

Wrestling with the Sovereignty of God & the Freedom of Relationship Romans Chapters 1 – 8 – An Introduction

Paul wrote the letter to the Romans in the late 50's of the 1st century
Probably wrote it from Corinth or somewhere nearby
Wrote it while planning his final voyage to Jerusalem with the goal of going to Rome after his trip and then hoping to go on to Spain
So it is written within the general Hellenistic culture of the Greco-Roman world

Claudius is Emperor

He expelled the Jews in 49 AD from Rome following rioting that may have resulted from early Christian preaching in the Jewish communities in Rome (because of continual insurrections because of Chrestus)

Paul reaches Corinth about that time.

Acts 18:2

Claudius dies in 54, and Nero takes over and allows the Jews to return

Suddenly, you have a Gentile Christian church with Jewish Believers joining them

- Romans 15:8-10

You also have Christian Gentiles with Non-believing Jews

Many thought God had endorsed their expulsion and that God had written them out of the covenant

There is then no point in winning over any more Jews if God is done with them

This is the audience Paul is speaking to

- Romans 1:16 – “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile”

Paul wanted to go on to Spain, and it was vital the Gentiles realized he was under obligation from God to reach the Jews

* Most believe Paul did finally get to Rome and in fact died there...church just outside the old city walls...St Paul where he supposedly was beheaded the same day Peter was crucified upside down where the Vatican now stands

[And so what are some of the natural problems and thoughts?](#)

Gentiles:

God has turned his back now on the Jews and it is the generation of the Gentiles

Jews:

IF God has turned His back on the Jews, He is not faithful to His promises

And the Jews still have not been fully restored from their exile in Babylon being under Roman rule...when will God finally be faithful

God is responsible for setting the World aright...JUSTICE...and yet the pagans rule

The book splits right in half between chapters 1-8 and 9-16

And then breaks further into 4 main sections: 1-4, 5-8, 9-11, 12-16

Theme: “God’s Righteousness”

“God’s Gospel unveils God’s righteousness”

That one phrase I think is the best way of summarizing the entire book of Romans

God is the subject, His Gospel is the means, and His Gospel displays HIS righteousness

It is His righteousness that ultimately is in question based on our audience specified earlier

The question is why would a Jew like Paul be so concerned with this overarching issue
The phrase the righteousness of God for a 1st Century Jew was a loaded statement
The expectation is that the God of Israel WOULD BE FAITHFUL to His promises
And as long as Israel remained under pagan rule, the great covenant promises made by YHWH to the patriarchs was still unfulfilled

Thus even though the Babylonian exile was over, exile was not

The promise of a glorious restoration of the nation, Temple, and Jewish way of life still laid unfulfilled

“God’s Gospel unveils God’s righteousness”...GOD’S Righteousness

There are two main thoughts a 1st century Jew would be thinking when they heard this phrase

1. God’s loyalty to the covenant with Israel

Why, why is this so important?

- Psalm 33:4-5a
- Jer. 32:41-42

2. Shaped by the 2nd Temple period setting of a LAWCOURT

During this time all cases were considered civil rather than criminal

The accuser and the defendant pleaded their case before the judge

Righteousness was the status of the successful party

More than being acquitted (applies only to the defendant)

Vindicated is closer

And the word has nothing to do with moral behavior but rather STATUS

And ultimately it spoke of the Judge Himself who needed to be impartial and most importantly willing to defend the one wronged

- Is. 52:1-10

God’s righteousness was seen in light of His faithfulness to His covenants and His deep desire to set the world to rights again

Covenant and lawcourt

And these two idea together tell you the story of Israel and where their hearts and heads were at

How so?

Pagans ruling horribly and still waiting for God to show up and be faithful to them

The image is of a GREAT COSMIS LAWSUIT

- Psalm 143

YHWY is not simply Israel’s God, He is also the creator of the whole world and it’s Judge

As such YHWH is under OBLIGATION to set things right AND be faithful

Israel is to be vindicated, and God needs to judge the pagans who oppress them

Can you see the conflict between these two: Covenantal and Lawcourt righteousness?

- a) YHWY was supposed to come to Israel’s rescue because of His covenant obligations
- b) But YHWH was also the judge in the cosmic court between Jew and Gentile and to establish just rule in the whole world

What do you do if these seem like they are in opposition to each other

How does God accomplish both?

And how do Jewish and gentile Believers coexist in this kind of tension?

The message of Romans is that somehow God’s GOSPEL message fulfilled in Messiah Jesus accomplishes both

That Paul is not taking the message to the Gentiles out of mere frustration with his people

God is not displacing the Jews through Paul

But rather this majority rejection of the Jews of Jesus is a fulfillment
And now the Gentiles will join the covenantal family in mass

This forced Paul to address a TON of questions

What then had God actually promised Israel that He would still be faithful?

Did God change His mind about Israel and if so how is He still faithful?

If the Jews are not restored in mass then what does this mean?

If only a small portion (read remnant) of Jews have come to believe in Jesus as Messiah, is this consistent with the promises of God?

- Romans 2:3, 23-24, 26, 3:1, 3, 9, 27a, 29a, 4:1, 9a

Paul's ultimate point will be that God has been faithful to His Story and covenant promises

The point of this book is NOT to answer your questions about individual salvation

But rather how is the Gospel consistent with God being righteous...i.e. faithful and just

When the phrase the "righteousness of God" occurs in Jewish texts, it ALWAYS refers to God's own righteousness, not to the status people have from God

(Deut 33:21, Jud 5:11, I Sam. 12:7, Neh 9:8, Ps 45:4, Dan 9:7-9, Mic 6:5)

It's interesting, statistically the word "God" occurs more times in Romans than in any other of Paul's writings = once every 46 words

In a sense, God is on trial as Judge and Faithful partner

- Romans 1:17a

The Gospel (the Story of God culminating in Jesus) reveals God's righteousness (His covenant faithfulness and His Justice)

And when we get to chapters 9-11, it will make way more sense

9-11 are about God and whether or not He is still righteous, not individual salvation

Paul's aim is to explain to the Roman church what God has been up to and where TOGETHER they might fit into that greater story TOGETHER

Paul was coming to Rome with the Gospel message that thru Jesus the Jewish Messiah, Lord of the WORLD, God's Justice is being unveiled once and for all

It's funny...we Americans have done a GREAT job at removing God from His Story

We read the Bible as Theology...making Theology our goal

But God has chosen to reveal Himself in Story...why...He is relational!

There is Theology found within the Story

But the Story and relationship is the Goal

And God's righteousness is found within the context of His Story

Chapters 1-4

God Gospel unveils...

In Jesus, the God of Israel has been faithful to the covenant He established with Abraham

And He has as a result brought justice and salvation to the whole world thru Israel

Despite the sinfulness of the Gentile Nations, and the almost total rejection of Israel, God has been faithful thru the surrogate faithfulness of Jesus

And He has now created a worldwide – Jew and Gentile – covenant family marked out by FAITH

Chapters 5-8

God has therefore solved the problem of Adamic sin

In Jesus God has done for His new people what he did for Israel in Exodus

He has

- a) redeemed them from slavery,
- b) lead them thru the wilderness of this present life thru His Spirit,
- c) and gave them a hope in the future of their inheritance with the entire creation redeemed

Chapters 9-11

Address the peculiar tragedy of the Gospel's revelation that only a remnant of Israel has believed in Jesus as the fulfillment of God's redeeming Gospel Story

Paul Himself is counted in that remnant, and God is hoping even now that the blessing the Gentiles are enjoying is theirs for the taking

Gentile believers are warned as a result of having ANY anti-Jewish sentiment

Chapters 12-16

The New Covenant Community that is created by this Gospel must now live as the true renewed humanity, co-partnering with God to set the chair back upright