

Romans

Authorship: “Paul a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God...” (Romans 1:1).

Date: A.D. 57-58 There is general agreement that Paul wrote Romans during his three-month stay in Greece (Acts 20:2-3).

Key Passage: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Key Words: Justified, Guilty, Redemption, Sacrifice of Atonement, Faith and Grace.

Background & Historical Situation: During the early stages of the church there was tension between the Jewish believers and the Gentiles believers. This tension created a situation that has become known in Biblical studies as the “Jew-Gentile Problem”. The book of Romans was written to address the “Jew-Gentile Problem.” The original readers discovered that sharing Abraham’s faith in God did not require sharing in his ethnicity. Sinful people receive the salvation made possible by Christ by grace through faith alone. Therefore, the book of Romans is a response letter to the historical problem that the church was facing in Rome. Today, the same problem exist and the Bible speaks clearly that no human being is without guilt and that all can receive the grace provided through the sacrificial death and atonement of Jesus Christ. Paul provides a clear prescription for Christian living in his Epistle, which addresses worship, the use of gifts, acts of service and hospitality, the role of government, loving one’s neighbor, living in the day, and pursuing peace.

Purpose: The primary purpose of the book was to bring about reconciliation between the Jewish and Gentile Christians and to solve the “Jew-Gentile Problem.” Secondary, to prepare the people of Rome (original readers) for Paul’s visit to the city. The apostle Paul had proposed to visit the city for a long time, but had been prevented (Romans 1:13; 15:22-24a). Thirdly, the letter meant to strengthen the Roman Christians in the faith (Romans 1:11,15). Some say that it was also written to win their financial support for his project to Spain after his visit to Rome (Romans 15:24,28). However, he only mentions the trip to Spain once and he does not specifically ask for money but for possible assistance. Overall, Romans is about the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Other Important Characteristics: The letter of Romans is considered by most scholars as the “Letter of all Letters.” The letter of Romans was carried to the city via Phoebe, a deaconess of the church of Cenchrea, who was traveling in that direction (Romans 16:1). The origin of the church in Rome is unknown. Who is the founder? “Sojourners from Rome” that were present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10)? Aquila and Priscilla who had come from Rome, and according to Romans 16:3, had returned there? It seems a consensus that neither Peter nor Paul were responsible for the founding of the church in Rome. Yet, tradition does maintain that both were martyred in Rome. Romans was the book that changed the course of the early church through Augustine, the medieval church through Luther, and the eighteenth century church in England through Wesley.

Theology:

1. The book of Romans presents Paul’s understanding of Christian theology (though not all inclusive. I.e., Christology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology).
2. There is an emphasis on Christian doctrine. I.e., some of the important theological terms include: sin, salvation, grace, faith, righteousness, justification, sanctification, redemption, death and resurrection.
3. There is a widespread use of Old Testament quotations. (See Romans 9-11).
4. There is a deep concern for the nation of Israel. The role of the remnant of Israel, and the ingrafted branches (the Gentiles).

Unique Feature: Paul employs a form of rhetoric known as, *diatribe* (a series of questions with an emphatic answer, “no”). He uses this as a way of persuasion. I.e., Does the fact that some do not believe the gospel mean that it isn’t true (3:3)? No! Is God unjust in bringing wrath on those who break His law (3:5)? No! Are Jews morally superior to Gentiles in God’s sight (3:9)? No! Should Christians sin more so they can be forgiven more (6:1)? No! Should Christians sin because they are not under the law but grace (6:15)? No!

Outline:

- I. Introduction: The Generosity of Servanthood (1:1-18).
- II. Diagnosis: The knowledge of God and the Sinful Fall of Humankind (1:19-3:20).
- III. Prognosis 1: Justified by Faith in Jesus Christ (3:21-8:17).
- IV. Prognosis 2: Subjected to Futility, Subjected to Hope (8:18-11:36).
- V. Prescription: Faithful Servants in Action (12:1-15:13).
- VI. Conclusion: (15:14-16:27).

Source:

Elwell, Walter A. and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998).