**AN INTRODUCTION TO PAUL’S LETTER TO THE ROMANS**

1. **Authorship and Authenticity**

Internal evidence is so strongly in favor of the genuineness of the letter to the Romans, with Paul as it author, that it has never been seriously challenged. In the first verse Paul identifies himself as author. The vocabulary, logic, and theological development are consistent with all of Paul’s other twelve letters. The style, while slightly different from his other letters, also suggests his authorship. The language in Chapter 15 regarding contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem coincides with Paul’s comments in I Corinthians 16 and II Corinthians 8 and 9.

 Testimony as to the authenticity of this letter, with Paul as its author, is almost unanimous from external sources. Early Christian writers, sometimes called the apostolic fathers (Barnabas, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and others), quoted extensively and authoritatively from the Roman letter in their writings indicating their belief in its authenticity. Even unbelieving historians in the post-apostolic period attributed the letter to the pen of Paul.

 Paul was peculiarly equipped to write the letter to the church in Rome for many reasons:

1. He was born a Jew (tribe of Benjamin) (Galatians 3:5) and educated in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia (Greek influenced).
2. The influence of a Grecian education is manifest in Paul’s writings. He uses the logical method of presenting truth and his method of linking together his arguments and driving relentlessly toward the ultimate conclusion or principle was not characteristic of Jewish writers in general.
3. Paul had been given a special relationship to the Gentiles by the Lord. He was God’s chosen vessel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), to preach Christ among the Gentiles (Galatians 1:16), because he had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised and God effectually worked with Paul in that effort (Galatians 2:7-8), thus making Paul a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth (I Timothy 2:7).
4. His later education was Jewish, at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). This made Paul thoroughly acquainted (Galatians 1:14) with the attitudes, doctrines, and reasoning used by the Jews who were the early adversaries of the gospel. He was a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5).

Although Paul was without question the author of the letter, it was physically written by Tertius (Romans 16:22), no doubt a scribe.

1. **Integrity**

The integrity, or textual correctness, of the letter has been the subject of some controversy. Although all recognized manuscripts and versions contain the letter as we have it, some relatively modern scholars have questioned the authenticity of the concluding chapters (Romans 12-16). The various hypotheses put forth by these critics have long passed into oblivion; and all recent critics of note have restored the concluding chapters to their place as an integral part of the letter.

The doxology (praising) at the end of the epistle (Romans 16:25-27) has been questioned because of the lack of agreement between the various manuscripts. Some place the doxology at the conclusion of Chapter 14, others at the conclusion of Chapter 16, one includes it in both places, and one omits it entirely. It is generally felt, however, that the doxology is correctly placed at the conclusion of Chapter 16. It was probably erroneously transposed in some manuscripts to the conclusion of Chapter 14 because the copyist considered the blessing in Romans 16:24 to be the real conclusion of the letter.

Chapter 16 is also debated more since Paul greets by name 26 people in a church he has never visited. This was probably Paul’s effort as a stranger to the Roman church to list his mutual friends. Paul would have met these people in the cities of his missionary journeys.

1. **To Whom it was Written**

This letter was written “to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints” (Romans 1:7). Hence, it was written to all the Christians residing in Rome at that time.

The city of Rome was founded in 753 BC and by the time of Paul it was the greatest city in the world with over one million residents. It was full of magnificent buildings, but the majority of people were slaves.

Although discussed for years, the origin of the church in Rome is still unknown. The Roman Catholic Church holds that Peter came to Rome in the second year of Claudius (42 AD) and that he founded the church in Rome and served as its bishop for 25 years. However, there are several facts which do **not** suppor**t** this claim that Peter was in Rome during the 25 years from 40 AD to 65 AD:

1. Peter was in prison in Jerusalem during the time Catholic tradition says he was bishop in Rome (Acts 12) – 44 AD.
2. Peter was in Jerusalem at the time of the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) – 52 AD.
3. In Paul’s letter to Rome, he does not mention Peter among the 26 individuals he mentions by name (Romans 16) – 54-58 AD.
4. Paul wrote five of his thirteen epistles (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, II Timothy, and Philemon) while in prison at Rome, but doesn’t mention Peter – 53-67 AD.
5. In II Timothy 4:10-11, Paul said that all had deserted him except for Luke. Where was Peter if he was bishop of Rome? – 67 AD.
6. No mention is made of Rome in the writings of Peter and no inspired writer mentions Peter in connection with Rome anywhere in the New Testament.

The testimony of the Roman Catholic Church notwithstanding, there is no trustworthy or unbiased evidence of any apostle being present in Rome until Paul’s arrival toward the close of his life. The most plausible theory of the origin of the church in Rome is that some of the “visitors from Rome” (Acts 2:10) were converted on Pentecost, then returned to Rome. They then planted the seed which led to further growth. The widespread knowledge of their faith and the influence that it had (Romans 1:8) could most logically be explained by a rather early establishment of the work in Rome.

Gentiles were predominant in the church at Rome (Romans 1:13; 11:13, 28-31; 15:15-16), but there were also Jewish believers (Romans 2:17-3:8; 3:21-4:1; 7:1-14; 14:1-15:12). The national character of the names of those addressed in the letter, coupled with the reasoning employed by Paul in the body of the message, show that both Jews and Gentiles comprised “to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints.” It is not surprising that a church made up of both Jews and Gentiles would experience some strife. Many of the problems dealt with in the Roman letter were due to the fact that complete reconciliation to being on an absolute equality in Christ was difficult for both Jew and Gentile.

There is evidence that many Jews lived in Rome at that time. Jews had been introduced into Rome in large numbers by Pompeius the Great (63 BC). Augustus, influenced by his friendship with the first Herod, had improved their condition and assigned them the section of Rome beyond the Tiber River. Later, Claudius, when quarrels arose between them and the Christians, passed a decree for the banishment of **all** Jews in 49 AD (Acts 18:1-2). (The Roman authorities did not understand that Judaism and Christianity were distinct and separate religious systems.) After Claudius died, Nero relaxed the decree and let the Jews return to Rome.

Why is this history important? Well, consider how the church in Rome would have developed. When a new church formed in the Gentile world, it usually had a Jewish “flavor” at first. After all, it was the Jews that believed in one God, believed in the Messiah, and had the Bible (Old Testament). Early churches started with Jews, and then Gentiles joined. The church in Rome probably started the same way and Jews would have been some of its leading members. But due to their banishment from Rome by Claudius for 5-7 years, the church in Rome would have been exclusively Gentile in its membership during that time. The Gentiles would have taken on leadership roles and taught the gospel to other Gentiles. The membership and culture of the congregation would have changed tremendously. But once the decree was relaxed and the Jews moved back home, strife in the congregation would have arisen between the Jewish brethren that wanted to resume control and the Gentile brethren who knew that they had been able to operate the congregation just as well in the Jews’ absence.

The congregation in Rome needed unification and Paul was ready with his message of how faith in Jesus Christ brings about righteousness and salvation for both Jews **and** Gentiles.

1. **Time and Place of Writing**

It is fairly certain that this letter was written from Corinth. Certain names in the salutation point to this conclusion. Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea, one of the port towns of Corinth, is commended to the Romans (Romans 16:1-2). Gaius, in whose house Paul lodged (Romans 16:23), is probably the person mentioned as a member of the Corinthian church in I Corinthians 1:14. Erastus, here called “the city treasurer,” is elsewhere mentioned in connection to Corinth (II Timothy 4:20; Acts 19:22).

It is also fairly certain that the epistle was written during Paul’s visit to Corinth following his long stay at Ephesus (in Roman-controlled Greece then; in Turkey now) on his third missionary journey as recorded in Acts 20:3. Paul, when he wrote the letter, was on the verge of carrying the contributions of Macedonia and Achaia to the poor saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27). A comparison with I Corinthians 16:4, II Corinthians 8:1-2; 9:11, and Acts 24:17 shows that he was so engaged at this period of his life. Moreover, in the letter he declares his intention of visiting the Romans after he has been at Jerusalem (Romans 15:23-25), and that such was his design at that particular time is evident from Acts 19:21.

The date of the writing of the letter has been variously placed between 54 and 58 AD. Paul then gave the letter to Phoebe to carry it to Rome.

1. **Purpose and Design**

It is evident that this letter was to take the place of an intended, but deferred, visit to Rome (Romans 1:11-13). It was apparently also to serve as a letter of personal introduction for Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2). Above all, it was written to teach and instruct Christians. In Acts, we are told **what** to do to be justified; in Romans, we are told the **how** and **why** of justification.

The epistle is designed as a discussion of the grounds on which a sinner is justified before God. The principal theme presented is justification by faith for both Jew and Gentile. In developing this theme, Paul has a threefold objective in his presentation.

1. To show that both Jew and Gentile are guilty sinners, under the same condemnation.
2. To show that neither Jew nor Gentile can be saved by any law, written or unwritten, except the gospel of Jesus Christ, the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16), which is a law of faith (Romans 3:27), the law of the Spirit of life (Romans 8:2).
3. To show all who are saved how to conduct themselves so as to attain eternal life.
4. **Language and Style**

It is evident that Paul approached the writing of this letter with great spirit and force. His words are bold, vigorous, and fresh. Moses E. Lard expressed it in these words, “His words march along like giants, and never glide in tranquil currents. His thoughts rush on as if wild; and his words rush on like his thoughts. Power and vitality seem always to have determined his choice of words. His words are like boulders between the mountain-top from which they have been disengaged, and the sea toward which they have bounded. Their source you can never mistake, nor their tendency fail to trace. No one can doubt that a powerful brain poured forth this verbal torrent, nor that its aim is to make the mind teem with light. It is replete with the force and buoyancy of the new divine life.” *(Lard’s Commentary on Paul’s Letter to Romans)*

In style Paul presents a message which in places is straightforward, clear, and unquestionably direct. However, sudden transitions and digressions are evident in his attempt to leave no part of the subject unexplained or undefended. It is this intricacy of structure that has caused many to regard Paul’s meaning as cloudy and obscure. However, a close consideration of the entire discourse will reveal that the digressions serve to solidify the foundation on which the glorious theme is built. He writes under a deep and lively sense of the truth and the importance of the gospel, as a man who clearly understood it, and in whose heart and affections it reigned far superior to all worldly considerations.

Romans is more than a book of theology; it is also a book of practical exhortation! The good news of Jesus Christ is more than facts to be believed; it is also a life to be lived – a life befitting the person “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).