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# Introduction: The Message of Romans

## Romans 1:1

*Russ Kennedy*

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus,  
called to be an apostle,  
set apart for the gospel of God...

We need the gospel today. In the midst of a frightful defection from truth that leaves struggling souls with little Godward hope, we need the good news. This is what Romans is all about. Its subject is the gospel, God's good news about God and for fallen men and women, boys and girls.

What we need is the gospel embedded deeply in our souls like a rod of iron that strengthens our spiritual backs. It will hold us upright so that our faces will gaze on God. It will give us enabling grace for salvation, sanctification and serving. So, we take up this study for the glory of God and good of His people.

Romans may well be the most written about book in the New Testament. Commentaries abound. Opinions, differences, and shades of understanding run like scattering mice through their pages. The faithful expositor can easily be overwhelmed. To make matters worse, there has been a whole category of study, writing and preaching on Romans that has used words, phrases and sentences as theological springboards. The assumption is that Romans is primarily the *magnum opus* of Pauline theology. We will follow a different path. We will take larger arcs of text whose words, sentences and paragraphs guide the trajectory of exposition along the path of Paul's purpose. So while there is a value in careful investigation of the leaves, stems and cell structures of the text, I am concerned that we follow the path of the Spirit's thought through the glorious forest of truth.

## Why this Letter?

Most of Paul's letters have an occasion, an event or problem that causes Him to sit down and begin writing. What issues was the church struggling with?

There is much discussion about this letter and how to understand what Paul is doing.

The gospel is prominent in the book, more so than in any of Paul's other letters.

The righteousness and justice of God seem to occupy Paul's attention too.

The salvation of the Gentiles in the plan of God is central to much of the book.

The unity and harmony of the body of Christ as it includes Jews and Gentiles appears to be an issue, particularly in practical Christian living.

Here is where I think the reason and rationale of the letter to the Romans is highlighted. Listen to Romans 15:7-13 but with the texts Paul quoted expanded to illuminate Paul's thinking.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

<sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, <sup>9</sup> and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." (2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49)

The chronicler wrote in 2 Samuel 22:50-51 quoting David's song:

<sup>50</sup> "For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations,  
and sing praises to your name.

<sup>51</sup> Great salvation he brings to his king,  
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,  
to David and his offspring forever."

<sup>10</sup> And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 32:43:

<sup>43</sup> "Rejoice with him, O nations [heavens];  
bow down to him, all gods,  
for he avenges the blood of his children  
and takes vengeance on his adversaries.  
He repays those who hate him  
and cleanses his people's land."

<sup>11</sup> And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him."

David wrote in Psalm 117:1-2:

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord, all nations!

Extol him, all peoples!

<sup>2</sup> For great is his steadfast love toward us,  
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Praise the Lord!

<sup>12</sup> And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."

Isaiah the prophet wrote most extensively in Isaiah 11:1-10:

<sup>1</sup> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

<sup>3</sup> And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

<sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;  
and a little child shall lead them.

<sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze;  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,  
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

<sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

<sup>10</sup> In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples – of him  
shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

And so Paul concludes:

<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power  
of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Welcome one another (all peoples, all nations, all ethnicities, all colors) as God has wel-  
comed us. Why? Because the God of hope, through believing, has filled all with joy and  
peace and the power of the Spirit is causing all to abound in hope.

## Getting the Big Idea..

The grace in the gospel is the power to bring the obedience of faith to all people groups...

Romans 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup> and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup> including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

Romans 15:15-18

<sup>15</sup> But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God <sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. <sup>17</sup> In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. <sup>18</sup> For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed,

Therefore, the theme of Romans is tethered to the opening and closing paragraphs. Paul is set apart for the gospel about Jesus Christ to bring about the obedience of faith among all the people groups. So all glory to the God who establishes believers by the gospel and by Jesus Christ preached among all the people groups leading to the obedience of faith. Then there will be ultimate glory displayed in the wisdom of God through Christ, forever.

We have Paul's main themes - the integrity of gospel committed to him and the solidarity of Jews and Gentiles in the covenant community. (Stott, *Romans*, p.36.) Therefore, the gospel is the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ to all people so that they will believe in an obeying way as the people of God together. Thus, we must learn the gospel (Ch 1-11) and we must live the gospel (Ch 12-16). Why? Because in it the wrath of God, the grace of God, the plan of God and the will of God are revealed through the good news about Jesus Christ.

## Meeting the Author

I can tell you a lot about the author. He is well known in the Bible and to Christians. But let's just take a moment to consider how Paul introduces himself. This opening sentence is simply follow the standard form for a letter. But it is also connecting parts of who Paul is with what he has to say.

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

### Pauline identity

Here is his personal name. Here is the Jewish person as a human being in the world. He has a history and a story. They know who he is. In the formal letter writing of the day, they know who this letter is from.

### Pauline humility

Here is the slave of Jesus Christ poised to serve and obey. The word here should be slave. That is what it meant. It is modern sensibilities that struggle to translate the word. But Paul sees himself as first and foremost, owned by the Lord Jesus. He is ready to do the Lord's bidding.

### Pauline authority

Here is the God-called of Apostle. This is where his authority comes from. He has been called and appointed by God. He was sent by God. He has seen the Lord. He may not have walked with Christ in his life here on earth, but he has seen the Lord face to face.

### Pauline ministry...

He is dedicated, sanctified, set-apart for the gospel of God. To him God gave the clearest and most profound insight and revelation into the full scope of the Scriptures, of Christ and of the gospel.

To the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul relates his ministry so clearly in **Acts 20:24**.

<sup>24</sup> But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

It seems that Paul wrote the letter to the Romans around 55-57 AD. Cross referencing some things he says at the end of the book with the book of Acts seems to indicate that he was at Corinth when he penned this book.

## **Following the Melodic Line...**

What is the melodic line? It is the main themes are parts of the book. Sometimes in shorter books it can be a summary sentence. But this is a symphony that has several movements. Here is the way the book unfolds.

Sinners and the Wrath of God (1:18-3:20)

Grace and the Salvation from God (3:21-5:

Identity and the Transformation by the Gospel (6:1-8:39)

Election and the Plan of God (9-11)

Life and the Will of God (12:1-13:7)

Harmony and the People of God (13:8-15:7)

Ministry and the Community of God (15:8-16:27)

So this great letter will sing in our hearts over the next few months.

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## **Reflect and Respond**

So come with me, my beloved. Let us run among the mountains of the glory and grace of God on hind's feet in His high places. Let us drink deep of the gospel and be strong in grace. Let us follow the stream that flows through this book till it gathers in torrential power up the near well-spring of our gloriously satisfying Redeemer.