

# **RIGHT IN ROMANS**

Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans

by

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE SETTING OF THE EPISTLE**

#### The Greatness of the Epistle

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS stands pre-eminent among the writings of the Apostle Paul. It is without question the most important production of his pen, if we except Ephesians which is as mystically sublime as Romans is logically profound. No other writing of his has so powerfully influenced the thinking of the Church. Down through the centuries it has proved to be a veritable cornerstone of the Christian faith.

#### **AUTHENTICITY**

We have the strongest grounds for claiming that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans. The Pauline authorship is attested to by a wealth of external and internal evidence. We are safe in saying that the Pauline authorship of Romans is confirmed by practically unanimous tradition ever since his day. It has been recognized in the Church as long as the apostle's writings have been in existence. This letter, furthermore, is the most thoroughly Pauline of all the writings that bear the name of the great apostle. It is fragrant with his personality. It fairly breathes his spirit. It is saturated with his most characteristic phraseology. It is surcharged with his dynamic convictions in matters of faith and practice. That Paul was the author of this work is evidenced by the whole tone and contents of the letter.

#### **TIME AND PLACE OF WRITING**

As to the date of the Epistle, while there are some who put it several years earlier, it is the general consensus of opinion on the part of competent authorities that it was written from Corinth in the winter of A. D. 57-58, while Paul was spending several months in comparative leisure in that city toward the close of his third missionary journey just prior to the visit to Jerusalem, which was to eventuate in his arrest and later imprisonment in Rome. The treatise—for it is really that, rather than a letter—was composed in the home of Gaius, a wealthy merchant of Corinth. As Paul's stay in the city was drawing to a close, he learned that Phoebe, a Greek Christian woman, was on the point of visiting Rome; therefore, he decided to trust her to take this precious Epistle to the church in the capital city of the Empire. What if Phoebe had proved careless or unfaithful to her trust? The loss to the Church would have been simply incalculable!

Truly God does commit priceless treasure to earthen vessels. Who knows what eternal consequences may be wrapped up in the faithful performance of our simplest duties to Christ?

### **THE PURPOSE IN WRITING**

Why did Paul write this Epistle to the Romans? He planned to visit Rome and then proceed to Spain which was the westernmost frontier of the Empire. To give in advance a full statement of his Gospel would greatly facilitate his labors after his arrival in the imperial city,

The strategic importance of the church in Rome invited a systematic presentation of the great essentials of the faith—although as a matter of fact the Epistle treats of only two of the major doctrines—sin and salvation. With his letter before them, the leaders of the church at Rome could judge of Paul, whether he was an imposter and a dangerous upstart, as his enemies claimed, or whether, on the contrary, he was indeed a trustworthy apostle with a living message from God.

Furthermore, it was needful for Paul to make clear the relationship of Christianity to Judaism because of the Jewish and the Gentile elements in the church. Nor are we in danger of going far wrong if we assume that the apostle with his statesmanlike vision foresaw the momentous advantage to the entire future of Christianity if the church at the very fountainhead of influences radiating out into the whole known world could be put in possession of a thoroughgoing treatise on basic Gospel truth.

### **THE CHURCH IN ROME**

There can be no question that this letter was written to the Christians in Rome. Such references as those found in 1:10-13 and 15:23, 24, 28 fit no other city.

Even thus early the church in Rome was undoubtedly distinguished throughout the Church at large for the strength and purity of its faith. Moreover, the church must at the time of the writing of this masterly Epistle have been a very large and important one because when the frightful persecution under Nero broke loose the Christians were an "immense multitude."

The origin of the church in Rome is largely conjecture. That the nucleus of the church in Rome may have been comprised of men and women won to Christ on the Day of Pentecost, believers who fled to the capital city in times of persecution and converts of Paul on his several missionary journeys is at least a plausible explanation of its beginning.

### **THE EFFECT OF THE EPISTLE**

A careful study of Church History discloses that practically every great revival and reform movement has been kindled and kept burning by a return to the Scriptures, a rediscovery of the Word of God, an opening of the draughts of inspiration from on high; it furthermore reveals that in this indispensable return to the Bible, the Book of Romans has again and again come into a place of prominence.

We can readily see why this should be so, because in this letter, as perhaps in no other, we find a full and exhaustive treatment of such basic questions as the reality of sin, the need of redemption, justification by faith, the efficacy of the atoning death of Jesus, regeneration, the new life in the Spirit, and the future glorification of believers.

A return to a close study of Romans as a reservoir of Christian doctrine is desperately needed in our day; for if there is one thing above all others that characterizes much of our current weak-tea variety of Christianity, it is an inadequate conception of the awfulness of sin and of the utter inability of man to find salvation apart from the redeeming grace of God in Christ.

### **THE STRUCTURE OF THE EPISTLE**

In bringing this introductory chapter to a close, a word or two with reference to the structure of the Epistle may not be amiss.

After a rather lengthy, but by no means irrelevant introduction, the apostle launches forth in 1:18 upon an exceedingly close-knit and logical argument to prove that man cannot be saved by works, but only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who gave His life a ransom for sin. There is a sense in which the first eight chapters constitute a unit in themselves.

Had the letter ended with the close of chapter eight, we should have had a complete treatise on the doctrine of salvation under the following natural and logical divisions:

- I. Condemnation for Sin (1:18-3:20)
- II. Justification by Faith (3:21-5:21)
- III. Sanctification of Life (6:1-8:39)

Chapters nine, ten, and eleven are a sort of excursus dealing with the knotty problem of the relationship between the truth of redemption by grace and the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.

In 12:1-15:13 Paul devotes himself to a discussion of some of the practical fruits of salvation in everyday life. The concluding chapter and a half consists of miscellaneous postscripts, last-minute articles tucked into the trunk before it is locked and strapped.

We might go so far as to say that the content of Romans can be epitomized in the single phrase *made right*.

When God provided in the death of Jesus Christ a sovereign remedy whereby He might save men from sin without doing violence to His own infinitely holy nature, He *made right* what otherwise would have constituted a divorce between His holiness and His love.

In justification by faith man is *made right* in state; in sanctification of life man is *made right* in life through the indwelling presence of the Spirit.

In the digression in Chapters 9, 10, and 11 the apostle shows how in the future restoration of Israel through a general acceptance of Christ as their Messiah and Redeemer the apparent failure of God's promises to His chosen people will be *made right*. The following three chapters show how those whose souls have been *made right* before God positionally can and must be *made right* for God through bearing abundant, practical fruits of consecration.

Justification by faith is the planting of the seed by the Lord, sanctification through the Spirit is the growing of the seed in the soil; but the believer must co-operate with God in a fullness of dedication if all of God's gracious purposes for him are to be realized in his own experience—if he is to be *made right* by God and for God.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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