

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS

October 24, 2018

Questions/Answers for Book of Acts from Oct. 17

Significance about the timing of the Holy Spirit: The Day of Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks as found in Deuteronomy 16:10) was the fiftieth day after the Sabbath of Passover week. Pentecost was one of the most popular of the Jewish feasts and Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims from everywhere. It was the perfect opportunity for a great multitude to witness the power of God.

Page 156: The Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in tongues (other languages). Then Peter delivered his first sermon. He speaks the Word of God boldly and without fear. Throughout the rest of Acts we see a church that has power, witnessing to the truth of the gospel, even in the face of great persecution.

Ananias and Sapphira: Acting out of their selfish desires they neglected the best interests of the people as a whole. They lied about the amount of money they had and kept a portion for themselves but made it appear as if they had given everything. Each falls down and dies on the spot.

Page 157: The first wave of persecution scatters the believers throughout Judea and Samaria. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Chapter 10: Three times Peter sees a vision of a sheet filled with all kinds of animals and is told to eat them although many were considered unclean. God showed Peter that God does not show favoritism but accepts all people from every nation.

Missionary journeys: Right from the start Paul and his companions meet opposition. However they demonstrate perseverance, shook the dust off their feet in protest, and continue with joy and with the Holy Spirit. On the first journey the people plot to mistreat and stone the missionaries in Iconium. On the second journey Paul and Silas are thrown into prison and later move on to Berea. At each place he continues his journey and strengthens the disciples. On his third journey, Paul is opposed in Ephesus and is arrested in Jerusalem. He is placed under house arrest in Rome and his ministry (according to Acts) ends in imprisonment.

Attitude of Paul: Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ (28:31).

LETTERS FROM PAUL

Paul's letters

Fourteen books of the New Testament are called *Letters of Paul* or *Pauline Epistles*. Except for *Hebrews*, the author claims to be Paul but scholars now know that Paul didn't write all of them. The order of those letters in the Bible as shown below is based on descending length except for *Galatians* with the four letters to individuals at the end before Hebrews. As a group, the letters address controversies and other issues in the early Church.

| Book | Likely date* | By Paul (who used secretaries) | Attributed to Paul but not by him per scholars** | Not claimed to be by Paul & scholars now agree |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Romans | 56/57 CE | ✓ | | |
| 1 st Corinthians | 53/55 CE | ✓ | | |
| 2 nd Corinthians | 55/56 CE | ✓ | | |
| Galatians | 50/55 CE | ✓ | | |
| Ephesians | 60/61 CE | | ✓ | |
| Philippians | 54/60 CE | ✓ | | |
| Colossians | 65/75 CE | | ✓ | |
| 1 st Thessalonians | 43/50 CE | ✓ | | |
| 2 nd Thessalonians | 53 CE | | ✓ | |
| 1 st Timothy | 90/100 CE | | ✓ | |
| 2 nd Timothy | 90/100 CE | | ✓ | |
| Titus | 80/90 CE | | ✓ | |
| Philemon | 60/61 CE | ✓ | | |
| Hebrews | 70 CE | | | ✓ |

* These dates from the *Lutheran Study Bible* (©2009) and from PSK's research have priority over different dates in workbook.

** These letters are identified as pseudepigraphic works (i.e., falsely-attributed works not by the claimed author); in these cases, they are likely written by associates or followers of Paul in his name.

Usual format of Paul's letters: opening/greetings; thanksgiving; body; closing/greetings.



Background to Letter to the Romans

The Book of Acts tells us of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus when he was on the road to Damascus to arrest Jews and bring them back to Jerusalem. As a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, he had the Hebrew name Saul and the Latin name Paul. Then, as both a Jew and a Roman citizen, Paul was able to tell the good news of Jesus the Messiah in both Jewish and Roman communities.

This Letter was written on his third missionary journey [see map on p. 162 in the workbook] probably while he was in Corinth; he would make a trip back to Jerusalem to deliver a collection of money he had gathered on that journey before heading west to Rome and then on to Spain. Phoebe was a deacon of the church in a port east of Corinth and would have been able to convey the letter to Rome after passing through Corinth. His journey from Jerusalem to Rome (map on p. 162) and his imprisonments on the journey and in Rome, etc., are told in the Book of Acts.

In the late 40's, Emperor Claudius expelled a large portion of Rome's substantial Jewish population. After Claudius died, Emperor Nero rescinded that expulsion edict and the Jews returned. Paul had two purposes in writing his letter to the Romans to address problems in the church there:

- address Christian Gentiles who are facing non-Christian Jews (Rom. 11:11-32);
- address a community in which Christian Gentiles and Christian Jews find themselves in uneasy coexistence (Rom. 15:7-13).

Summary of Letter to the Romans (from PSK's June 6, 2018 handout from the evening Bible study of Romans)

Main theme is the righteousness of God; Jesus is the lens through which one may see the saving plan of God.

Chapters 1-4:

The God of Israel has been true to the covenant established with Abraham.
In the face of a sinful world God saved both Jew and Gentile.
The covenant is a sign of the faithfulness of God through Christ.

Chapters 5-8:

The covenant addresses and resolves the sin of Adam.
In the Messiah God has done for all people what was done for the Israelites.

Led through the wilderness (and out of Egypt) they were brought to the present life by the Spirit.

Through Christ God made the whole world right once more.

His covenant love for us is expressed clearly through the death of Christ.

Chapters 9-11:

The fall of Israel is the means by which salvation is extended to the whole world.

Paul (a Jew) is an example of one who can still participate in the covenant blessing.

God desires that more of the Jewish community will come to share in the new covenant.

Gentile Christians are warned against anti-Jewish arrogance.

Chapters 12-16:

The new community must live as the true and renewed humanity (internally and externally). It must reflect the intention that Jews and Gentiles are to come together as one worshipping body.

The greetings to different groups in the Roman church indicate this desire.

God's judgment

Paul speaks of God's judgment of the Jews and then of the Gentiles (Rom. 1:18-3:20). Many of the Jews, because they have the Torah, think that they do not need to honor God or offer their prayers of thanksgiving to Him. They worship other gods and no longer acknowledge God as their Creator. This attitude affects their entire lives and how they interact with others. They were not living up to the standard expected of them as God's chosen people.

But then Paul reminds us all that none of us should judge others because then we're actually judging ourselves. God's judgment will affect all of us, Jew and Gentile alike, because God is impartial. Having the Torah (the Law) and being circumcised do not give the Jews a special status. Paul says that the Gentiles may not have heard the Torah but that the law was written on their hearts; he says that real circumcision is a matter of the heart rather than of the body.

But the good news for the Jews -- and for all of us -- is that God is faithful even if His people are not. It is the law that tells us of our sin; it is the gift of His grace that justifies us (Rom. 3:21-24):

“But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ...”

The verses in Rom. 1:26-27 are often cited out of context as biblical justification for opposition to same-sex relationships; the original context of these verses referred to sexual acts within the context of idol worship.



Righteousness

God's plan for redemption of humankind didn't begin with Jesus; the need for redemption began when sin entered the world with Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3:15). God's plan began with Abraham: God declared Abraham righteous because of his faith in God:

“And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.” (Gen. 15:6)

“For what does the scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’” (Rom. 4:3)

Abraham's circumcision, fourteen years later, was just a symbol of the righteousness God bestowed on him. So, Paul says that the same righteousness is credited to anyone who has faith in God through Jesus Christ. He says that the Jews were trying to decide for themselves what equals righteousness: what people could do rather than on the relationship based on faith; they should be submitting because God demands obedience. They don't understand that Christ's coming and His death/resurrection supersede the Law: upends Jewish understanding of Law being the ultimate expression of how to live a faithful life (Rom. 10:1-4). Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17 reframe the Law: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

In Romans 10:10, Paul says: “For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.”

- justified = being made right with God (i.e., declared righteous)
- saved = from sin and its consequences

But being justified and saved requires two actions: not just believing in one's heart but also speaking that word to others. Paul returns to the requirement to speak in Rom. 10: 14-17:

“But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.”

Paul's emphasis on hearing is connected to the theme of obedience prominent in Romans (more so than elsewhere in the New Testament). "Obedience" in Greek is a compound word from the verb "to hear." The obedience is not good works but faith, the human response to God's faithfulness.

Being made righteous means that God's people have the ability to live consistently in that righteousness but must choose to do so.

- power over sin (chapter 6): Paul says that we should not sin more in order to receive more grace. Christ conquered sin by dying and conquered death by rising. Those of us who have been baptized share in the death of Christ; so, sin no longer has power over us and we can choose not to sin.

From the rite of Holy Baptism in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*: "In baptism our gracious heavenly Father frees us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ."

- power over the futility of the law (chapter 7): If we believe in the risen Christ, we are released from our relationship with the law. But Paul says that the law is neutral: it shows both its strength and its weakness. It is weak when the law is dominated by sin because it persuades people they can save themselves. It is strong because the law can serve God when the power of sin is broken. Paul uses the 10th commandment not to covet to illustrate his point: this is the one commandment that is about an inward attitude and not an outward action. Verses 14-25 describe our human conflict of doing what we shouldn't do and not doing what we should do – but God can deliver us from our struggle with sin.
- power of the Holy Spirit (chapter 8): Paul says that Christ came to take away the power of sin and to give us life through the Holy Spirit.

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you." (Rom. 8:11)

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Rom. 8:26-27)



Salvation for All (titled "Grace of God" in the workbook)

God chose the Israelites and made covenants with them. He gave them the Law teaching them how to live, prophets to remind them of what they forgot, and His forgiveness as they continued not to follow what He had chosen them to do; He always preserved a remnant of His people.

Paul now is concerned that the Jews (his people) have not accepted Christ; Paul worries that their focus on being chosen, on covenants, and obeying the law are keeping them from their salvation. They tried so hard to be righteous on their own by what they did.

This stumbling by the Jews served God's purpose of salvation for all "to make Israel jealous" (Rom. 11:11-16). The idea of God's extension of salvation to the Gentiles must also have been a shock to the Jews. The initial election by God was a status conveyed from one generation to the next – that status implied it wouldn't be extended beyond the Jewish community.

- But God continues to surprise! And there are indications of God's intent for inclusion in the Old Testament: the promise to Abraham that he would be the ancestor of all who believe; the role of the Moabite woman Ruth who accepted the religion of the Israelites and became the mother of Obed (the grandfather of King David, the beginning of the Davidic line leading to Jesus)

Meanwhile, the Gentiles are accepting Christ; they haven't pursued righteousness by their actions but by their faith. Paul also speaks to the Gentiles to warn of the human reaction of thinking that they are now more important to God than the Jews; instead, God's purpose (or one of them) is to use the Gentiles as an instrument to restore salvation to the Jews. For God can choose to make the Israelites be His people again. Paul says that God can choose to give His mercy to whomever He wants without being unfair to the others because God is God; that is difficult for humans to understand. God keeps His promises; He is faithful.

The outcome is that God can give His grace to all; salvation is extended to Jews and Gentiles who have faith in the Christ. Paul uses the metaphor of pruning and grafting the branches of an olive tree (Rom. 11:17-24) to illustrate both God's wrath/judgment and God's love/mercy. In Rom. 11:26, Paul says all Israel will be saved and quotes Isaiah 59:20-21: "Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob."

Living a Christian Life

Romans 12 through 15:6 is a section addressing the ethical ideal of being a Christian rooted in human understanding of what is known of God and His purpose for humans.

The basis of Paul's ethics is spiritual worship (Rom. 12:1-2):

- He frames it in the context of sacrifice but it's a very different concept of sacrifice from that familiar to the Jews in their context of Temple worship in Jerusalem:
 - a human, not animal, sacrifice
 - a living, not dead, sacrifice – which then becomes a person's whole life.
- The sacrifice (that is, this way of living) involves the mind as well as the body; we are freed from trying to be what the world wants so we can work on discerning how God wants us to live.

In Rom. 12:3-8, Paul explains the importance of the membership in the body of Christ. Members have different gifts and different functions; the members work together to carry out Christ's mission for us and work together to support each other in this mission – community is

important. The identification of the body of Christ and slightly different lists of gifts are found in other letters (1st Cor. 12, Eph. 4; Gal. 5); Isaiah 11:2-3 also lists gifts of the spirit. The lists are not exhaustive but give various examples.

In Rom. 12:9-21 Paul gives specific instructions for how a Christian should live in relation to others and not just other Christians. The chapter 12 verses plus 1st Corinthians chapter 13 could be considered Paul's counterpart to Christ's Sermon on the Mount. Romans chapters 13-16 address other areas where Christians need to consider how to balance their freedom with their responsibilities. Because Christ died on the cross for the benefit of all humankind, it is our thankful response to God to act accordingly.

Romans chapter 13: In different countries – including the U.S. -- in different periods, this chapter has been used to say that Christians are to support whatever policies the government deems appropriate. [See PSK's July 11 lesson on this chapter; past Bible study handouts will be included in a separate section on Redeemer's website.]



Importance of Paul's Letter to the Romans within Lutheranism and the Protestant Reformation

Martin Luther studied, wrote, and lectured about this Letter for many years. In his preface to the translation of this Letter, he described it as “the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul.” [English translation ©1983 by Saint Anselm Abbey.]

Luther thought that eternal life was not earned but was instead a free gift of grace from God through belief in Jesus Christ. This principle, called *justification by faith*, is based on Luther's study of Rom. 1:17: “... the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith” and Rom. 3:28: “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.”

- Luther referred to this principle in Latin as *sola fide* (by faith alone) although “alone” is not part of the original Greek text of this verse.

Due to this position and to Luther's unwillingness to recant, Luther was excommunicated by the Pope. The people who read and agreed with Luther's many writings came to be called Lutherans; the overall movement based on the actions of Luther and other reformers is called the Protestant Reformation.

Assignment for October 31

Complete the Exercises from Lesson 30 on p. 163-166.

Read *I Corinthians* or the portions listed on p. 166.