

(Rocky – Lesson 1 Handout – 01/19/2025) **INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ROMANS AND PAUL'S OPENING THEME REGARDING THE GOSPEL**

(Romans 1:1-17)

OPENING SCRIPTURE: *For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of His Father and the holy angels – Mark 8:38.*

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ROMANS

THE BOOK OF ROMANS is a cornerstone of **THE NEW TESTAMENT**. It is one of the most profound theological writings to be found anywhere in Scripture.

- **ROMANS** presents a detailed exposition of the Gospel by addressing the most fundamental issues of our faith ... The questions of **SIN, SALVATION, GRACE,** and **CHRISTIAN LIVING** are major themes of this New Testament epistle.

JOHN CALVIN considered **ROMANS** to be 'a crucial text for understanding the Gospel and the entirety of Christian doctrine.'

He believed understanding **ROMANS** was a 'key' to understanding the Bible as a whole since, in his opinion, **ROMANS** provides the most comprehensive explanation of **SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH** to be found anywhere in **HOLY WRIT**.

CALVIN'S exact quote, taken from his preface to his **COMMENTARY ON ROMANS**, is this: "When anyone understands this epistle, he has a passage opened to him to the understanding of the whole of Scripture."

Though **MARTIN LUTHER** said, 'If I could possess only one New Testament book, I would prefer to have **THE BOOK OF GALATIANS**,' I suspect if **LUTHER** could have *two such books*, **ROMANS** would make his short list.

LUTHER was troubled deeply by a verse from **THE PSALMS** that reads: "**IN YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, DELIVER ME**" – *Psalm 31:1*. This statement raised a serious question in **LUTHER'S** mind.

How could this be? **LUTHER** knew ... (as we all should know) ... that **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD**, far from delivering us from our sinful state, **CAN ONLY CONDEMN US** – but the Psalmist said, "**IN YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, DELIVER ME.**"

This single sentence perplexed **LUTHER** until he read in **THE BOOK OF ROMANS**: *For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ... to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. For in the Gospel, the Righteousness of God is revealed from faith-to-faith; as it is written: "THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH" – Romans 1:16-17.*

One night in **LONDON** in **1738** ... a confused, failed, and unsaved minister attended a Bible study in which someone read to the group from **LUTHER'S COMMENTARY ON ROMANS**. I do not know the passage that was read that night ... but I know the result because that young man later wrote these words:

*While the speaker was describing the change God works in the sinner's heart through faith in **CHRIST**, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I knew I did trust **CHRIST** for my salvation, and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins — even mine"!*

That was the night in **LONDON** when **JOHN WESLEY** was saved.

I find this description of **WESLEY'S** conversion very interesting. **NOTICE:**

- (1) He did not walk down an aisle or repeat some prewritten prayer. *He didn't 'ASK JESUS TO COME INTO HIS HEART' – an oft misused phrase that doesn't appear anywhere in Scripture.*
- (2) He didn't ask to be baptized or to join a church. He already had been baptized and he already was a church member; in fact, he was the Senior Pastor of a church.
- (3) He didn't do anything; he simply realized that he believed the Gospel.

This fits perfectly with the conversion of CORNELIUS in ACTS CHAPTER 10. PETER was preaching and CORNELIUS believed his message.

SALVATION is patterned after a story in NUMBERS CHAPTER 21. ISRAEL was in the wilderness and the people became impatient with THE LORD, so God sent what the text calls '**FIREY SERPENTS**' that bit the people so that many of THE ISRAELITES died.

The people then *repented* and they asked MOSES to intercede with THE LORD on their behalf. He did and God told MOSES to fashion a bronze image of a serpent and to place it on a pole where it could be seen by the people.

- God's instruction was simple and clear: *'If anyone is bitten by a serpent, and he simply lifts his eyes and looks at the image of the serpent, he will be delivered and he will live.'*

There is no less meritorious act I can think of than simply looking at something. JESUS explains what that '*something*' is in **JOHN 3:14-15**:

As MOSES lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must THE SON OF MAN be lifted up so that whoever believes (the Gospel) will have eternal life IN HIM.

This is exactly how WESLEY describes his conversion. He – *a confused, failed, and unsaved minister* – simply believed the message he was hearing when the preacher presented the Gospel that night in LONDON.

SALVATION by FAITH-ALONE in CHRIST-ALONE is the central message of **THE BOOK OF ROMANS**. And it is the message that led WESLEY to faith, and it is the message without which no man ever has come to faith.

AUTHORSHIP:

Among those who take the claims of Scripture seriously, **THE APOSTLE PAUL** is almost universally recognized as **THE AUTHOR OF ROMANS**. *In fact:*

- ΠΑΥΛΟΣ is the first word in both the **ENGLISH** and **GREEK** texts. He is the author.
- **PAULINE AUTHORSHIP** is further supported by **Romans 15:22-33** that outlines the author's future plans for his ministry, and they are consistent with those of **THE APOSTLE PAUL**.
- Beyond this, we know from **Romans 16:22** that **PAUL** dictated this epistle to a scribe named **TERTIUS** sometime around **A.D. 56-57**, probably when he was in **CORINTH** on his **THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY**.
- Finally, the epistle is addressed to believers in **ROME**, a diverse congregation comprised both of Jewish and Gentile Christians, and a destination to which **PAUL** was committed to travel.

THE PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE:

PAUL wrote **ROMANS** to prepare the **ROMAN CHURCH** for his upcoming visit. In his letter, he outlines two major issues he will be addressing in **ROME**; *these two issues are:*

- (1) The need to unify the Jewish and Gentile believers by addressing divisions that had arisen in ROME, likely as a result of the diversity of their cultural origins; *and ...*
- (2) He needed to enlist the ROMAN CHURCH'S support for his planned mission to SPAIN (*vid., Romans 15:24*).

MAJOR THEMES IN ROMANS:

As I mentioned, central to this epistle is THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH. (1) PAUL also emphasizes THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN (*vid., Romans 3:9-20*), (2) THE NECESSITY OF FAITH IN CHRIST-ALONE FOR SALVATION (*vid., Romans 3:21-31*), (3) AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS SALVATION ON CHRISTIAN LIVING (*vid., Romans Chapters 12 – 15*).

Other key themes include THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD, THE ROLE OF THE MOSAIC LAW IN THE NEW DISPENSATION OF GRACE, and THE INCLUSION OF GENTILES IN GOD'S REDEPTIVE PLAN OF SALVATION. *All of these subjects will be addressed in our study of ROMANS.*

INTERPRETIVE CHALLENGES IN ROMANS :

ROMANS presents several interpretive challenges that have been the subject of theological debate for centuries. Among these challenges are: THE RELATIONSHIP OF LAW AND GRACE – This will be apparent in Chapters 7 and 8, where PAUL deals with the role of law-keeping in the life of New Testament believers.

- *Exactly how should Christians understand the tension between living under grace, while still honoring God's moral expectations?*

This answer differed for those coming to faith from a Jewish background in which the role of the Law was well understood – (*at least as it was integral to life in the previous dispensation*); and the Gentiles who grew up in the pagan culture of the Roman Empire.

To deal with this issue, in Chapters 9 – 11, PAUL ADDRESSES THIS QUESTION —: *'IN LIGHT OF THE NEW DISPENSATION AND THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH, WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR ISRAEL'?*

In this context PAUL addresses THE DOCTRINES OF FOREORDINATION, ELECTION, and PREDESTINATION.

- Also in ROMANS CHAPTER 9, PAUL engages in a rhetorical debate that is presented hypothetically in which he raises the very objections he anticipates he will hear in opposition to his teachings on divine sovereignty and human responsibility.
- And he couches this debate in the broader context of the ultimate destiny of ISRAEL in light of the nation's rejection of JESUS as the MESSIAH and His subsequent CRUCIFIXION.

PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE MIDST OF THE PAGAN CULTURE OF ROME is addressed specifically in Chapters 12 – 15. These four chapters outline PAUL'S ethical instructions for the Christian Life.

- The issues lie in how to interpret and apply God's Moral Law *vis-à-vis* the contemporary cultural and the prevailing social issues – a problem we wrestle with today in 21st Century America.

FINALLY THERE IS THE LEGACY OF ROMANS FOR THE CHURCH

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS has left an indelible mark on the Church that continues to chal

lenge and inspire believers today.

- Its profound theological insights call Christians to embrace the Righteousness of God, to live transformed lives, and to participate in God's Redemptive Mission to bring the Gospel to a lost world – **Missions**.
- For **THE CHURCH**, **ROMANS** affirms the authority of Scripture, and the necessity of faith in **CHRIST-ALONE**, both for **JUSTIFICATION** and for **SANCTIFICATION**.

As we study this epistle, we should keep in mind **PAUL'S DECLARATION**:

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ... to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile – Romans 1:16-17.

EXEGESIS: [**READ ROMANS 1:1-7**] – By saying he is a bond-servant of **CHRIST**, **PAUL** is identifying with the Christians in **ROME** ... He is saying, *'Like you – I too am a believer.' I am just like you! I am no worse and I am no better. Now – in that I am an Apostle, I have a different set of responsibilities ... but like you, 'I am a sinner saved by Grace.'*

PAUL also says of himself, *'I am called as an Apostle.'* By this he is identifying himself with an official office that was unique to the first century – and it was an office that carried with it *'God given authority.'*

The term *'called'* refers to *'a divine appointment'* – and it is used in these opening verses in two different ways:

(A) In **verse one** its primary purpose is to assert that **PAUL** holds his position as an Apostle as a result of a divine appointment, which is what is meant by *'called.'* Not everyone is called to be an Apostle. It was a very specific office limited to the First Century.

(B) But in **verse six** we see this same term used in the phrase: *"You also are among those called by Jesus Christ."* Here **PAUL** is asserting that all believers – including the Christians in **ROME** – have come to faith in Christ as a result of something God did, and that *'something'* is **AN 'EFFICACIOUS CALL.'** By **'EFFICACIOUS'** we mean, *'a call that produces an EFFECT.'* This call does more than simply make something possible – it actually results in something. The **'EFFECT'** (or the result) is the positive volitional response to the Gospel. It is the human response to what **CALVIN** called: **'IRRESISTIBLE GRACE.'** **'IRRESISTIBLE GRACE'** is the doctrine that states:

God's grace is applied to those He chooses to save, so that their innate resistance to the Gospel is overcome through a 'call' by the Holy Spirit that saves those whom the Father has chosen and whom Christ has redeemed.

This is the essence of **THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION** – something **PAUL** will explain in detail in **CHAPTERS 8-11**.

So on the one hand, **PAUL** is just like the other Christians in **ROME**; but he also is an Apostle – and that office carried a great deal of authority. *And what have we learned recently about authority? Where does authority originate? In what way is authority dispensed today?*

Though **THE BOOK OF ROMANS** begins with this important information about **PAUL**, **ROMANS** is not about **PAUL**; it is about **JESUS CHRIST**. So **PAUL** begins his presentation of who **JESUS** is by several very interesting statements about **CHRIST**:

(1) In verse 2, **PAUL** emphasizes that Jesus' coming was not unexpected but was foretold both by the prophets and the Scriptures, highlighting the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. This continuity is key to understanding that Paul's teachings are not a new doctrine but

rather the fulfillment of promises made in the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul connects the Gospel to the ancient faith of Abraham, demonstrating that the message of salvation is consistent across both Testaments, advancing through progressive revelation.

(2) In verses 3-4, the proclamations about JESUS highlight Him both as a descendant of David and as the Son of God. The title '*Son of God*' can be confusing, especially when viewed through the lens of human relationships. The confusion arises from the dual meanings of '*son*.' Unlike a human son, who has a beginning, JESUS, as the second person of the Trinity, has always existed. This is affirmed in John 1:1-4, where Jesus is described as eternal, having existed with God from the beginning.

JESUS only mentions His birth once in Scripture (*John 18:37*), but even there, He qualifies it, emphasizing His preexistence by saying '*He came into the world*' rather than '*He was born*' in the usual sense. So when used of Christ, the term '*Son of God*' expresses an eternal, unbroken relationship between God the Father and God the Son, a relationship with no beginning or end, unaffected by the incarnation.

ROMANS teaches us that the full Gospel is embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. Denying any part of His nature — His Deity or His Humanity — means rejecting the complete Gospel. In His Deity, Jesus stands before us as God; in His Humanity, He stands as the One who represents humanity before God.

(3) JESUS is said to be **A DESCENDANT OF DAVID ACCORDING TO THE FLESH**. This assertion calls our attention both to His Humanity, as well as to the covenants God made with Israel. By calling attention to the covenants, PAUL is asserting that this JESUS is the very MESSIAH, who was promised formerly in THE OLD TESTAMENT – and that He took on flesh at the INCARNATION in order to serve as our substitute in the ATONEMENT.

(4) Verses 4-5 raise an interesting question: 'If JESUS always has been the Eternal Son of God, how then is He said to have been '*declared to be the Son of God*' in verse 4? Let me summarize this section of PAUL'S Epistle:

JESUS always has been the Son of God. The resurrection did not make Him the Son of God, but it did serve as a **public declaration of His Eternal Sonship**. The grammar of the phrase '*declared to be the Son of God*' is an Aorist passive participle plus a predicate nominative, indicating a public proclamation, not a change in His nature. His nature is eternal; the declaration of His Sonship took place at a specific moment in time (*Aorist tense*) in the past (*at His resurrection*).

In Psalm 2:7, God acknowledges JESUS as His Eternal Son, and this trinitarian relationship is linked to Messiah's role and His subsequent divine authority. JESUS' death and resurrection, according to John 2:19 and 10:18, were predicted beforehand by JESUS Himself. And He affirms that his death was a voluntary act. And if His death occurred fully under the sovereign will of CHRIST Himself, then so did His resurrection.

CHARLES HODGE interprets Romans 1:4 as follows: "*Jesus, in His human nature, is the Son of David, but in His divine nature He is the Son of God – and this was demonstrated publicly by His resurrection.*"

(5) **Verse 5 states:** "*Through whom we have received grace and apostleship.*" Here PAUL turns from his description of the Gospel to his own personal call. The phrase '*through whom we have received grace and apostleship*' refers to PAUL'S calling and it is tied to the event that took place on THE DAMASCUS ROAD. This unique experience qualified PAUL in two ways: (A) It qualified him as a born-again Christian (*cf. Colossians 1:12*), and (B) It qualified him to serve as an Apostle.

[READ ROMANS 1:8-15] – Leaving his comments about himself, PAUL turns in these eight verses to the ROMANS themselves, and the first thing PAUL does is commend their faith.

(6) In verses 9-15 we learn there is spiritual benefit to the Church when we meet together as a body. PAUL emphasizes the importance of corporate worship. Believers gain spiritual strength and encouragement when gathered together as the Church. PAUL'S desire to visit the ROMANS in person is expressed in the form of a prayer (verses 9-10) – but only if such a visit is God's Will.

Visiting ROME was not PAUL'S idea of a European vacation; his visit had a purpose (see verses 11-12): PAUL desired to impart a 'spiritual gift' (Greek: *χάρισμα πνευματικὸν* – pronounced 'charisma pneumatikòn') to edify the church and foster mutual encouragement between himself and the believers in ROME. While the term *χάρισμα* relates to our term, 'charismatic,' Paul likely is not referring to miraculous 'sign gifts' (e.g., tongues). More likely he has in mind such things as 'doctrinal clarity, exhortation and encouragement, and perhaps some specific prophecy related to the local church in ROME' – though I think this is the least likely explanation. The lesson we should take from verses 9-15 is ... *The Christian community (corporately) and our Christian lives (individually) thrive in community, not in isolation.*

(7) PAUL expresses his frustration that, at least from a human viewpoint, he has been unable to visit ROME, despite his strong desire to do so. His plans have been hindered, not by a lack of interest, but by circumstances beyond his control, reflecting the truth that God's purposes often differ from human expectations. PAUL knows it is by the providence of God that he has not been able to visit the ROMANS, but he also knows that if the time comes when it is possible to come to ROME, that also will be governed by the providence of God. God's providence directs the circumstances of our lives, (cf. Proverbs 16:33), which reminds us that even seemingly random events are under His control. Similarly, James 4:13-15 teaches humility in planning, acknowledging that our lives are fleeting and subject to God's will. PAUL'S delayed journey to ROME illustrates this principle, reminding us to trust in God's timing and not our own preferences.

[READ ROMANS 1:16-17] – You may recall our opening Scripture:

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of His Father and the holy angels – Mark 8:38.

PAUL also wrote to TIMOTHY these words:

Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me, His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the Gospel according to the power of God – 2 Timothy 1:8.

PAUL'S message to the Roman Christians emphasizes his unwavering commitment to the Gospel, despite the opposition and ridicule he faced. He anticipated objections not only from the Roman Church but also from the hostile cultural environment surrounding them. PAUL understood the world's hatred for the Gospel was ultimately a hatred for JESUS. His declaration, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," reflects his courage and full commitment to the truth, even in the face of persecution. He reminded the Romans that the Gospel is not merely a philosophy but is 'the power of God for salvation.' This divine power effectively transforms lives, reconciles sinners, and brings people into a right relationship with God.

PAUL experienced persecution firsthand; he was ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned and more, yet he continued to proclaim the Gospel. His confidence stemmed from his belief that the Gospel, empowered by the Holy Spirit, would prevail and save those whom God had chosen. The universal

ity of the Gospel is another key point. While it was first given to the Jews, its reach extended to the Gentiles, transcending cultural and ethnic barriers. Salvation is available to all who believe. However, its transformative power is activated only through faith.

PAUL'S teaching underscores the dual role in salvation: **(A)** human proclamation and **(B)** divine calling. Evangelism involves presenting the Gospel universally, trusting the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of those chosen by God.

PAUL'S confidence inspired theologians like Martin Luther, who wrestled with the concept of God's righteousness and eventually came to understand that righteousness is not earned but given freely by God's grace. This central truth of the Gospel, rooted in divine power and grace, remains the foundation of Christian faith and Christian living.