

# The Year of St. Paul

## The Letter to the Ro-



### Overview and Date of Writing

St. Paul had no hand in forming the early Church in Rome; nor did he ever visit Rome prior to this letter being written. This letter almost becomes a way for Paul to introduce himself to the Church in Rome. It had long been Paul's plan to visit Rome, and it seems apparent that Paul is familiar to many individuals in Rome. It was his plan to first deliver to the mother Church in Jerusalem a collection taken up in the Gentile Church, and then move to Spain, stopping for a period of time in Rome. The collection was to assist the poor in Jerusalem and to show Gentile solidarity through their sharing of the "spiritual blessings" received. Paul's trip to Rome was ultimately not one made freely and would end in his martyrdom.

In Rome, there had been persecution of the Jews. With no distinction between traditional Jew and Christian Jew, all were driven from Rome by the edict of Claudius in 49AD. Yet the Church continued to flourish through the faith of Gentile Christians. After approximately five years of exile, AD54, Jews were permitted to return to Rome. The Jewish Christians, needless to say, came back expecting to have control. A struggle pursued concerning dietary and calendaric regulations (laws of monetary contributions).

Paul would have heard of this problem. So the early part of this essay-letter immediately dealt with the call of all people to salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It is the last of what scholars believe is an original, that is, written by St. Paul. Even with this said, some hold that parts were later added by another source.

## GOD FIRST

*Year Three, Part 27*

**February 1, 2009**

### The Gospel is the Power of God meant to bring salvation to all people

This is the basic theme that runs through the entire letter of Paul to the Romans. It also explains why, while it is considered a basic early Christian catechism, it does not touch upon key teachings of Paul found in other letters, including some earlier in depth teachings of the church including eschatology and the Eucharist.

### Overview of Romans

The gospel defined (1:1-17)

Opening Greeting (1:1-7)

Thanksgiving and wish (1:9-15)

The gospel as the power of God (1:16-17)

The need for the gospel (1:18-3:20)

Gentiles needed the gospel (1:18-32)

Jews needed the gospel (2:1-29)

Despite their moral superiority (2:1-11)

Despite possessing the Torah (2:12-24)

Despite circumcision (2:25-29)

Objections and answers (3:1-8)

The universal dominion of sin (3:9-20)

The gospel and faith (3:21-4:25)

God's righteousness and faith (3:21-26)

No grounds for boasting (3:27-31)

Abraham was justified (4:1-17)

By faith (4:1-8)

Before circumcision (4:9-12)

Before the Law (4:13-17)

Abraham as the example of faith (4:18-25)

The gospel and freedom (5:1-7:25)

What God has done in Christ (5:1-11)

Adam and Christ (5:12-21)

Freedom from the power of sin and death (6:1-11)

Freed for obedience to God (6:12-23)

Freed from the Law (7:1-6)

Sin and the Law (7:7-11)

Life under sin and the Law (7:12-25)

The gospel and life in the Spirit (8:1-39)

Life in the Spirit (8:1-11)

Children of God (8:12-17)

Waiting in hope (8:18-25)

The Spirit and prayer (8:26-27)

God is for us (8:28-39)

The gospel and God's plan (9:1-11:36)

Paul's lament and Israel's privileges (9:1-5)

The surprising way of God (9:6-13)

God's sovereign freedom and justice (9:14-24)

The present state of God's people and Scripture (9:25-29)

Israel's mistake (9:30-10:4)

Biblical confirmation (10:5-13)

Accepting and rejecting the gospel (10:14-21)

A remnant within Israel (11:1-10)

Jews and Gentiles (11:11-16)

The olive tree (11:17-24)

The mystery of salvation (11:25-32)

Celebratory conclusion (11:33-36)

The gospel and Christian life (12:1-13-14)

The body of Christ and the gifts of the Spirit (12:1-8)

Love towards others (12:9-21)

Christian life in the Roman Empire (13:1-7)

The love command and the day of the Lord (13:8-14)

The gospel and community conflict (14:1-15:13)

Avoid condemning others (14:1-12)

Respect for the conscience of others (14:13-23)

The example of Christ (15:1-6)

Christ as the principle of unity (15:7-13)

The promotion of the gospel (15:14-16:27)

Apostle to the Gentiles (15:14-21)

Travel plans (15:22-33)

Final Greetings (16:1-16)

Warning (16:17-20)

More greetings (16:21-23)

Doxology (16:25-27)

The above overview is taken from *Meeting St. Paul Today*, by Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, Loyola Press, Chicago

Paul wishes to direct all thought to the salvation necessary for Gentile and Jew alike. All were sinners needing God's forgiveness. Jews, through their being chosen as God's unique and favored people, are the first offered this salvation through faith. It is then offered to the Gentiles. The Uprightness of God is revealed as justification for the person of faith.

For Paul, the gospel is all about Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, the saving actions of God.

It is God doing!

We are benefactors of this, and, because it is not of our doing that salvation is offered, it cannot be our doing in determining who are coheirs of this gift of grace and life.

All are equal.

Paul is clear that through Christ all are justified, that is, made worthy of eternal life. He is equally clear that the gospel, the message of salvation must be accepted by each person. This requires faith on their part.

We come to see that Paul's understanding requires faith to be accepted as gift from God, and that this gift is more than a belief.

### **Faith as unity in the work of Christ**

The gospel, the power of God meant to bring salvation to all people, is made known through faith. That is,

those coming to believe in their salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, must now take on this very action with complete abandonment. For the Jew, the perfect model of faith was that of Abraham, who long before the time of Jesus, abandoned self completely in the acceptance of God's will, shown in his readiness to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Abraham is shown as justified by God before Jesus is sent as the final covenant.

Paul goes further. Jews holding to the law as their covenantal response, will cite the outward sign of their relationship with God — their circumcision. Paul, as a devote Jew, can no longer allow an outward observance to be the foundation of a true faith. Nor can the Mosaic law fulfill and move the believer to completeness of self. There is no freedom except in giving over and in trusting.

These points will be further discussed in the weeks to come, as seen in chapters six and seven when a fuller understanding of the Holy Spirit is brought to light.

Now the person of faith is asked to enter completely into the will of the Father, who offered as sacrifice his only Son, Jesus. Faith, trusting completely in the care the Father has for us, must be put on the line. Nothing else will do. The purpose of faith is to bring us to completion in, with, and through Jesus Christ. Our faith does not take away or replace the justification won by Christ. Only God's action can bring that about.

Faith does require the necessary response to know

Wheel taken from "Reading the Acts, Epistles and Revelation by Kingsley E. Dalpadado, OMI, St. Paul Editions

the complete giving of God found in our being justified.

This is the crux of the first four chapters of Paul's Letter to the Romans — and to us.

### **POINTS TO PONDER**

1. The concern raised by the tension found between Jews and Gentiles in Rome is found even in the Church today. What must our focus become to eliminate such tensions? And how can they be removed?
2. Often we may find ourselves attempting to justify our words and actions. If we take serious consideration, do they first accept the justification of Jesus' death and resurrection? And second, do they lead us to true faith?
3. When it comes to trust, there is a secular trust and one of faith. These can be diametrically opposed. Which is more frequent in our own lives? Do we really trust God? Or are our own doings bring about a greater sense of surety and trust?
4. At Mass, the Doxology is proclaimed, "Through Him, with Him, and In Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours almighty Father, forever and ever." How does this go along with what Paul is writing concerning our lives in Christ?