



UNIT 3 NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON 5

INTRODUCTION TO PAULINE EPISTLES AND ROMANS

The ministry of Paul was not bounded by the limits of a life. It influenced decisively all European history, and, through European history, the history of the whole modern world.

One after another, the great thinkers of the Church - Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley and Barth - have risen up to name Paul master in their trade, persuaded that he, better than any other of the apostolic men, has grasped "the truth as it is in Jesus Christ".

A note on Paul's theology. What is the key word or concept which will lead us to the heart of Paul's Christianity so we can see it as a whole?

"Salvation is the word we need. Salvation is a thing of the past, a thing of the present, and a thing of the future" (Lightfoot).

We were saved (Romans 8:24). We are being saved (1 Cor. 15:2). We shall be saved (Romans 5:9). Indeed, Paul's whole doctrine of salvation is contained in Romans 5:1 - "Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God."

As a past event, salvation rests on 'the finished work' of Christ. To it, our right response is faith. But salvation is also, for Paul, a present experience. It means to be 'in Christ', to live by the power of the Spirit the life that is life indeed, in the fellowship of the new People of God, the Church, which is Christ's Body. But finally, for Paul, salvation is a future hope. It can only be realised in its completeness when, with Christ's coming, sin and death are overcome and the redeemed behold God and Christ face to face.

R O M A N S

"This Epistle is the chief book of the New Testament. it deserves not only to be known word for word by every Christian, but to be the subject of his meditation day by day, the daily bread of his soul." (Martin Luther)

Nowhere else is there to be found a document which so fully, lucidly and convincingly sets forth the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith (C.H. Nash).

The Occasion and Readers

Paul had finished his mission in Greece and was on his way to Jerusalem with the proceeds of the collection made by his churches for the poor Christians in Judaea (15:25, 26, 30f. See Acts 20:1-3).



Paul's projected trip from Ephesus to Macedonia to Achaia to Jerusalem and finally to Rome is mentioned in Acts 19:21.

There is wide agreement that the Epistle was probably written in Corinth about 57-58 AD (which would be twenty-odd years after our Lord's crucifixion and several years before Paul reached Rome).

After settling the business at Jerusalem, Paul intended moving westward to Spain, visiting the Roman church on the way (1:8-15).

Nothing definite is known of the founding of the church in Rome. It has been suggested that the Gospel was brought back to Rome by Jews returning from the Feast at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:10). It is almost certain that no apostle founded it.

That there were Christians in Rome at a very early date, seems certain. In AD 49, Claudius banished all Jews from Rome. Aquila and Priscilla, who were banished under this edict, appear to have been Christians when met by Paul in Corinth. If so, there were Christians in Rome before AD 49.

The Church seems to have been a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians, possibly of Jewish origin and Gentile growth. Sometimes, Paul has Gentile readers in mind (1:13; 11:13). At other times, he links himself with his readers as Jews (4:1 cf. 7:6; 9:10). Furthermore, his argument assumes a good knowledge of the Old Testament.

Purpose

For years Paul had laboured in the Eastern Mediterranean. His work was finished there (15:19, 23). After he had visited Jerusalem, he saw the West as his future sphere of ministry.

While he was on the western-most point of his third missionary journey (at Corinth), and before he left for Jerusalem, Paul wished to pave the way for a trip to Spain. He would need, undoubtedly, the assistance of the Roman Christians (15:24, 28). Thus Paul's immediate purpose was to establish interest in his Spanish mission; but that would not seem to account adequately for the theological character of the letter. Paul's prospective visit to the West explains why he wrote to the Romans. It does not explain why he wrote the particular letter we now possess.

As a missionary strategist, Paul recognised the immense importance of the Christian Church at the centre of the Empire, and this may well have influenced the form of the Epistle which he addressed to it. The Roman Epistle reads more like a treatise (particularly the first eleven chapters) than any other Epistle Paul wrote, with the possible exception of Ephesians. It is most probable that the apostle was deeply conscious that he had reached the turning point of his missionary career, and his mind dwelt upon some of the major themes which had formed part of his ministry.

The theory that the Epistle was intended to be a 'full statement' of the apostle's doctrinal position is not entirely satisfactory. There are important truths which he does not enlarge upon. Furthermore, it must be remembered that though 'Romans' bears some resemblance to a treatise, it is still a letter, containing personal allusions and related to an historic situation. Nor are we aware of how much of the 'doctrine' contained in the epistle may have been addressed to a certain need made known to Paul by Aquila and Priscilla.

**Theme**

A number of suggestions have been offered:

"The Gospel According to St. Paul" "Salvation, its Root and Fruit"

"The Answer to the Question, 'What is Christianity?'"

It is suggested that Paul himself state his theme and announces his text in 1:17 following the introduction: "He who through faith is righteous shall live". ("He who is put right with God through faith shall live" TEV or Good News)

The way of righteousness which Paul sets forth to the Romans was a way which was well known to him, ever since his feet were planted on it outside the walls of Damascus. There is more autobiography in this Epistle than meets the eye - the autobiography of a man who has been justified by faith (F.F. Bruce).

Plan

It is well to remember that in its essential structure, 'Romans' follows a typical letter of Paul's day. All the elements are present:

- 1) Greeting 1:1
 - 2) Prayer 1:7
 - 3) Thanksgiving - 1:8
 - 4) Special Contents (bulk of letter)
 - 5) Salutations and Greetings - chapter 16
- A. Prologue 1:1-15
- B. The Gospel according to St. Paul 1:16 - 11:36
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| 1. | Theme of the gospel | 1:16, 17 |
| 2. | Sin and Retribution | 1:18-3:20 |
| | Pagan World | |
| | Moralist | |
| | Jew | |
| | All Mankind Guilty | |
| 3. | Way of Righteousness | 3:21-5:21 |
| | God's Provision | |
| | An OT Precedent | |
| | Blessings which accompany | |
| | Justification | |
| | Old and New Solidarity | |
| 4. | Way of Holiness | 6:1-8:39 |
| | Freedom from Sin | |
| | Freedom from Law | |
| | Freedom from Death | |



5. Human Unbelief and Divine Grace 9:1-11:36
Problem of Israel's Unbelief
God's Sovereign Choice
Man's Responsibility
God's Purpose for Israel
God's Purpose for Mankind

C. The Christian Way of Life 12:1 - 15:13

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| 1. | The Living Sacrifice | 12:1, 2 |
| 2. | The Common Life of Christians | 12:3-8 |
| 3. | The Law of Christ | 12:9-21 |
| 4. | The Christian and the State | 13:1-7 |
| 5. | Love and Duty | 13:8-10 |
| 6. | Christian Life in Days of Crisis | 13:11~14 |
| 7. | Christian Liberty and Christian Charity | 14:1-15:6 |
| 8. | Christ and the Gentiles | 15:7-13 |

D. Epilogue 15:14 - 16:27

(F.F. Bruce)

Question 1

Give a brief account of what Paul has to say in his Epistles about Salvation.

Question 2

Where was Paul when he wrote Romans? To whom did he write and what do we know about the Roman church?

Question 3

Why do you think he wrote this letter?

Question 4

What did Paul have to say about the Christian and the State in Romans 13:1-7?

Question 5

What did Paul have to say about Christ and the Gentiles in 15:7-13?

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY

Read Romans 13:8-10. What is Paul saying about duties to one another? What does this specifically mean in your own home and community?