least three stated aims. The first was that Paul wrote to get the Roman Christians to pray for him as he went to Jerusalem (15:30). Two things in particular were requested. He asked for prayer that he "may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea" (15:31a). He also asked the Romans to intercede that "my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints" (15:31b). So when Paul wrote Romans he was thinking especially of the collection visit he was undertaking in order to demonstrate the unity of Gentile and Jewish Christians in one church. Paul's second stated aim was his desire to impart some spiritual gift to strengthen the Roman Christians (1:11-12; 15:15-16). This spiritual gift was doubtless his gospel, which offered a basis for the unity of Gentile and Jewish Christians in the church. The third stated aim was to get the Roman Christians to speed him on his way to Spain (15:24). This, of course, would not have been possible if the various types of Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome were not united. These three stated aims in writing indicate that Romans was written both because of Paul's own plans and because of needs in the Roman church. A consensus seems to be building, moreover, that the main need in the Roman church addressed by Paul was that of resolving the disunity between Jews and Gentiles. If so, then the spiritual gift Paul wanted to impart was his gospel, which was to be the basis of unity for the Roman congregations.

These occasions functioned as catalysts for Paul's letter. The argument of Romans, however, was determined by the logic of the gospel as Paul had thought it out during his Aegean mission. In this sense Romans is a summary of Paul's mature thought insofar as it applied to the Roman occasion. This means, on the one hand, that Romans has relevance beyond the specific occasions that evoked the letter. For example, insofar as sin affects Jew and Gentile alike, it is a human problem. Insofar as Christ saves Jew and Gentile alike, he is a universal savior. This means, on the other hand, that Romans does not offer a summary of all of Paul's teaching but only of those points that were called for by the letter's occasions. Romans, then, is an occasional letter but with universal applicability—not either-or but both-and.

### Pauline Chronology



Establishing an exact chronology of Paul's life is difficult. The one fixed point is provided by an inscription found at Delphi that refers to Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia.

Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, 12th year of tribunician power, acclaimed emperor for the 26th time, father of the country, sends greetings to [\_\_\_\_\_]. For long have I been well-disposed to the city of Delphi and solicitous for its prosperity, and I have always observed the cult of the Pythian Apollo. Now since it is said to be destitute of citizens, as my friend and proconsul L. Iunius Gallio recently reported to me, and desiring that Delphi should regain its former splendour, I command you to invite well-born people also from other cities to come to Delphi as new inhabitants, and to accord them and their children all the privileges of the Delphians as being citizens on like and equal terms. For if some are transferred as colonists to these regions. . . .

From the inscription it is possible to date Gallio's service either to AD 50–51 or 51–52. Then attention is called to Acts 18:12, which says: "When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal." Putting the two pieces of evidence together makes it likely that Paul came before Gallio in 51. If so, all other dates are derived from reasoning backward and forward from 51. This does not lend itself to scholarly agreement. One possible schema, given by Karl Donfried, is as follows.

Conversion of Paul (AD 33)  
 First missionary journey (AD 47–48)  
 Apostolic conference in Jerusalem (AD 49)  
 Paul's arrival in Corinth (AD 50)  
 Paul leaves Corinth (AD 51 or 52)  
 Paul arrives in Ephesus (AD 53)  
 Paul leaves Ephesus (AD 56)  
 Paul's arrival in Corinth (AD 56)—the time of the writing of Romans  
 Paul's arrival in Jerusalem (AD 57)  
 Paul before Festus (AD 59)  
 Paul's arrival in Rome (AD 60)

Translation of Gallio inscription taken from Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 141-42.

Karl P. Donfried, "Chronology," *ABD*; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1.1016.



#### Gallio Inscription

A group of nine fragments on an inscription found at Delphi and housed in the Delphi museum that refer to the proconsul Gallio mentioned in Acts 18:12. (Credit: Charles H. Talbert)

## The Literary Presentation of Romans

Romans opens and closes as an ancient letter would. The opening in 1:1-15 contains the usual A to B, greeting (expanded by Paul's explanatory material), and a prayer (also expanded). The closing in 15:14–16:27 contains the summing up, the greetings, the exhortations, and the liturgical ending that one expects from Pauline letters. A number of attempts have been made to determine exactly what kind of letter Romans is: an ambassadorial letter<sup>59</sup> or a letter essay,<sup>60</sup> for example. So far none has gained a consensus. Romans is

so complex that no one epistolary classification describes it.<sup>61</sup> [First Page of Romans in Erasmus's Greek New Testament of 1524]

Romans is also a rhetorical act. Within the letter envelope is a long sustained argument running from 1:16 to 15:13 that some scholars think conforms to the rules of ancient rhetoric. Romans, it is argued, is a deliberative speech, one that seeks to persuade. It contains at least an *exordium* (1:1-12), a *narratio* (1:13-15), a *propositio* (1:16-17), a *confirmatio* (1:18–15:13), and a *peroratio* (15:14–16:23) as the ancient handbooks dictated.<sup>62</sup> Comparison of the proposals of various scholars' suggestions reveals great diversity of opinion about what parts of Romans belong to what categories of ancient rhetoric. Again, Romans' argument is so complex that it cannot be forced into artificial categories. Indeed, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.16 says that often the rules stated in the ancient rhetorical handbooks do not apply to a good speech. A speech using deliberative rhetoric, for example, often did not include all parts of other rhetorical forms. The precise rhetorical divisions of Romans are as yet unagreed upon by interpreters. Perhaps this is because the species and organization of ancient rhetoric, woodenly applied, are not appropriate to analyze the Pauline epistles.<sup>63</sup>

Romans 1:16–15:13 is most definitely an extended argument. There is general agreement on its thought units, save one. The parenetic section runs from 12:1–15:13. The doctrinal section covers 1:18–11:36. This doctrinal section consists of three parts. Chapters 9–11 are clearly a unit. Chapters 1–8 fall into two units. The basic issue is where the break comes between the two parts. Some argue for chapters 1–4 and 5–8 as the two units. Others prefer chapters 1–5 and 6–8. Still others contend that the break comes at the end of 5:11, yielding 1:18–5:11 and 5:12–8:39. In this commentary preference is given to the break at 5:11.

General agreement exists that the theme of Romans is given in 1:16-17. Less agreement exists about what that theme is. Is it the righteousness of God? Is it that the righteous shall live by faith? Is it salvation? Is it universalism (to Jew and Greek; to all who believe)? Is it the gospel? Probably all of the above make up the theme of Romans. If these components are focused in any way, it is likely that Romans is about the gospel of the righteousness of God revealed in the faithfulness of Jesus that issues in salvation for all who believe. This focus of Romans is on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in salvation history, but it is not to be reduced to that. It is above all concerned about how God's saving activity deals with the guilt and power of sin in the lives of humans and how that



#### First Page of Romans in Erasmus's Greek NT of 1524



First page of Romans, taken from the Greek New Testament of 1524, edited by Jacob Ceperinus. (Credit: Baylor University Rare Books Collection)

saving activity issues in Christian communal unity and ethical behavior in the world.<sup>64</sup> An outline of the letter as a whole might look like this:

1:1-7 Salutation

1: 8-15 Prayer form

- 1:16-17 Thesis: the gospel of God's righteousness
- 1:18-15:13 Argument
  - 1:18-8:39 God justifies
    - 1:18-5:11 From the human condition to God's remedy to the role of the Law to ultimate salvation
    - 5:12-8:39 From the human condition to God's remedy to the role of the Law to ultimate salvation
  - 9:1-11:36 God is righteous
  - 12:1-15:13 God's righteousness in human behavior: what slavery to righteousness (6:19) looks like
    - 12:1-13:14 General parenesis
    - 14:1-15:13 Specific parenesis
- 15:14-16:27 Letter closing

The audience addressed in 1-8 consisted probably of Gentile Christians who thought in Jewish categories. While some of this section is a debate with non-Christian Judaism, it is not necessary that Jews or Jewish Christians were the intended audience of the debate. The Gentile Christians were almost certainly originally God-fearers. They would have known the law (e.g., 7:1) and would have understood non-Christian Jewish objections to Paul's gospel. The audience in chapters 9-11 was composed of Gentile Christians; in chapters 12-15 probably both Jewish and Gentile Christians of diverse persuasions were intended. The purpose pursued in 1-8 is the destruction of Jewish presumption and objections, in 9-11 it is the overturning of Gentile pride, and in 12-15 it is opposition to mutual arrogance. The theological base for the argument is the good news of the righteousness of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In 1-8 God justifies all who believe, in 9-11 God is righteous/faithful to the covenant promise, and in 12-15 God's people are called to show what being a slave of righteousness looks like.

Underlying the argument of Romans was a wider world view and belief system on which Paul drew.<sup>65</sup> It may be inferred from his writings from the period of the Aegean mission. In order rightly to interpret Paul the thinker, it is necessary to understand what this wider world view was. What was it? Simply put, Paul read his Scriptures, the Scriptures of Israel, in a way that valued certain covenants and not others.<sup>66</sup> Paul made no mention of the covenants with Noah (Gen 9:8-17), Phinehas (Num 25:10-13), Joshua (Josh 24), Josiah (2 Kgs 23), and Ezra (Ezra 9-10; Neh 9-10). The covenant with David was not central to Paul's thought, although it was echoed in the oral tradition taken up in Romans

1:3-4 (“descended from David according to the flesh”) and in the quotation from Isaiah 11:10 in Romans 15:12 (“The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope”). Paul saw the promise to David fulfilled in the reign of Jesus after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20-28). Three covenants of the Scriptures of Israel received significant attention in Paul’s letters: (1) the covenant with Abraham, (2) the covenant through Moses, and (3) the new covenant of Jeremiah 31. Of the three covenants that play significant roles in Paul’s letters, two were highly valued, while the third’s importance was minimized by the apostle. The construct that makes the most sense out of the various things Paul said about the covenants throughout his letters may be summarized as follows. (1) The covenant with Abraham furnished Paul a scriptural way to argue that justification through faith had been God’s plan all along for Jew and Gentile alike. (2) The Law (Mosaic covenant) was a temporary phase in God’s dealings with the covenant people. In spite of its just requirements, it was impotent because of human sin. With the coming of Christ, the Law (Mosaic covenant) had come to an end as a part of ongoing salvation history. (3) The Mosaic covenant had been replaced in salvation history by the prophesied New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 in which God enables the people’s faithfulness to the relationship. This way of reading the Scriptures of Israel underlies all of Paul’s thought in Romans.

Paul’s thought in this regard is seen most clearly when set against the backdrop of Middle Judaism. The covenants were variously valued by different groups in Middle Judaism. For example, the *Psalms of Solomon* refer to the covenant with Abraham (9:9-10; 18:3) and to the Mosaic covenant (10:4), but the covenant central in their thought is the Davidic one (e.g., *Pss Sol* 17 and 18). The new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-34, moreover, was absent from Second Temple Judaism, except for Qumran and Christian Messianic Judaism. At Qumran, new covenant (CD-A 6.18-19; 8.20-21; CD-B 19.33-34; 20.11-13; 1QpHab 2.3) was used interchangeably with other expressions such as “covenant of God,” “this covenant,” “covenant of the everlasting community,” and others.<sup>67</sup> Qumran did not set “new covenant” in opposition to “old covenant.” Rather “new covenant” was used over against “broken covenant.” So, at Qumran, “new” referred to the restoration of the law, which CD saw fulfilled in the coming of the Teacher of Righteousness.<sup>68</sup> The Covenanters, then, saw the new covenant as a return to the original intentions of the Mosaic Torah.<sup>69</sup> (This trajectory continues into the earliest rabbinic exegetical use of

Jeremiah 31:31-34. *Sifra* on Leviticus, edited in the third century AD, juxtaposes Jeremiah 31 with Leviticus 26:9 in order to clarify the latter v.. The result is a reading in which the promise to maintain the covenant in Leviticus 26 is identified with the making of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31.<sup>70</sup>)

Among the early Christian Messianic Jewish references to the new covenant are: Gal 4:21-31 (?); 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6,14; Rom 7:6; 11:27; Heb 8:6-13; and Luke 22:20. Some less reliable manuscripts of Mark 14:24 add “new” before covenant. A similar situation applies in Matthew 26:28. In both cases, the “new” was likely added to make explicit what is implicit in the best texts. The reference in John 13:34 to a “new commandment” assumes a new covenant; the “new song” of Revelation 5:9 also assumes a new deliverance/covenant. Christian Messianic Judaism saw the old Sinai covenant as defective and inefficacious.<sup>71</sup> Paul, then, fit into Christian Messianic Judaism’s way of thinking about a new covenant that replaced an old, defective one. In addition, he focused on the Abrahamic covenant as a basis for Gentile inclusion in God’s people. Although the term “new covenant” is not used in Romans, it is part of the world view Paul assumed in this epistle. In chapters 1–4 , 9–11, and 15 the covenant with Abraham furnishes the substructure of the argument. In chapters 5–8 it is the New Covenant that functions as the unarticulated matrix of thought that must be understood in order rightly to interpret the argument.

In constructing his arguments, Paul used a number of conventional devices. He frequently employed the diatribe form<sup>72</sup>; the citation of traditional material such as creeds and hymns and Old Testament proof texts is frequent<sup>73</sup>; parallelism and chiasm often shape the material.<sup>74</sup> Any reading of Romans that expects a fruitful harvest will be attuned to the tactics of the Pauline argument.

[Chiasm and Diatribe]

## CONNECTIONS

### How Can Occasional Writings Function As Scripture?

Scholars spend a great deal of effort attempting to describe the original historical situation out of which a biblical writing arose. This is important because the original meaning of what was said is determined by the context in which the words were used. Words do not have an inherent meaning; they mean what they mean in context. In order to determine what the words of a biblical text

### Chiasm and Diatribe

**ΑΩ** A chiasm is an oral and literary method of communication that involves repetition in reverse order. For example, Isa 6:10 is chiastically organized.

A Make the heart of this people fat,  
 B and their ears heavy,  
 C and shut their eyes;  
 C' lest they see with their eyes,  
 B' and hear with their ears.  
 A' and understand with their hearts, and turn and be saved.

The diatribe was a technique of communication used by ancient philosophers that often began with the objection by a real or imagined opponent and then continued with the teacher's answer to the objection. 1 Cor 6:12 is an example of Paul's use of this form.

Paul's opponents are cited first: "All things are lawful for me."  
 To which the apostle responds: "But not all things are beneficial."

Both chiasm and diatribe are found frequently in Paul's letters.

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originally meant, it is necessary to set these words in their original cultural and historical context. Once this is done, the question arises: how does this text with this response to this original situation function as normative for Christians in our time and place? Without trying to be exhaustive, one may note two different ways of using such an occasional writing.

On the one hand, sometimes what the biblical text said becomes relevant because the occasion that was its catalyst is analogous to our own occasion. If we have the same problem, then the word spoken to that problem originally is relevant for us now. Similarity in occasion, then and now, leads to relevance of the word spoken then for the present.

On the other hand, sometimes the occasion that evoked the text is not analogous to our own situation. What then? In such circumstances, one may ask about the general theological and ethical structures that underlie the historical argument. Even if the occasion of the text in its original setting is not ours, the theological substructure of the text's argument can be relevant as a substructure for our dealing with our particular occasion. The view of God, of Christ, of human sin, of salvation, and of the Christian life style all are relevant regardless of occasion.

Take the case of Romans, for example. Romans was written to deal with the particular historical problem of the relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome. (1) The *function* of Paul's gospel was to unify Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome. (2) The *content* of his gospel was a theology that placed Jew and

Gentile on an equal footing: both in their sin and in their salvation. Sometimes a modern situation corresponds to Paul's original one. In such a case, Romans speaks directly. Most of the time, modern situations are different from the original one. Romans still speaks. Although the content of Paul's gospel was elaborated in a particular cultural context, its applicability goes far beyond the original milieu, as Christian history has amply demonstrated.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> (London: Mathieson & Co., n.d.), 302.
- <sup>2</sup> Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 180-81.
- <sup>3</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), dedicates his commentary "To the many many women. . . who suffered because of what 'Paul' wrote and how that was used."
- <sup>4</sup> Ernst Käsemann, "Paul and Early Catholicism," *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 249-50.
- <sup>5</sup> Cited by Wayne Meeks, ed., *The Writings of St. Paul* (NY: W. W. Norton, 1972), 435.
- <sup>6</sup> For a history of the interpretation of Romans from earliest times to the present, see R. Morgan, "Romans, Letter of," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John H. Hayes (2 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 1.411-22
- <sup>7</sup> *Conf. 8.7 (The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. E. B. Pusey [NY: Pocket Books, 1957], 140)
- <sup>8</sup> *Conf. 8.12 (The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, 147-48).
- <sup>9</sup> Preface to *Lectures on Romans*.
- <sup>10</sup> Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, xiii.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Journal of John Wesley: A Selection*, ed. Elisabeth Jay (London: Oxford University Press, 1987), 34-35.
- <sup>12</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 22-23.
- <sup>13</sup> *The Epistle to the Romans* (trans. E. C. Hoskyns; London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 7.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert Morgan, *Romans* (NT Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 14, observes: "Religious art and music. . . have drawn almost nothing from this epistle."
- <sup>15</sup> 1 Macc 8:17-22.
- <sup>16</sup> 1 Macc 8:25.
- <sup>17</sup> *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium* 1.3.3.
- <sup>18</sup> Josephus, *Ant* 14.77, 79; *J.W.* 1.155, 157.
- <sup>19</sup> *Flacco* 67-69.

- <sup>20</sup> *Pro Flacco* 66-67.
- <sup>21</sup> Josephus, *Ant* 14.214-15.
- <sup>22</sup> Suetonius, *Jul.* 36 (*Lives of the Twelve Caesars*).
- <sup>23</sup> Josephus, *Ant* 17.61.
- <sup>24</sup> Philo, *Embassy* 155-56.
- <sup>25</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 2.85; Suetonius, *Tib.* 36 (*Lives of the Twelve Caesars*).
- <sup>26</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988), xlv.
- <sup>27</sup> Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4 (*Lives of the Caesars*).
- <sup>28</sup> Acts 18:2.
- <sup>29</sup> Josephus, *Life* 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Juvenal, *Sat.* 2.11.
- <sup>31</sup> Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.541-44.
- <sup>32</sup> Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.105.
- <sup>33</sup> Persius, *Sat.* 5.184.
- <sup>34</sup> Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.
- <sup>35</sup> Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.96-102.
- <sup>36</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1.1; 3.3.2-3.
- <sup>37</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (NY: Meridian Books, 1958), 72-157.
- <sup>38</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Ad Romanos*.
- <sup>39</sup> Raymond E. Brown, "Further Reflections on the Origins of the Church of Rome," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in John and Paul*, ed. R.T. Fortna and B. R. Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 98-115.
- <sup>40</sup> Cf. Acts 15; 21:20-21; Gal 2:12; Rom 3:8.
- <sup>41</sup> E.g., 16:3-5a; 16:15; 16:14; 16:10; 16:11, etc.
- <sup>42</sup> Reta Halteman Finger, *Paul and the Roman House Churches* (Scottsdale PA: Herald Press, 1993), following Peter Lampe, contends Paul greets five groups.
- <sup>43</sup> This reconstruction is influenced by the seminal work of Wolfgang Wiefel, "The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity," in *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 85-101.
- <sup>44</sup> This seems a better explanation than that the Gentile Christians addressed in Romans continued to be involved in the Jewish synagogues, remaining within them, as is claimed by Mark D. Nanos, "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 283-304.
- <sup>45</sup> W. D. Davies, "Paul and the People of Israel," *NTS* 24 (1977-78): 20. C. K. Barrett says of Paul's conversion: "This did not mean an abandonment but it did mean a rethinking of Judaism." ("The Development of Theology in the New Testament," in *Jesus, Paul and John*, ed. Lo Lung-kwong [Hong Kong: Theology Division, Chung Chi College, 1999], 37.)
- <sup>46</sup> Gabriele Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 7-25.

<sup>47</sup> Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 179.

<sup>48</sup> James D. G. Dunn, "Who Did Paul Think He Was? A Study of Jewish-Christian Identity," *NTS* 45 (1999): 175.

<sup>49</sup> See the evidence assembled by Neil J. McLeney, "Conversion, Circumcision and the Law," *NTS* 20 (1974), especially 328-33.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>51</sup> Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) provides us with a modern, sympathetic Jewish reading of Paul. He concludes: "Paul's letters record the thinking of a Pharisee who has converted to a new, apocalyptic, mystical, and—to many of his contemporaries—suspiciously heretical form of Judaism" (xii). His conversion experience carries him from one variety of Judaism to another.

<sup>52</sup> Timo Laato, *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Timo Eskola, *Theodicy and Predestination in Pauline Soteriology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 162, 272, 296.

<sup>54</sup> Rom 15:25-27.

<sup>55</sup> Rom 16:1, 23 (cf. 1 Cor 1:14; 2 Tim 4:20); Acts 20:2-3.

<sup>56</sup> Rom 16:22. Secretaries functioned in different ways in antiquity: (1) the author gave a secretary the general ideas and the secretary composed the piece; (2) the author dictated the piece and the secretary took it down in short hand and later wrote it out in longhand; (3) the author dictated the piece and the secretary wrote it out in longhand. Tertius would likely have functioned in terms of categories (2) or (3).

<sup>57</sup> Rom 16:1-2.

<sup>58</sup> Harry Gamble, *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

<sup>59</sup> Robert Jewett, "Romans as an Ambassadorial Letter," *Interpretation* 36 (1982): 5-20.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Luther Stirewalt, Jr., "The Form and Function of the Greek Letter-Essay," in *The Romans Debate*, 147-74.

<sup>61</sup> Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (SP 6; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 16.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Jewett, "Following the Argument of Romans," in *The Romans Debate*, 265-77.

<sup>63</sup> So Stanley E. Porter, "The Theoretical Justification for Application of Rhetorical Categories to Pauline Epistolary Literature," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 100-122.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 28, who argues strongly against the thesis associated with Krister Stendahl and his followers that Romans was only an occasional letter devoted to establishing Jewish and Gentile Christian unity in Rome.

<sup>65</sup> N. T. Wright, "Romans and the Theology of Paul," in *Pauline Theology, Volume III: Romans*, ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 30-67, especially 31-34, and *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis:

Fortress, 1992), 268-79, sees this assumption system located in the alleged belief of many first-century Jews that the Babylonian exile of Israel continued into their own day. So Israel's promised forgiveness of sins and restoration from exile were yet to come. Paul, then, claimed the hour of fulfillment had arrived in Jesus' death and resurrection. This view is suspect not only because many believed the exile was over (e.g., Baruch 4:36; 5:5-9; Judith 4:1-5; 5:17-19; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.314; 10.112-113; 11.1-4; *m. 'Abot* 1.11) but also because Paul makes no explicit reference to it.

<sup>66</sup> Charles H. Talbert, "Paul on the Covenant," *RevExp* 84 (1987): 299-313.

<sup>67</sup> Susanne Lehne, *The New Covenant in Hebrews* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 43.

<sup>68</sup> Ellen Juhl Christiansen, *The Covenant in Judaism and Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 129-30.

<sup>69</sup> Lehne, *New Covenant*, 58.

<sup>70</sup> Richard S. Sarason, "The Interpretation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Judaism," in *When Jews and Christians Meet*, ed. Jakob J. Petuchowski (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 99-123.

<sup>71</sup> Lehne, *New Covenant*, 59, 78.

<sup>72</sup> Stanley Kent Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981).

<sup>73</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Paul and His Predecessors* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961).

<sup>74</sup> Ian H. Thompson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994); Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (reprint of 1942 edition; Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1992); John W. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981).