

Romans

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Lectures 1 & 2: Introduction to Romans - Handouts

Introductory Issues

1) Authorship

2) Dating and Provenance

- Rom 15:19-32
- Cf. Acts 19:10, 21-22; 20:2-3
- Rom 16:2 – Phoebe from Cenchrea – deacon or servant?
- Rom 16:23 – Gaius – same as 1 Cor 1:14?
- Rom 16:21-23 – Erastus; cf. 2 Tim 4:20? – Erastus Inscription

- Written from Corinth? If so, when?
 - Gallio incident in Acts 18:12-16
 - 2 years in Ephesus
 - 3-month visit Cf Acts 20:2-3
 - → 55-58CE

3) Integrity of the letter

4) Relationship of Romans 9-11 to the whole letter

5) Jews – Judeans debate

- How to translate Ἰουδαῖος? – Jews, Jewish, Judeans?

6) Origin of the Roman churches

7) Audience of Romans

- Jews only?
- Gentiles only?
- Mixed audience – predominantly gentiles

8) The starting point for Understanding Romans

- Systematic exposition of Christian doctrines?
- Reading through Martin Luther's eyes?
- Dangers: If we IGNORE the following:
 - Romans is not only about individuals get saved but how Jews and Gentiles can both be people of God
 - Romans is written to at least 5 house churches
 - Churches affected by the edict of Claudius
 - Churches wrestling with the return of the Jews after the edict of Claudius – issue to be discussed later
 - Churches struggling in listening to Rom 13:1-7

9) Recent debates in Pauline/Romans scholarship

- New Perspective of Paul/Justification by faith
- Jew-Gentiles debate
- Relationship of Romans 9-11 to the entire letter
- Anti-imperial propaganda

2 Major Issues Deserving Further Treatment

- New Perspective on Paul
- The Edict of Claudius

New Perspective on Paul

- G.F. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism" *HTR* 14 (1921): 197-254
 - 19th century writers: Judaism as antithesis of Christianity; legalistic, God inaccessible, one must earn salvation by good works/merit
 - Dominates NT scholarship
- Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963): 199-213
 - Questions that concerned Augustine and Luther, not Paul.
 - "Pauline awareness of sin has been interpreted in the light of Luther's struggle with his conscience."
 - "Does (Paul) ever intimate that he is aware of any sins of his own which would trouble his conscience? It is actually easier to find statements to the contrary."
 - Paul's "robust conscience"- Acts 23:1; cf. 24:16; 2 Cor 1:12; Phil 3:12-14; 1 Cor 9:27; 2 Cor 5:10-11 - "These are hardly the convictions of someone who intends to rest entirely on the merits of an alien righteousness imputed to his or her account."
 - The chief sin of Paul is being persecutor of the church (1 Cor 15:9; 1 Tim 1:13-16) → But Paul does not languish in guilt

- Growing consensus: 1st century Palestinian Judaism is never a religion of “legalism”
- Questions:
 - If Paul was not protesting against legalism in Galatians and Romans, what is it he was up against?
 - If Jews also believed in grace and faith, to what did Paul object?
 - A challenge to traditional Christian understanding of the doctrine of justification?
- W. D. Davies – Paul and Rabbinic Judaism
 - Jewishness of Paul over against Hellenistic influence
 - “The work is ... an attempt to set certain pivotal aspects of Paul’s life and thought against the background of the contemporary Rabbinic Judaism, so as to reveal how, despite his Apostleship to the Gentiles, he remained, as far as was possible, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and baptized his Rabbinic heritage into Christ.”
 - For Paul “the acceptance of the Gospel was not so much the rejection of the old Judaism and the discovery of a new religion wholly antithetical to it, as his polemics might sometimes pardonably lead us to assume, but the recognition of the advent of the Messianic Age of Jewish expectation.” (p. 324)
- E. P. Sanders
 - *Aims of Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (from p. xii)
 - To consider methodologically how to compare two (or more) related but different religions;
 - To destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship;
 - To establish a different view of Rabbinic Judaism;
 - To argue a case concerning Palestinian Judaism (that is, Judaism as reflected in material of Palestinian provenance) as a whole;
 - To argue for a certain understanding of Paul;
 - To carry out a comparison of Paul and Palestinian Judaism
 - Sanders’ Conclusion
 - For Judaism: “*obedience maintains one’s position in the covenant, but it does not earn God’s grace as such. It simply keeps an individual in the group which is the recipient of God’s grace.*” (p420) In other words: “obedience is universally held to be the behaviour appropriate to being in the covenant, not the means of earning God’s grace.” (421).
 - ‘Israel’s situation in the covenant required the law to be obeyed as fully and completely as possible ... as the only proper response to the God who chose Israel and gave them commandments’ (p. 81).

- Covenantal Nomism
 - Key terms:
 - Getting in; staying in
 - From solution to plight; not plight to solution
 - Sanders on Paul
 - Reactions to Sanders
- James D. G. Dunn
 - Coined the term, 'New Perspective on Paul' during 1982 Manson Memorial Lecture
 - Provides a coherent framework for both Paul's positive statements about the law and his negative statements.
 - Not the law itself which Paul criticized, but rather its misuse as a social barrier → "the works of the law":
 - 'Works of law', 'works of the law' are nowhere understood here, either by his Jewish interlocutors or by Paul himself, as works which *earn* God's favor, as merit-amassing observances. They are rather seen as *badges*: they are simply what membership of the covenant people involves, what mark out the Jews as God's people;...in other words, Paul has in view precisely what Sanders calls 'covenantal nomism.' And what he denies is that God's justification depends on 'covenantal nomism,' that God's grace extends only to those who wear the badge of the covenant
 - Works of the law/badges:
 - Sabbath
 - Circumcision
 - Food laws
 - boundary markers limited to Jewish national identity boundaries that excluded Gentiles from salvation; the social function of the Law that confines the grace of God to members of that nation.
 - More important for Reformation exegesis is the corollary that 'works of the law' do *not* mean 'good works' in general, 'good works' in the sense disparaged by the heirs of Luther, works in the sense of achievement...In short, once again Paul seems much less a man of sixteenth-century Europe and much more firmly in touch with the reality of first-century Judaism than many have thought

- N. T. Wright – the righteousness of God
 - Wright's focus is the gospel and the doctrine of justification.
 - Paul's gospel was not justification by faith, but the death and resurrection of Christ and his exaltation as Lord. The proclamation of the gospel was the proclamation of Jesus as Lord, the Messiah who fulfilled Israel's expectations.
 - [T]he doctrine of justification by faith is not what Paul means by 'the gospel'. It is *implied* by the gospel; when the gospel is proclaimed, people come to faith and so are regarded by God as members of his people. But 'the gospel' is not an account of how people get saved. It is,...the proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ....
 - 'Justification' is the doctrine which insists that all those who have this faith belong as full members of this family, on this basis and no other.
 - Justification, in Paul's Jewish context, refers to law-court terminology, and it speaks of God's faithfulness to God's covenant
 - Specifically, Wright explodes the myth that the pre-Christian Saul was a pious, moralist seeking to earn his individual passage into heaven. Wright capitalizes on Paul's autobiographical confessions to paint rather a picture of a zealous Jewish nationalist whose driving concern was to cleanse Israel of Gentiles as well as Jews who had lax attitudes toward the Torah.
 - The doctrine of justification was not what Paul preached to the Gentiles as the main thrust of his gospel message; it was rather "the thing his converts most needed to know in order to be assured that they really were part of God's people" after they had responded to the gospel message.
 - Paul's mission was to demonstrate that God's covenant faithfulness (righteousness) has already been revealed in Jesus Christ
 - What is justification and righteousness of God?
 - Righteousness of God – refers to God, not to individuals! What different perspective would this bear on reading Romans?
 - Romans 3:5
 - Romans 3:21-26
 - Romans 10:2-4
 - Romans 1:17

- Responses to the New Perspective
 - John Piper; Guy Waters
 - Joseph Fitzmyer & Douglas Moo in their Romans commentary
 - Martin Hengel – **The Pre-Christian Paul**
 - D. A. Carson; Peter O'Brien & Mark Seifrid – the *Justification and Variegated Nomisim* project

Edict of Claudius

- History of Jewish community- see Jos, *Ant.* 14.77; *War* 1.155
- Anti-semitism in Rome is unmistakable
- Expulsion of Jews under Tiberius in 19CE
- However, Jewish population continued to grow under Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius
- Rise in number of synagogues for the spread of Christ-movement
- Suetonius biography on Claudius:
 - Statement in 49CE: *Judaeos assidue tumultuantes impulsore Chresto Roma expulit* - "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he (Claudius) expelled them from Rome"
 - Acts 18:2 – Prisca and Aquila
 - Who is Chrestus?
 - A mistake made by Suetonius to mean "Christus", the Messiah of Israel's scripture? - This reading is extremely popular
 - See F. Blass; Wolfgang Wiefel; Cranfield, Lampe, Schreiner (p. 12), Bruce, Dunn; Fitzmyer and popular commentaries – all make this assumption that Chrestus = Christus
 - This reading is historically dubious
 - Hence, Chrestus is more likely to be a prominent Roman figure or someone the blame is attributed to
 - Possibility of a different translation: "Chrestus caused Claudius to expel from Rome the continuously rebelling Jews."
 - Therefore, the report is not about Christian and Christian propaganda – the Jews and Christians must be distinguished
 - The Jews are the target, precisely because they are Jews, not because they are Christians.
- How many Jews were expelled? Probably not everyone, but majority, especially those in prominent position
- Effects of the Edict:
 - Jews were unable to meet in synagogues
 - Christians who remain are gentiles or lower class, low profile Jews.
 - Hence meeting in private homes and tenement areas started.
 - Significant effect on Roman churches – churches became predominantly gentile, and gentile influence increases tremendously
- 54CE – reign of Nero
 - Clemency is extended; anti Jewish measures repealed
 - Not because of his friendly attitude to Jews, but clemency is often viewed as a means to gain loyalty and patronage
 - Jews returned; Prisca and Aquila also returned – Rom 16:3-5; Acts 18:26; 2 Tim 4:19

- What happens when the Jews returned?
 - Jewish believers find different form of organisations
 - Gentile Christians played important role in the Christian assemblies
 - Jewish elements in these assemblies might have been eliminated
 - The gentile-led assemblies now look completely different from what the Jewish believers knew
 - The tensions can be seen in Rom 9-11 and 14-15; and if paid careful attention, all the exhortations were written to Gentiles, and not Jews
→ A plea for the gentiles to accept the Jews?
 - This background helps understand Romans 16, and the entire Romans

Starting Point for Reading Romans

- Bornkamm: “Romans is the last will and testament of the Apostle Paul”
- If Romans is about “justification by faith”, how do we make sense of the following:
 - Romans written to groups of 5 house churches?
 - Churches affected by the edict of Claudius?
 - Churches wrestling with the return of the Jews after the edict of Claudius has been repealed?
 - Churches struggling with listening to Rom 13:1-7?
- Romans 16 as the starting point for Romans?
 - how would Paul know all the people?
 - women and men – 16:3-16 name 26 Christians (Narcissus and Aristobulus excluded – not Christians?) in Rome – 9 woman and 17 men.
 - But who is praised in the church? More women and men.
 - Women held important leadership roles in church!! Note Phoebe
- 5 groups of people:
 - 16:3-5 – church in home of Prisca and Aquila – the only house church?
 - 16:10b – those in the household of Aristobulus (note NRSV use family – household better term, incl. slaves and extended family)
 - 16:11b – household of Narcissus
 - 16:14 – 5 people without description are greeted by names – incl brothers and sisters with them
 - 16:15 – 5 others, with all the saints who are with them.

- Possible social location for these 5 groups
 - 1) Prisca and Aquila
 - 2) Aristobulus
 - 3) Narcissus
 - 4) The brothers (16:14)
 - 5) The saints (16:15)

- Tenement church?

- Questions:
 - What pictures emerge as you envision the various churches in Rome?

 - If this letter is so tied to a specific historical situation, how much of it is still relevant today? How can we interpret other biblical writings in the context of our modern church communities?

 - Is the main thesis of Romans in 1:16-17 as relevant for us today as it was for first-century Christians? Why or why not? Is this thesis taken seriously in your local congregation?

 - Our society thinks in psychological and individualistic categories. Is it possible to think back into the minds of early Christians who did not understand concepts such as universal democracy, individual rights, or the power of the unconscious? Does the gospel take a different shape now than it did then? How might it be different? How might ethical implications be different?

 - How do we deal with diversity in our churches today? Differences in theology? Diversity on issues of race or class status, and on controversial topics like woman's ordination, abortion, or homosexuality? How far can we tolerate differences in the spirit of Romans 14?

 - If Paul's discussion of one's attitude toward the state (13:1-7) reflects something of the political situation of his time, how do we interpret it for our lives today?

 - Can Romans lend insight into how to relate to people of different ethnic groups in our nation? What about Jewish people and the nation of Israel?

 - Much of what Paul says in Romans is shaped by his eschatology, his strong hope of the eventual triumph of Jesus Christ over all the powers of evil and of God's renewal of all creation. Compare his hope and your hope for the future.

Why did Paul write Romans?

Purpose of Romans

- Paul seeks for partnership and missionary support to Spain (15:17-24; 1:11-13)
- Paul updates his travel plans asks for prayers for protection as he brings the Collection to Jerusalem (15:25-33)
- Paul addresses issues confronting the church – relationship between Jews and Gentiles; strong and the weak.

Argument of Romans: A Suggestion

1:1-15 - Epistolary Thanksgiving

- 1:1-7 – the anti-imperial rhetoric
- 1:8-15 - thanksgiving

1:16-18 – Thesis – the purpose of the gospel

- Paul’s gospel in summary righteousness by faith for both Jews and Gentiles

1:19-3:20 - Jews and Gentiles both under sin

- 1:19-32 – sins of the Gentiles “God gave them up” in 1:24, 26, 28
- 2:1-3:8 – Jews are also guilty
- 3:9-20 – scriptural support for the unrighteousness of all humanity

3:21-4:25 – Jews and Gentiles under the favour of God in Christ Jesus

- 3:21-31 – justification by faith in Christ
 - legal metaphor, declaring not guilty (3:21-23)
 - Commercial metaphor – redemption (3:24)
 - Religious metaphor – sacrifice of atonement (3:25)
- 4:1-25 – the example of Abraham – the faith of Abraham!

5:1-21 – The results of justification

- 5:1-5 – peace with God
- 5:6-11 – saved from God’s wrath
- 5:12-21 – this gift of salvation is for all people

6:1-8:39 – Sanctification through the Spirit

- Freedom from sin (6:1-23)
 - Metaphor of Baptism (6:1-14)
 - Metaphor of slavery: Slaves of righteousness (6:15-23)
- Freedom from law (7:1-25)
 - Metaphor of marriage (7:1-6)
 - Law and sin (7:7-25)

Freedom from death (8:1-39)
Victory is possible (8:1-11)
Metaphor of adoption (8:12-17)
Suffering and weakness (8:18-30), help of the Spirit

9:1-11:36 – question of Israel – why many Jews reject the gospel?
9:1-29 – the frequent disobedience of Israel
9:30-10:21 – they have treated the law as a means of works righteousness rather than living by faith misuse and misunderstanding of the law
11:1-36 – this is only a temporary rejection

12:1-15:13 – Ethical implications of the gospel
12:1-2 – the basic principle
12:3-8 – using one’s gifts for building up the body of Christ
12:9-13:14 – exercising the gifts in love
14:1-15:13 – Christian tolerance

15:14-33 – Travel plans

16:1-27 – Greetings and doxology

Some practical issues

- Homosexuality and the Christian life – 1:18-32
- The modern state of Israel
- Relationship between Christian and the State/government – 13:1-7
- Relationship in the Body of Christ – 14:1-15:13