

Romans

Problem Identified

When studying in any epistle, it is important to remember the author's overall intent for writing that letter. This is especially true when considering the book of Romans, and this is true for two reasons. First, one must contend with the length of Romans. Being sixteen chapters long, the reader may lose sight of the whole from beginning to end. There are so many oft quoted passages within Romans, that the whole work is at risk of being fragmented into memorable passages, thus losing the overall thrust of the letter. If this happens, then in effect one cannot see the forest for the trees, as significant as any one tree may be. A second problem, almost unique to Romans, is the weight of doctrinal theology attributed to Romans. Martin Luther saw an epiphany in Romans. John Wesley was so moved by Luther's introduction to Romans that his heart was "strangely warmed" as he put it, and he was forever changed. (Jones, p.3) Dispensationalist, conservative Evangelicals, Methodists, Roman Catholics, all types and forms of theologians draw theological succor from the well of Romans, and their interpretations are understandably flavored by their predisposition to the entire Gospel message. Consequently, the second problem falls to the danger of reading one's theology into the text. For example, Warren Weirsbe, a dispensationalist, breaks the body of the letter into "S" word subsections. He writes the body of the letter may be divided into sections on Sin, Salvation, Sanctification, Sovereignty, and Service. (Weirsbe p.359) While this makes for a neatly packaged sermon series, one must wonder if the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to consider twentieth century English

vocabulary when Paul framed the body of the letter. It may help the reader, but it may also miss Paul's intent. Further, under the sub-section "Sovereignty," Wiersbe subtitles this section as "Righteousness rejected". Referring to the Jewish nation, he wrote "It presents dispensational truth in chapters 9-11,..." (Wiersbe p.360) One must then argue if dispensationalism framed this section, or vice versa. Not to be overly hard on Weirsbe, the NIV study Bible also breaks the body into the same subsets, although with understandably different headings for the sections. (Baker p.1704)

A Solution Proposed

What this paper proposes, is to examine the letter from beginning to end, attempting to delete conscious presuppositions, and examine the letter as if seen for the first time. Chapter and verse is referred to in order to orient the reader, but not to break the letter into parts. Titles over subsections, often found in any Bible, will be ignored, as each one is the interpretation of the scholar who edited the epistle. Attempts will be made to break the epistle into segments based on key words, such as "therefore", on phrases such as "What then?" and on stylistic breaks, such as when Paul addresses a particular group by name such as "You gentiles..." and finally, when Paul shifts from direct argument to self reflective comments, such as "I myself..." The examination is based on the NIV translation.

Presupposition cannot be completely out of the question, and perhaps that is the Achilles' heel to this approach, but there are a few presuppositions that seem required. One is that the NIV translation is adequate for the task at hand. Another is that Paul did not simply write in the modern "stream of consciousness" style, nor was his hand simply a machine of the Holy Spirit. There is a presupposition that Paul had structure to his thoughts and in his letter accordingly.

The idea here is that you want to know the mind of the biblical author - what he meant by what he said.

What follows is the outline that is proposed for this study.

A. Introductory Remarks

B. Description of the universal state of man before Christ, gentile and jew

C. The singular influence of Christ on that condition

D. Mankind's present condition

E. The influence of God for our future condition, gentile and jew

F. A description of life under Christ's authority

G. Concluding Epistolary remarks

Background

Before we explore the letter in detail, let us first remember that it was not a letter written to us. It was written by one person, at a certain place and time, written for others at another location, and for their edification, not ours. We may glean diamonds of information, but it is helpful in pulling from the text, to remember that we are "reading someone else's mail."

Paul is the undisputed author of the letter. Here some more pre-suppositional prejudice is involved. The author identifies himself, in typical Greek style, at the beginning of the letter with "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus,..." (Rom. 1:1) Fortunately for the length of this paper, there are no serious challenges to that attestation (Carson p.241). The first chapter tells us to whom the letter is written. It is important to note here that he does not address the church in Rome, but "all in Rome who are loved by God." (1:7) The implication is that there is not one single church. A brief history lesson, may be helpful here.

Good
(includes
reference to
assist reader)

If we consider how Christianity spread to Rome, it is helpful to remember that at Pentecost (Acts 2:10), there were Jews from around the known world. It is reasonable to believe that Messianic Jews were the first to bring Christianity back home, to Rome. Some claim Peter started the Roman “church”, but this seems to be contradicted in Paul’s remarks in Romans 15:20, in which he attests that it is not his ambition to build “...on someone else’s foundation.” Further, closing remarks in chapter 16 indicate that many people living in Rome were known by and to him. Many of these names are gentile. The conclusion is that while the church may have been planted at Pentecost, it was watered with converts brought into Christianity under the ministry of Paul in his missionary journeys. Returning to the history lesson, in A.D. 49, the Roman emperor expelled the Jews from Rome due to the “constant rioting at the instigation of *Chrestus*”. If *Chrestus* is a corruption of *Christos* (the Greek name for Christ), it is easy to see that Christianity was causing quite a stir in Rome. Acts 18:2 attests to the Roman exodus when it refers to Priscilla and Aquilla, who were expelled from Rome by the emperor. (Carson, p. 242)

Now, as time continued, Jews eventually were allowed back in Rome, but in the interim, the Gentile church had become firmly established. This shift, from Jewish ^{or at least, presence} predominance to Gentile autonomy is foundational to understanding the body of this epistle to Rome. Again, consider that Paul does not address the church in Rome, but “...all who are loved by God and set apart...” (Rom. 1:1)

So, if we can remember to whom Paul is writing, let us consider when. The latter part of chapter 15 indicate that Paul is concluding a missionary journey, intends to go to Jerusalem, after which his mission to that part of the world are over. This alone would place Paul at the conclusion of his second missionary journey, headed to Jerusalem. The Book of Acts tells more

of that outcome, but for our purposes, we are only concerned with his time and place of writing.

Paul intended to evangelize Spain and use Rome as a sending point. This is evident in Romans 15:23-24. It has been argued that Paul wrote this epistle to expound his theology in order to win their support. This paper argues that while he indeed expressly want^{ed} their support, he wrote this letter with the same boldness and same corrective posture and arguments that he often employed in other letters to churches he had planted.

That being proposed, let us move on to the letter itself.

A. Introductory Remarks

In his introductory remarks, Paul summarizes his ministry. In four verses, Paul identifies what good news he proclaims (v.2), who is that good news (v.3), declared by the Holy Spirit to be the Son of God, (v.4), through whom the Gentiles are called (v.5), and finally, the gentiles in Rome (v.6). Lest one might think the Messianic Jews are excluded, Paul writes “to all in Rome ...”(v.7). More on the inclusion will be offered later.

In the second part of his introduction, Paul addresses the Romans. He thanks God for them, prays for them, plans to come to them, and had planned for a time to see them.(vv. 8-13) Paul explains his obligation to preach to Greeks, and non-Greeks, wise and foolish, (and let the reader interpret into which category he falls) as Paul desires to come to Rome to preach. He speaks of the power of God through the Gospel. And here he first differentiates between the Jew and the Gentile. It is a difference that is repeated often in the body of the letter. Verse 17, however is the closing remark of the introduction, and the opening salvo that declares the intent of Paul’s argument against and to the Romans. He boldly proclaims a righteousness by which Christians shall live. It is attested by the Jewish prophet, revealed by God, but first to last,

accessed only by faith. Such a statement demands proof, and so Paul unpacks his exhortation.

B. Description of the universal state of man before Christ

Paul, (v.18), begins to show why all of mankind is guilty under God. This section concludes with “You, therefore”(2:1), as Paul directs his attention to the gentiles, guilty outside of the law. “Now you, if you call yourself a Jew...” (2:17) shifts the attention off of the gentiles and to the Jewish members of “all in Rome who are loved by God...” (1:7). How do they stand under scrutiny? Bringing this section to a close in 3:9, “What shall we conclude then?” He employs the Psalmist to verify his “...charge that Jew and Gentile alike are all under sin.”

Thus far we have moved through two major movements, the introduction, and the demonstration that all are universally guilty of sin. This is life before Christ.

C. The singular influence of Christ on that condition

Chapter 3, verse 21 indicates another section opened up in the phrase “But now...” What has changed the status of mankind is revealed in the progressing verses. Righteousness comes through “faith in Jesus Christ.” (3:22) We are justified by God’s grace through the redemption that came through Jesus Christ. (3:24)

For those who might argue for the law, Paul refers back to the patriarch who was prior to the law. In the following verses he demonstrates the priority of faith over the law. This section concludes with, “Therefore, the promise comes by faith...” (4:16). It was by faith, credited to him and to us who have faith (vss. 22-25).

Continuing to build on his argument “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith,...” (5:1), Paul speaks of the peace available to all through faith. To draw things to conclusion in this section, Paul again says “Therefore, just as sin entered...” (5:12), as he

demonstrates Jesus Christ's ability to offset the contamination brought about by Adam. This third section concludes, then, as Paul feels he has adequately demonstrated the singular answer to the universality of sin; faith in Jesus Christ.

D. Mankind's present condition

How is mankind then to understand itself in relation to the former law? If we are no longer under the law, what is our relation to sin? The next section is introduced "What shall we say then?" (6:1), as he explores the relationship between grace and sin. Again, "What then?" (6:15) is asked, as he introduces another dimension of the sin/grace question.

The next section does not introduce itself with a phrase, but as a shift in ideas. Paul speaks of the power of the law in the example of marriage (7:1-6), using it to demonstrate a first law. "What shall we say, then?" (7:7), introduces a second law that Paul has found equally strong. The remainder of chapter 7 illustrates the present state in which man is bound to be confined, as long as we are confined to this body of death. The only rescue continues to be in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. The summary statement "Therefore" (8:1), again brings together the preceding remarks, concluding that although the situation of sin still exists in the body, there is no condemnation! We have received the spirit of adoption, and so are children of God. "Therefore" (8:12), concludes that although there is no condemnation, there is an obligation. This is fleshed out from verses 12-16.

E. The influence of God for our future condition

For the saved

"Now,..." (8:17), takes the section pertaining to our present condition, and shifts it toward our future position. Paul transitions from the present state of being God's children, to the

future reality that we are joint heirs with Christ! 8:31 brings us back from the future glory and into the present situation again. “What then, shall we say in response to this?” Paul confirms that there is no power equal to God, nothing can separate him from his children.

For the Jews

While still forward looking in time, notice Paul’s shift in address. “I speak the truth...” (9:1) is now in the first person, as Paul addresses an issue personal to him. (Chapter 7 also uses the first person, but it is meant as a universal “I”. Otherwise, the “law” which Paul refers to in chapter 7 would be unique to him, and of no value in his argument to the Romans.) Here again, Paul returns to the theme of comparing and contrasting what it means to be gentile or Jew in this new kingdom of Christianity. Here, again, he differentiates between those who descend from Israel and Israel (v.7). “Children of the promise”. (v. 8) is a crucial concept to retain as this portion of the argument goes forward. Another conclusion is drawn with the word “therefore” in verse 16, as he again gives the accountability to God and not man. “What shall we say then?” (9:30), introduces another section, but still continuing in the contrasts between Jew and gentile. The problem is one of faith ^{verses} works. In a series of questions, Paul continues to advance the argument until concluding in 10:12, that there is no difference between Jew and gentile, but that they all need to hear. Did Israel hear? (paraphrase of 10:18), to which Paul quotes scripture to assure the reader that they did. “Did God reject his people?” (11:1) is then asked, to which Paul again emphatically declares “No!” Paul reminds us that a remnant was retained before, alluding to a present remnant which will be saved. “Did Israel stumble... beyond recovery?” (11:11). Again the answer is no. He uses an analogy of ingrafted olive branches to prove his point.

“Consider, therefore...” (11:22) draws this section to a close, asking “all in Rome who

are blessed by God...” (1:7) to consider the kindness and sternness of God. “All Israel will be saved,...” (11:26) is a verse that many Dispensationalists have rallied behind to prove their theological point. As we must not neglect the forest for the trees, consider this point a tree. Consider the two groves of trees presented earlier by Paul, when he wrote of Abraham, the father of all who believe,...”(4:11) and later as a child of the promise. (9:8) If you consider verse 11:26 in light of the entire argument that Paul has been making, then ask ‘Who is Israel, that God should save?’ Surely, as 11:32 says, “For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”

The universality of sin has been brought forward in the first portion of the body of his letter. The singular atoning act of Christ is the second thrust of his letter. How we live, caught between the Holy Spirit filled life and the mortal death is the third major portion. Looking forward to the glory to come is the fourth section. It constantly contrasts Jew and gentile, resolving again that it is God who elects whom he will, so either saved or unsaved owe their status to God. *(but this is not detached from their responses to God either)*

F. Description of Life under Christ authority

Chapter 12 begins with another marker “Therefore,” as Paul moves on to another pertinent point. For the verses that follow all the way to our 15:13, the problem of living day to day is addressed. Paul is no longer presenting question after question. Now is time for instruction. Be transformed (12:2), love in sincerity (12:9), submit to authority (13:5). “And do this,...” (13:11), shifts the understanding to another level. Additional exhortations are given, concluded with the remark “So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.” (14:12). “Therefore let us stop passing judgment ...” (14:13) begins the conclusion of this section. Let us

therefore... (14:19) continues. The final summation consists of four quotations from the Old Testament, prefaced by the admonition to “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you,...” (15:7).

G. concluding Epistolary remarks

The body of his remarks now concluded, Paul shifts again to the first person singular as he concludes his epistle. He reassures them of their good standing, (15:14), he witnesses to his ministry (15:19), he tells them of his plans “But now...” (15:23), which is confirmed in the benediction “The God of peace be with you all. Amen.” (15:33). Final greetings and admonitions conclude this lengthy letter from Paul to the “church” in Rome.

So what?

Having explored the depth of Romans from this perspective, it is necessary to ask ourselves, “So what?” If that is all there is to it, than it is questionably a nice history lesson regarding Roman Christianity from thousands of years ago, but no more. Rather strongly to the contrary, the importance of this interpretation if extremely important to the church in the 21st Century. If we consider how ^{potentially} fractionalized the Roman “church” was, one need only look in the phone book under “churches” to see how we have failed to keep the unity of the spirit alive in our “church” today. Paul’s argument on the universality of sin, on the common state of all mankind with and without Jesus is just as relevant today. What is more pronounced is the shameful division constantly accepted within “the” church. Paul does indeed write a theological treatise that is instructional for Lutherans, Wesleyans, Evangelicals, Pre-trib, Mid-trib, and Post-trib Christians, but more critical than that is the message that we are all to be unified in our faith and response to God. ^{At} On the outset of this paper, it was proposed that this letter had much of the

instructional exhortation characteristic of Paul's apostolic authority. He was writing to the church in Rome for much the same reason as he challenged Peter regarding Jewish privilege. The schism between Jew and Gentile threatened the unity of the church. What was happening in Rome was a microcosm of the Christian world at large. Paul wrote with apostolic authority to stop the division in its tracks. The churches in Rome would be of little help to Paul if they were constantly fighting amongst themselves for predominance. Paul needed a unified, healthy church if they were to support his ministry to Spain.

If Paul were writing to our county, would not the same admonitions apply? Perhaps not Messianic Jew and Gentile, but Methodist and Episcopalian, Brethren and Evangelical. Why could Paul not write a letter to the "Church of Lebanon County"? Much as with Rome, there is no one, unified church, but a scattering of "house" churches, often competing with each other for predominance. We need a unified, healthy church if we are to support an active ministry in our frontier, America. The in-fighting, posturing for position, denouncement, and prejudice has got to stop in God's church. It cripples not the churches of Christ, but the Church of Christ. It indeed speaks volumes to a Martin Luther, who had lost the value of Faith in his Catholic religion. It is indeed crucial to Wesley to discover that righteousness cannot be found in works, but simply and remarkably on Faith alone, but all of this is prompted by a corruption of the original message of the Gospel. The Romanist doctrine was not in existence when Paul wrote to the Romans. Wesleyan methods were not codified in the first century Church. What was disrupting the purity of the Faith, what still corrupts the purity of our faith, is the disharmony that comes from self interested assemblies. Paul says to the Romans what he says to us who are listening: 1. Everybody is guilty of sin. 2. Christ is the only answer. 3. We will struggle with sin

all the days of our natural lives. 4. The only hope is through faith in the Holy Spirit, to regenerate our sinful selves into incorruptible perfection. Our present state is better than our condition before Christ, but it is nothing compared to what we will become. 5. This is the workings of God. That we may not fathom his wisdom does not matter. In the gospels, God revealed “a righteousness that is by faith from first to last...” (1:17).

Concluding this epistle

There is a joke about a country church. Members came one Sunday, and the doors were chained and padlocked shut. On the door was nailed a note from the preacher. It simply read “You heard what to do. Now, go do it.” Paul had apostolic authority behind his message. Many in Rome were no doubt brought into the faith by him. Others knew him by reputation. His lengthy list of greetings attests to the fact of many in Rome knowing him and his associates. History tells us what became of the church in Rome. One’s present predispositions will determine whether one believes that letter made a lasting impression on Rome,...or not. But we have now heard also. Have we listened to the admonitions echoing through this epistle? “Watch out for those who cause division and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.” (16:17) That was not an afterthought in Paul’s message. Is it even a footnote in our’s?

Brian, well done. Excellent interaction with a 'tough' letter such as Romans. The Lord's blessings on the work the content of this letter out in your heart.

95% A

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A Chiastic footnote.

When I started my approach to this paper, I had in mind to examine it from a chiastic structure. Not wanting to be influenced by predispositions, I attempted to see the structure without referring to your outline. I thought that if I was able to construct the same outline, then I would feel more confident in its presence, rather than seeing it through your interpretation.

The outline is representative of a Chiastic structure, which would be properly stated here:

- A. Introductory Remarks
- B. description of life before Christ
 - C. The influence of Christ on our Present condition
 - D. Mankind's Present Condition
 - C.' The influence of God on our Eternal condition
- B.' description of life under Christ's authority
- A.' Concluding Remarks.

This arrangement like this would place how we live, struggling with our two natures to be at the center of his argument. To explore this section "D" further, please note the following:

Man's Present condition

- A. First question regarding grace and sin.
- A.' Second question regarding grace and sin
 - B. First example from law.
 - B.' Second example from law.
 - C. Freedom from condemnation while under these laws.

This arrangement would place the present struggle at the heart of the argument. Although there are laws at work in our lives, we are free from the condemnation that existed prior to Christ's redemptive work. This would indicate Paul's message essentially encouraging the Christians to continue in their struggle, knowing they are at internal war, yet confident in victory.