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the

NEW TESTAMENT

Exploring

volume 2

THE LETTERS
AND REVELATION

Exploring

the NEW TESTAMENT

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THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

In this chapter we shall consider:

- the situation that led to the writing of Romans and its purpose(s);
- the manner of Paul's argument;
- the working out of Paul's discourse in detail;
- the place and date of writing;
- the relation of Romans 16 to the rest of the letter.

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. (John Wesley *Journal* for May 24th, 1738)

Probably no book in the New Testament has been so influential in the history of the Christian church as the Letter to the Romans. Autobiographical accounts tell us how it was decisive in the initial conversion of, or the renewal of living faith in, such significant figures as Augustine, Martin

Luther, John Wesley, and Karl Barth, and through them in the lives of many more.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

Romans is the longest of Paul's letters and the most systematic, in the sense that a careful argument is developed, even if it is so complex that it is difficult to give a clear analysis of it. Yet it has proved remarkably difficult to offer a compelling account of the reasons for writing it and the goals of the writer.

We can begin by noting four relevant facts in Paul's own situation.

- Paul was hoping to pay a visit to Rome to a church that he himself had not founded and for which, therefore, he had no responsibility and within which he had no particular authority. It will be remembered from his correspondence with Corinth that he was quite touchy about other missionaries working in the congregations that he had founded and equally he avoided working in other missionaries' territories (2 Cor. 10:12–16). However, he wished to visit them only 'in passing' (Rom. 15:24), and the letter is meant to pave the way for the visit.

ROME AND ITS CHURCH

Situated halfway down the Italian peninsula the city of Rome, traditionally founded in 753 BC, had become the centre of a vast empire that encompassed the whole of the area round the Mediterranean Sea. Rome itself was a city of c. one million inhabitants. It was an administrative, military and commercial metropolis, which acted like a magnet to people from all over the empire. It is not surprising that there was a sizeable population (estimated at 40,000) of Jewish immigrants. Nor is it surprising that Christianity should have reached Rome at an early date, thanks to the movement to and fro of Jews; according to Acts 2:10 there were Roman Jews in Jerusalem at the first Christian Pentecost, and such people will have taken their faith back to Rome with them.

The Emperor Claudius issued an edict banning the Jews from Rome in AD 49. Suetonius, a Roman historian, says that this was because the Jews were continually rioting *impulsore Chresto* ('with Chrestus as the instigator'; Suetonius *Claudius* 25), which many take to be a slightly garbled attempt to describe outbreaks associated with 'Christus' ('Chrestus' and 'Christus' would be almost identical in pronunciation). Whether this be a correct interpretation of the cause of the troubles or not, the ban affected the Christian Jews in Rome, and we read that Aquila and Priscilla were forced to move to Corinth (Acts 18:1–2). With the death of the Emperor in AD 54 the edict lapsed, and the Jews trailed back to their homes.

The Christian church in such a setting was doubtless composed of Jews and non-Jews, just as was the case in other major cities. In a city of this size it would be likely that there were several groups of Christians meeting in different places; Romans 16 contains greetings to a number of people and the church that met in their homes.

- With his considerable circle of contacts around the Christian world and in view of the fair amount of travel that took place between Rome and other parts of the Empire, it would be strange if Paul was not aware of what was going on among the Christians in Rome. Some parts of the letter contain quite specific advice that reflects concrete situations in congregational life. On the assumption that Rom. 16 is genuinely part of the letter (see below, pp. 124–5) Paul did know quite a number of people in the Roman church sufficiently well to send them greetings.
- There is no doubt that this letter is the most lengthy and careful exposition of some major themes in Paul's theology; chapters 1–8 are a sustained theological argument; chapters 9–11 are an equally sustained treatment of a crucial topic; only 2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4 is comparable. We need to ask why Paul wrote at such length and with such care, and why he took up the particular topics that we find here.
- From the letter itself we learn that Paul saw himself as being at the end of one phase of his mission work in the eastern part of the Mediterranean world; he had 'fully proclaimed the good news of Christ' 'from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum' (Rom. 15:19), and there was now 'no further place for him in these regions' (Rom. 15:22). Therefore he was on the brink of setting out for Spain as a new, virgin territory for mission, and would visit Rome on the way. It would not be surprising if at such a stage in his life Paul paused to sum up what he had done so far and to set down his message and certain implications of it in a thoughtful manner. This may have been less of a conscious motive and more of an underlying concern in the writing of the letter.

Against this background we can now mention various proposals that have been offered regarding the purpose of the letter. Bear these in mind as you read through the letter and consider which of them (there may be more than one!) make best sense of it.

- Some scholars think that the letter is basically related to Paul's own situation as a missionary, and that the letter is really concerned with *the criticisms of his theology* that had been made in the church at Jerusalem which took a different view regarding the salvation of the Gentiles from him (J. Jervell, in Donfried 1991). Certainly it would be difficult for Paul to write on the issues that he discusses in Romans without the discussions and problems of his immediate past affecting what he was writing.
- We shall consider below the possibility that there may have been more than one edition of Romans with copies being sent to different churches. Building on this possibility, some have proposed that Romans is really a circular letter intended for several churches and that, coming as it does at the end of his mission to the Eastern Mediterranean, the letter was intended to be a kind of 'last will and testament' in which he summed up *his mature understanding of the gospel* for the benefit of the congregations that he had founded (G. Bornkamm; T. W. Manson, in Donfried 1991). The letter is thus a kind of manifesto of Pauline theology.
- A theory which takes into account the church at Rome is going to be much more plausible than these theories which ignore it. The *prima facie* impression given by the letter is that it is written to prepare the way for Paul's intended visit to Rome, and therefore it acts as *a kind of self-introduction by a Christian missionary* who is well aware

that the understanding of the gospel that he has is not universally held by all Christians (Cranfield 1979, pp. 814–23). On this view the letter is very much concerned with Paul's own understanding of the gospel, but he writes about it because of its relevance to his forthcoming visit. The content of the letter is shaped by what Cranfield (1979, p. 818) calls the inner logic of the gospel. From the letter it is clear that Paul hoped for the support of the church at Rome in his mission in the west, and it is understandable that he would want to reassure people about the nature of his message.

- Various scholars have argued that the specific way in which Paul presents the teaching in the letter is *related to actual circumstances in the church at Rome*. Minear (1971) insisted that the key to the letter lies in the practical application towards its end in which we can see reflected a situation of some disharmony between different groups in the church over the question of ritual observances with regard to food and festivals. These questions ultimately went back to Jew/Gentile problems, and the main part of the letter can then be understood as a theological discussion of the place of Jews and Gentiles in God's plan of salvation, against which the practical, daily problems in the church could be faced and a harmonious solution be found. A further, specific element was the need to encourage the church to internal unity in face of the attacks from outside to which it was subject from time to time. However, not all agree that what is described in Rom. 14–15 is specific to Rome and is motivated by knowledge of the situation there.

Dunn (1988, pp. liv–lviii) has stated that Romans has more than one purpose, and he

fits the pieces of the jigsaw together slightly differently to suggest three elements in the total picture.

- **A missionary purpose** To gain support from the church for his mission to Spain.
- **An apologetic purpose** To develop a defence of his understanding of the gospel which he felt to be under attack, and thus to gain support from the church at Rome for himself against his opponents.
- **A pastoral purpose** To deal with the problem of divisions, real or potential within the church.

Digging deeper

Read through Romans and consider which of the various theories listed above regarding its purpose make best sense.

THE NATURE OF THE ARGUMENT IN THE LETTER

The next stage in our consideration of the letter must be to identify what is going on as Paul develops his argument or exposition in the letter. There is some disagreement as to the precise understanding of what he is trying to do.

- According to Cranfield (1979, pp. 814–23), Paul is setting out the gospel as he understands it, with particular reference to its fundamental nature in relation to Judaism and the Jew/Gentile question.
- A related view is that of Chae (1997, p. 300), who sums up his position: ‘Paul’s self-awareness of being apostle to the Gentiles has significantly influenced the shape, the content and the structure of his

inclusive soteriological argument in Romans. As apostle to the Gentiles, he boldly presents the theological argument in favour of the Gentiles in his attempt to affirm the legitimacy of Gentile salvation by establishing the equality of Jew and Gentile in Christ.’

- A somewhat different understanding is that of Wright (1991, pp. 194f., 231–57), for whom the purpose of Romans is to demonstrate that the gospel shows that God is righteous in his dealings in and through Christ.

Again it may be the case that no one of these theories is adequate by itself. Certainly Paul has plenty to say about himself and his own personal involvement in the Christian mission, but the letter is not primarily about himself. It is much more likely that the subject of the letter is the gospel as such. In this there may well be an element of theodicy, in showing that God is righteous (Rom. 3:26), but this seems to me to be more of a side issue arising out of the main subject. Nevertheless, Wright’s perspective is valuable in highlighting an element that has perhaps not received adequate attention in evaluating the total picture.

A further preliminary comment is that in the letter we have a remarkable variety of modes and moods.

- **Lots of Scripture** There is much fuller use of the Old Testament in this letter than elsewhere in Paul. If we confine our attention to actual quotations, one estimate gives some 53 quotations compared with only 41 in all the other letters in the Pauline corpus; they are scattered throughout the letter but especially in chapters 3–4 and 9–11.
- **Dialogue** There are also passages where Paul raises questions that people might ask

in view of what he has said, so that the exposition borders on a dialogue. The questions are not necessarily the objections of a real opponent, but often serve to carry the discussion forward. (This kind of style is associated with an ancient form of rhetoric called 'diatribe'.)

- **Personal emotion** We also find passages where Paul expresses his feelings in a very intense and personal way (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1).

Material of this kind ensures that the letter is throughout couched in a lively style that retains interest despite its dense content.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE LETTER

It is impossible to do justice to the letter in a brief summary. What is offered here is simply some guidance as you read through the letter as a whole.

THE STRUCTURE OF ROMANS

1:1-7	OPENING GREETING
1:8-15:33	BODY OF THE LETTER
1:8-17	Thanksgiving, leading into theme
1:18-3:20	The universal sinfulness and guilt of humanity
3:21-5:21	Justification by faith
6:1-8:39	The place of the law; new life in the Spirit
9:1-11:36	The problem of Jewish unbelief; God's future purpose for Gentiles and Jews
12:1-15:13	Practical aspects of Christian living
15:14-33	Paul's future plans
16:1-27	CLOSING GREETINGS

THE OPENING (AND THE CLOSING)

(Rom. 1:1-15; 15:14-16:27)

The letter begins with a lengthy greeting in which Paul introduces himself as an apostle/missionary to spread the gospel about Jesus Christ who is God's Son, promised in the Scriptures, and specifically to bring Gentiles to faith (1:1-7).

In the ensuing 'prayer-report', which swiftly glides into personal comment, Paul expresses his confidence in the readers and intimates his desire to share the gospel with them in Rome, and to be encouraged by them (1:8-15). There is a combination here of building up the congregation and of evangelism.

At the end of the letter (Rom. 15:14-33) Paul again expresses his confidence in the readers, but nevertheless states that he felt it necessary to write to them in view of his role as the apostle to the Gentiles, and it would seem that he is justifying that role and the way in which he carries it out. In an autobiographical passage he explains how God has blessed his work to such an extent that he feels that he has completed his work in the Eastern Mediterranean, a task which had prevented him from travelling further west to Rome despite his desire to do so. This explains how he is now on the brink of coming to them. However, first he must visit Jerusalem and he asks for prayers in view of the uncertain reception that he awaited there. The letter concludes with a lengthy set of greetings of people by name, probably those with an active part in the life of the church (Rom. 16). There is a warning against troublemakers, which makes the assumption that the majority of the church have received teaching which is in harmony with that of Paul. And there is a lengthy doxology which sums up some of the main motifs in the letter.

This quick look at the ending of the letter confirms our understanding of the opening and helpfully expands upon it.

THE TEXT IS ANNOUNCED! (Rom. 1:16–17)

But back now to Romans 1! Paul's statement of his plans leads smoothly into a brief statement of the gospel that can be regarded as the 'text', which is expounded in the rest of the letter. Paul wants to proclaim the gospel because it brings salvation to all who have faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. This is because in it the righteousness of God becomes evident, for believers, just as Scripture says. This is by no means a summary of all that Paul will say in the letter, but it affirms things that lie at the heart of his understanding:

- The gospel offers salvation. (This implies that people need to be saved!)
- Salvation is offered to and needed by all people, whether Jews or Gentiles.
- Salvation is received by the exercise of faith – again, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile.
- The gospel offers salvation in that it reveals 'the righteousness of God', and again the need for faith is emphasized in such a way as to suggest that there must have been some other view that Paul is combatting.
- The key motif of righteousness by faith is defended as being what the Jewish Scriptures teach. Paul's teaching is firmly based in the teaching accepted by Jews as traditional and authoritative, and is not his own novel idea.

UNIVERSAL SIN AND GUILT (Rom. 1:18–3:20)

Paul's first stage in developing this theme is to justify the need for people to be saved by showing that all stand under the judgement and wrath of God because of their

RIGHTEOUSNESS IN PAUL'S THEOLOGY

The words translated as 'righteous', 'righteousness', 'justify' and 'justification' all represent words from the same Greek root (*dikaio-*). We tend to think of 'righteous' as meaning that a person has a certain type of character, which issues in their doing what is right and pleasing to God. This is broadly true for Paul, but in line with the rest of the Bible he tends to think of righteous people as being those who stand in a right relationship with God, even though they may have sinned against him. God no longer reckons their sins against them – on Paul's view, because of the fact that Christ has borne their sins and died on their behalf; those who believe are thus 'justified' by God's gracious action, and are now committed for the future to living righteously. 'Righteousness' thus is to be understood as a new status conferred on people by God, but a status that is intended to issue in a new, righteous way of life. 'Justification by faith' was a key issue for Paul, because he rejected the Jewish belief that circumcision and other observances of the Jewish law were the requirements for entering into or remaining in God's favour.

sinfulness. He begins with a depiction that clearly applies primarily to the world of non-Jews; the root problem is a failure to recognize the existence and character of God despite the fact of his revelation in nature. He paints a dark picture of human ignorance and folly leading to idolatry and also to sins of a kind regarded as particularly abhorrent by Jews. Paul interprets the miserable and wicked state of humanity as being the result of their failure to acknowledge God and then as being intensified by the judgement of God upon them. Just as Pharaoh hardened his heart against the Israelites in the Old Testament story and was then further hardened by God, so God gives up sinners to an even more debased mind, as a judgement upon

What do you think?

Paul's picture of the sinfulness of the world (Rom 1:18–32) is pretty grim: which parts of the picture of humanity are hardest and easiest for people in your cultural setting to accept, and why?

them that is also meant to make them realize their sin and need (Rom. 1:18–32).

With all of this, Jewish readers would not have any problems; that was basically how they viewed the Gentiles. But then in chapter 2 Paul moves to address those who share his estimate of the Gentiles to try to show them that they too are sinners, committing essentially the same kind of sins. The Jews thought that they were in a better position because they had been given the law of Moses and they fulfilled its requirements, notably that of circumcision. But Paul emphasizes that it is not possession of the law but the doing of it that matters (Rom. 2:13), and also that circumcision in itself is valueless if it is not accompanied by obedience to the rest of the law (Rom. 2:25). He evidently believes that much of the moral teaching of the law, as opposed to those observances specifically required of the Jews, was also recognized and to some extent practised by non-Jews, so that those who did not have the law of Moses but followed their moral intuition were in a better state than those who had the law but disregarded it. At the same time, this is not to denigrate the law or circumcision or to call in question the justice or faithfulness of God if he judges Jews who fail to keep the law (Rom. 3:1–8).

The conclusion to be drawn, then, is that both Jews and Gentiles are under the power

of sin, and again Scripture is drawn in to paint a picture of universal sin (Rom. 3:9–20). Although the primary point is that both groups of people are sinners and the Jews cannot avoid condemnation, it is implicit that the condemnation involves all individuals in both groups, and not just some individuals in both groups. Paul does not mean that all have committed the same sins, but that all have somehow or other failed to pass the test; in the end it does not matter whether you have failed by a great or a small amount if you have not measured up to the standard required.

It follows that the law of Moses did not have the function of saving people in the sense of putting them in the right with God, since it merely told them God's requirements; it did not enable them to keep them (Rom. 3:20).

THE MAIN PROPOSITION (Rom. 3:21–31)

But now things are different! What the law in fact does is to point forward to the coming of Christ and the possibility of people getting right with God through faith rather than by trying to keep the law. Instead of them trying to put themselves right with God, God does what is necessary to put them right with himself in that they are set free from their sins and their resultant liability to judgement and wrath through the death of Jesus, which Paul understands as functioning like a sacrifice offered to God. It follows that in granting justification to sinners God is acting righteously and fairly; he does not ignore the sin but provides the sacrifice that cancels it out (Rom. 3:21–26).

Three things follow. First, those who are put right with God in this way cannot boast of it as their own achievement in keeping the law. Second, if justification is not dependent on

keeping the law but is by faith, clearly it is open to all humankind and not just to Jews. But, third, all this is not contrary to the law, but rather it upholds the law, since the law itself, as understood by Paul, had the function of pointing people to Christ and not of being in itself a means of justification (Rom. 3:27–31).

The main proposition in the letter has thus been briefly stated. In what follows Paul is concerned to develop its implications more fully and to tackle objections that might be raised against it, particularly by Jews and Jewish Christian readers who may have been influenced by the Judaizing movement in the church to argue for some place for the law in the lives of all Christians.

Digging deeper

With the aid of a commentary study the various pictures in Rom. 3:24–26 of what the death of Jesus achieves; consider where each picture comes from and what it means.

ABRAHAM AS AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH

(Rom. 4:1–25)

An immediate possible objection is to cite the case of Abraham, who functioned as a model for Jews in that he might well have been thought to be justified by his good works (cf. Jas. 2:21–26, where it is argued that Abraham demonstrated both faith and works). Paul's response makes several points. In 4:3 he cites the key text, Gen. 15:6, which affirms that it was Abraham's faith that led to him being credited with righteousness. He stresses that since righteousness is said to be God's gift, Abraham cannot have worked to deserve it. He backs up Genesis with a

quotation from Ps. 32:1f, which makes the same point (Rom. 4:7–8). Then he is able to use the case of Abraham who was not circumcised until after God had pronounced him righteous to make the point that justification is independent of circumcision, so that Abraham can be seen as the spiritual father of all who believe, whether circumcised or not (Rom. 4:9–12). Moreover, Abraham lived before the law was given, and to make righteousness dependent on the law would invalidate the promise given to Abraham – and to his descendants who follow his path of faith (Rom. 4:13–15). Paul celebrates the fact that Abraham is the 'the father of all of us' and comments on his extraordinary faith which believed in God against all the odds (Rom. 4:16–25). Because he was convinced that God would do what he promised, his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. By analogy those who believe in the God who raised Jesus from the dead will also be justified, because Jesus is the one through whom our sins are dealt with in his death and resurrection.

THE RESULTS OF JUSTIFICATION (Rom. 5:1–11)

The last word in chapter 4 is 'justification', and Paul uses it to form a catchword link to the next stage in his exposition. The main point that he makes in this section is the certainty of future acceptance with God for those who are justified by faith. Already they enjoy peace with God. Whereas the Jews might place their trust in the law and boast or exult in it as their means of getting right with God, believers exult and are confident in the fact that they will share in the glory of God. At the same time Paul recognizes that the confidence of believers could be shattered by the fact that they have to undergo sufferings in this life. It is not clear whether he is thinking of the sufferings

common to all people or of the persecution that might be inflicted upon Christian believers; either way, he asserts that one effect of suffering can be to develop a strong character and so to strengthen hope in vindication by God – a hope that is not empty or imaginary or the fruit of self-effort but is confirmed by the experience of being loved by God that comes as an inner assurance to the believer through the activity of the Spirit of God (Rom. 5:1–5).

The ground for future hope is spelled out more fully. If Christ died for people who were ungodly and had no claims on God's mercy, how much more will God finally save those who have been justified and against whom no condemnation can be raised. Put otherwise, if Christ died to reconcile God's *enemies* to him, how much more will God finally save and deliver those who are now his *friends* (Rom. 5:6–11)?

What do you think?

'Paul's great images of salvation – justification, redemption, sacrifice, reconciliation – tell us much more about the *experience* and *effects* of salvation through Christ than they tell us about *how* through his death and resurrection Christ achieves salvation': discuss whether you agree or disagree with this. Can you suggest modern images or words that help to convey more clearly to people today what Paul was saying?

CHRIST CONTRASTED WITH ADAM (Rom. 5:12–21)

In the second part of the chapter the magnitude of what Christ has done is developed by means of an extended analogy and contrast with Adam. Adam committed a

sin that brought death and judgement upon all humankind because they all sinned like he did; Paul argues from the fact of human death back to human sin. Just how Paul sees the connection between Adam and the rest of humanity is not entirely clear. He does seem to be saying that Adam's sin brought an inescapable fate upon everybody else (Rom. 5:18). But his main intent is to say that in the same way the righteous act (he means the sacrificial death) of one man, Jesus Christ, results in life for everybody else; in view of what Paul says in the immediate context and consistently throughout his writings about salvation and justification being by faith, it is clear that he means here that Christ's righteous act brings justification universally to all who believe. And since the power of God shown in Christ is far greater than the power of sin and death, it follows that far greater blessings are bestowed on believers, who will reign and enjoy the life that God bestows. Moreover, this takes place through the grace of God: it is offered as a free gift.

What do you think?

Make a comparison in two columns between Adam and Christ, listing the similarities and the differences in what they did and the effects that resulted.

'The historicity of Adam is vital: the biblical view of evil and of salvation (which is also a historical event) hangs upon it.' (H. Blocher): do the theological points that Paul makes in Romans 5 hang upon the view that Adam was a real, historical individual?

NO LONGER UNDER SIN AND UNDER THE LAW (Rom. 6:1–23)

From exposition of the nature of justification and new life, Paul proceeds to consider a possible objection or set of objections to it. If justification is entirely a matter of God's favour (grace), people might be tempted to think that it does not matter if they go on sinning, since God will go on being gracious and forgiving. Paul's teaching could thus be thought to open up the possibility of moral indifference and to take away the incentive to sinless behaviour. A new line of defence is mounted against this implied objection. It rests on the fact that early Christian believers underwent the ceremony of baptism. To the outward ritual there corresponded an inward, spiritual reality (just as Paul held that there was a circumcision of the heart alongside physical circumcision, Rom. 2:29). Baptism effectively symbolized the washing away of sins. To Paul it symbolized something more, and he assumed that his readers had the same understanding as himself. It symbolized a sharing in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, so that the believer in effect dies and rises in a manner analogous to that of Jesus (Rom. 6:5).

This can be understood in various ways. One way is that believers 'die' in Christ who acts as their substitute in dying for their sins. Another way is that, as Christ rose from the dead and was exalted to be with God, so too believers will be resurrected to eternal, spiritual life (cf. 1 Cor. 15). But here Paul emphasizes that the death of believers is their death as sinful people, and that they are resurrected to a new life in which they are the joyful servants of God; in dying they become deaf to the appeal of sin and in rising they become open and obedient to the call of God.

But, comes the immediate objection from people like myself, it's not like that in reality. I still hear the voice of temptation to sin and I still yield to it, and I don't always gladly obey the voice of God. Paul's response to this objection appears to be that what he is saying about the status of believers can become a reality as they believe; they have the capacity to be dead to sin and alive to God if only they will believe (like Abraham) in the power of God. Therefore, Paul's doctrinal statement culminates in a passionate appeal to the readers not to yield to sin as their master but rather to yield themselves to God in the confidence that sin will not be their master – 'since you are not under the law but under grace' (Rom. 6:14).

With this closing phrase Paul prepares the way for a fresh aspect of the topic (Rom. 6:15–23). The point of the phrase is that Christians are not under a law that can tell them what to do but cannot help them to do it, but in the realm of grace where God himself enables believers to live the new life. But that phrase could again be misunderstood to suggest that if people are no longer under the law, they are no longer under constraint to live morally in obedience to God. Therefore Paul has to go over the point again. He does so by suggesting that in fact believers face a choice between obedience and disobedience to God, between righteousness and sin, between death and life (Rom. 6:16). So escape from slavery to sin is not escape into a kind of freedom where people do what they like (that would still be bondage to sin!) but into obedience to God. Therefore, believers, having been set free from sin, must not yield to sin but to God. They are set on the path to what Paul calls sanctification (Rom. 6:22), here understood as moral life of a kind that is pleasing to God and the appropriate,

required characteristic of his people. And at the end of the path lies the hope of future, eternal life with God – not that it is earned by their obedience, for it remains God's free gift to believers.

THE LAW IS GOOD – BUT IMPOTENT

(Rom. 7:1–25)

For Paul's Jewish readers (or for Gentiles who had been converted to Judaism) the question of the law was of paramount importance. The Jews lived life under the law. Paul affirms that Christian believers are not under the dominion of the law but of God's grace. They are no longer under the law. Just as a law is binding on a person only during their lifetime and not after they have died, so the law of Moses is no longer binding on people who have died with Christ and now are living for God. This is seen as a great release, because Paul believed that one thing that the law did was to bring the latent sinfulness in people's hearts to expression. The fact that something is forbidden can often make us want it all the more. In that sense the law made people prisoners in sin (Rom. 7:1–6).

This did not mean that there was anything bad about the law itself. Rather it served to bring the sinfulness that was there all the time out into the open. The law of Moses appeared to promise life: it said 'do these things and you will live', but in fact nobody is able to keep it. The actual effect of the law was to bring death, because people sinned, rather than life (Rom. 7:7–13).

Why did this happen? It was because of what Paul calls the 'flesh', meaning that as physical beings we are weak and yield to temptations. We know that we ought to do the things that were summed up for Jews in the law, but we have not the willpower to do

them. Sin has taken over control of our lives and our failure to obey the law makes this obvious to us. A person may delight in the law (as the writer of Ps. 119:97 said), but still be incapable of keeping it. It is a wretched state to be in, tied to sin and consequently under sentence of death. Where can a solution be found? Paul would have said that there was no solution in Judaism, but there was a solution in Christ (Rom. 7:14–25).

Digging deeper

There is considerable controversy about what kind of person Paul has in mind when he speaks about the 'I' who is 'sold into slavery under sin' and cannot do what he knows to be right (Rom. 7:14–25).

- Is Paul referring to his own experience or to the experience of humanity in general? (Some commentators note that in Phil. 3:6 he claimed to be blameless before his Christian conversion and conclude that he is not writing about his own experience here.)
- Is the description that of an unconverted person who lacks the power of Christ and the Spirit to deal with temptation?
- Or is it a description of a Christian (note the present tenses!), and if so, does it refer to the 'normal' state of Christians living in a continual tension in their struggle with their sin, or does it refer to the 'abnormal' state when they try to live the Christian life in their own strength without relying on the power of Christ?

Make your own study of the passage; the commentaries give summaries of the arguments for and against the various options (see, for example, Ziesler 1989, pp. 189–95; Moo 1996, pp. 441–51).

NEW LIFE BY THE SPIRIT (Rom. 8:1–39)

In Romans 8 Paul moves into a positive exposition of what this solution involves. There is a new way of life for people who believe in Christ and have been spiritually joined to him. God has set people free from the inexorable bondage to sin and hence to death. Paul repeats the fact that the death of Christ is the condemnation and judgement of sin; therefore believers no longer stand under judgement. But this is not a licence to go on sinning. On the contrary, it is deliverance from the power of sin in order to fulfil what the law requires. And this fulfilment is possible through the power of the Spirit of God. Previously Paul has commanded people to yield themselves to God as though they have been resurrected to new life. Now we learn that this new life becomes real for them because the Spirit of God teaches them what God requires and enables them to do it. Paul makes the point by a rather repetitive comparison between life that is dominated by the flesh and life that is directed by the Spirit, the one leading to death and the other to life (Rom. 8:1–11).

Just as in chapter 6 Paul exhorted Christians who had risen to new life with Christ not to yield to sin, so now he exhorts Christians who are led by the Spirit to put their sinful natures to death. And he motivates them with the promise of eternal life to come. He then explains how this future life belongs to them; the Spirit whom they have received is the agent whereby they become children of God and are conscious of the fact through calling God 'Abba' (the Aramaic word for 'father'); but if they are children, then they are also heirs along with Christ to the inheritance that God has for them. The metaphor is a bit of a stretch, because God does not in fact die and leave his wealth to other people, but rather all that God has is

shared with his Son and his children. But there is a condition tagged on at the end, which Paul then develops at greater length – 'if in fact we suffer with him' (Rom. 8:12–17).

As we have already seen, suffering is part of the human lot, and it may be intensified for believers through persecution and through the hardships of serving Christ. The remainder of the chapter is broadly concerned with this fact (Rom. 8:18–39). Paul stresses that the suffering may appear intolerable, but in fact it cannot bear comparison with the glorious future that awaits believers, and that awaits the creation itself when it is renewed by God. (This is one of the few places where a New Testament writer takes up the question of the future of the universe and looks forward to a renewal of it in a manner that lies outside ordinary human conceptions of what is possible.) He further notes how we are too weak and ignorant even to tell God what we want in prayer, but the Spirit aids us in this also. And he emphasizes that, no matter what the sufferings and setbacks, God can bring about good because his ultimate purpose for his people is to make them into his family and to share his glory with them. And this purpose will be fulfilled precisely because it is God's purpose and nothing can ultimately thwart his intention. His love for his people is so great that he will not let anything separate them from it.

With this thought Paul has reached the climax of this part of the letter. Again it is clear that the letter is concerned to present a picture of God that will reassure his readers. It is a declaration of the rich blessings now and in the future for Christian believers and thus constitutes a powerful incentive to believe in the gospel.

Digging deeper

Set out Paul's key beliefs about the character of God as they are reflected in Romans 8.

THE PROBLEM OF JEWISH UNBELIEF IN THE GOSPEL (Rom. 9—11)

And yet there are people who do not believe the gospel! One of the most powerful objections to the Christian faith was simply the fact that so many Jews had not accepted it and remained content with the Jewish religion based on the law (Rom. 9—11). How could Christianity be true in light of the fact that so many Jewish people had rejected it? Was there an explanation of their attitude? And what would happen to them in the end? And how did this rejection square with God's election of Israel as his people? Surely what he had purposed he must bring to fulfilment? These are the questions that arise in the central section of the letter. Although these are theological questions, however, we cannot fail to be struck by the fact that what drives Paul in this section is deep sorrow that his fellow-countrypeople do not share his belief in Christ (Rom. 9:2–3).

Paul begins by noting that the Israelites (as he calls them) had received so many benefits and privileges from God that one would have expected them to accept the Messiah who came from among them (Rom. 9:4–5). Then he insists that their failure to do so is not the fault of God through a failure to communicate to them. Throughout Israelite history in the Old Testament it had been a feature that there were some who might be called 'true' Israelites and others who were not. From one point of view this could be

seen as a process of divine selection in which he chose out the descendants of Abraham through Isaac (and not through Ishmael) to be his people (Gen. 16—17), and then the descendants of Jacob (and not of Esau; Gen. 25:19–34). It could be said that God decided to show mercy on some and not on others, and even that he hardened the hearts of some so that they did not believe (Rom. 9:6–18).

The consequence that might be drawn from this is that God is unjust to condemn those who were not selected, since it was not their fault that they were not selected. But Paul insists that God is free to show mercy or to withhold mercy as he chooses, just as a potter can decide what different sorts of pots to make from the same batch of clay (Rom. 9:19–21).

Digging deeper

'But we are not simply clay pots, but persons made in the image of God and able to converse with him in prayer!' Is Rom. 9:20 Paul's last word in this letter on God's control of the universe and our status in his sight? Consider (for example) the picture of Abraham in Rom. 4; the love and grace of God even for rebellious sinners in Rom. 5; the status of Christian believers as the beloved children of God (Rom. 8); the dialogue of Elijah with God (Rom. 11:2–4).

In fact, Paul goes on, God has called not only Jews but also Gentiles through the gospel (Rom. 9:22–33). Only a limited number (a 'remnant') of Jews are being saved, and God has called Gentiles as well. Paradoxically, Jews have failed to attain righteousness, i.e. acceptance with God,

because, although they strove for it, they did so by the works of the law, which is the wrong way; whereas the Gentiles, who had not striven for it, because they were ignorant of the law, have achieved it by faith. (Paul is speaking here in broad terms: there were other Jews who did believe, like himself, and other Gentiles who did not believe).

By the end of the chapter, therefore, Paul has moved from his initial statement that God has not failed to fulfil his promises, since these promises never included the showing of mercy to everybody, even to all members of the Jewish people, to the assertion that the failure of many Jews to be put right with God stemmed from their own mistaken understanding of how to achieve justification.

This point is repeated in the context of deep personal concern for the Jewish people in Romans 10, where Paul again emphasizes that salvation is available through Christ for all who believe. He develops the contrast between the two ways of doing what the law requires and believing by juxtaposing Scriptures (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 30:11–14), which in his view epitomize them (Rom. 10:5–11). The latter text is regarded as referring to the need for belief in the heart and confession with the mouth that Jesus is the Lord whom God raised from the dead. Then Joel 2:32 is brought in to show that the route of faith is open to ‘everybody’ (Rom. 10:13). This leads into a comment on the need for messengers to be sent by God to tell people about Jesus Christ (again buttressed by Scripture, Isa. 52:7; Rom. 10:15). So, returning to the original point, Paul can claim that the Jews (broadly speaking) have heard about Jesus, and yet have not believed; they have been disobedient to God (Rom. 10:16–21).

Again Paul returns to the question of whether God has acted unjustly or is open to accusation. Does all this mean that he has rejected his own people, the Jews, and turned to the Gentiles instead? This cannot be so, because even at that time there were some Jews, including Paul himself, who had responded to the Christian gospel.

Throughout history, in fact, there had been a core of faithful Jews at times when the mass of the people had turned to idolatry and deserted God. There are Jews who are saved, but it is by grace and not by works (Rom. 11:1–6).

How, then, is the limited success of the gospel among the Jews to be explained? Paul reverts to the kind of point made at the beginning of Romans 9, when he spoke of people being ‘hardened’ by God (Rom. 11:7–12). The Jews by and large have been ‘fixed’ by God in their unbelief. But in this situation the gospel has gone to Gentiles who have believed and received salvation. Paul sees this situation as one that would make the unbelieving Jews envious of the believing Gentiles. One motive, therefore, and certainly not the only one, for Paul’s mission to the Gentiles is to increase this sense of envy and so lead the Jews to seek salvation in the same way as the Gentiles. At this point Paul explicitly says that he is addressing the Gentiles. This implies that up till now he has been primarily addressing Jewish Christians and ‘defending’ the ways of God to them. But now he tells the Gentiles how wonderful will be the effects if the Jews turn to Christ (Rom. 11:13). Paul cannot forget that he is a Jew and that the Jews had been originally chosen by God. He can therefore remind the Gentiles that they have been brought into the olive tree, which symbolizes the people of God, and they should be appropriately humble and

thankful (Rom. 11:17–24). He also reminds them that, although some branches (unbelieving Jews) had been broken off because of unbelief, yet God can graft Jews back into the olive.

What do you think?

Paul says that Gentile Christians are like wild olives grafted into the original (Jewish) tree. Why does he think it important for Christians to be aware of their Jewish roots? How might this awareness be developed more for Christians today?

God's secret plan has been revealed to Paul. Elsewhere he can refer to God's plan to include Gentiles in his people as a revealed secret. Here, however, there is another aspect of God's secret plan: the 'hardening' of the Jews is temporary, until the full number of the Gentiles is saved, and then there will be a fresh turning of the Jews to

'ALL ISRAEL'

The reference of the phrase 'all Israel' in Rom. 11:26 is not certain. One possibility is that Paul is thinking of the 'new Israel', composed of Jews and Gentiles. More probably he is thinking of the Jews, in view of his usage earlier in the letter (see especially v. 25). Some scholars want to restrict the reference to the 'true' Israel (cf. the distinction in 9:6), but that would be tautologous. The alternative is that Paul is thinking in broad terms of the Jews at that particular future point, but without necessarily including every single individual Jew. (Similarly, in the Mishnah [Sanhedrin 10] it can be stated that 'all Israelites have a share in the world to come', but this is immediately followed by clauses that exclude notorious sinners.)

receive the gospel; they are not finally excluded, so that there is no possibility of repentance on their part. In the end, the mercy of God is extended to all, to Jews and Gentiles alike, and may be received by all who believe. Thus in the end the ways of God are vindicated (Rom. 11:25–36).

This section of the letter raises some extremely difficult issues. There are critical questions about how Paul uses Scripture, about the relation of hardening to showing mercy, and much besides. It is perhaps this section that is most concerned with 'theodicy', explaining how God is acting justly and compassionately despite appearances to the contrary.

Digging deeper

In the light of (a) Rom. 9–11, and (b) the unfortunate history of Jewish–Christian relations, do you think that it is right for Christians to evangelize Jews? If your answer is Yes, in what circumstances and in what ways might this appropriately be done?

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW LIFE (Rom. 12–13)

Despite these difficulties, one key note of Romans 9–11 is undoubtedly 'mercy', and this term forms the catchword connection to the third main part of the letter (Rom. 12–15), which proceeds to draw the practical conclusions for Christian living in the church from the doctrinal teaching that has preceded. Two chapters deal with this in fairly broad terms.

- Paul begins with an appeal to the readers for dedication of their lives to God, a statement in different terms of the calls to

commitment that recurred in Romans 6 (Rom. 12:1f.).

- Next (Rom. 12:3–8) he urges humility, mutual concern and appropriate diligence in the exercise of spiritual gifts of ministry in the congregation (a distillation of the essential teaching in 1 Cor. 12–14).
- A third section (Rom. 12:9–13) stresses the importance of love (cf. 1 Cor. 13).
- This leads to consideration of the Christian attitude to those who persecute believers and personal opponents in general (Rom. 12:14–21).
- In this context of persecution Paul then proceeds to stress the need for believers to be generally submissive to the rulers of the state (Rom. 13:1–7). This instruction may have been especially necessary because Christians could well have been tempted to take up a hostile attitude to rulers who on occasion persecuted them. It is therefore stressed that these rulers are in fact God's servants to maintain good order in society, and are therefore entitled to respect and obedience.

Digging deeper

In Romans 13:1–7 how does Paul understand the role of the state authorities as serving the purpose of God?

How would you deal with the difficulties involved in teaching from this passage in a country where people are suffering under an oppressive régime?

- Finally, following on from this is a summing up of Christian duty in terms of love for one another (Rom. 13:8–14); such love is regarded as the way to keep the law fully, for observance of the other

commandments (Paul cites only the second part of the Ten Commandments) stems naturally from love. If motivation for doing so is required, Paul emphasizes that the day of salvation, i.e. the final day of judgement associated with the coming of Jesus, is not far off and (as in 1 Thess. 5) believers should be living in such a way as to be ready for it, not engaged in activities of which they would be ashamed.

JEWES AND GENTILES LIVING TOGETHER IN THE SAME CONGREGATION (Rom. 14:1–15:13)

Such teaching could have been given in any of Paul's churches, although the instruction about response to the state may have been particularly apt in the centre of Roman administration. The next section of the letter picks up an issue that arose where there were Jewish and Gentile believers together in the same congregation and difficulties were arising because of their different customs and practices with regard to what to eat and drink and what religious festivals to observe. These are essentially the same issues that are reflected in Galatians and 1 Corinthians 8–10. Once again Paul goes over this ground. The teaching given here is much the same, but it is freshly minted and some points stand out the more clearly.

So the main problem here is probably the consumption of meat that had been offered in sacrifice to a pagan god; some people in the church were happy to eat it but others felt that they had to abstain from it. Paul wants to insist that in both cases the people were endeavouring to please God, and he argues that in a case of this kind it is the motive that counts, with the result that different types of conduct may be equally acceptable to God (Rom. 14:1–9). Clearly Paul would not have said this about conduct that was clearly criminal or sinful. It follows

that people should not condemn one another over these matters; they are answerable to God alone (Rom. 14:10–12). (The difficulty of course is when somebody believes that what other people regard as neutral is actually sinful.) Also, people should not persuade other people to go against their consciences and thus fall into self-condemnation and sin. There may, therefore, be occasions when it is necessary to abstain from some action because other people think that it is wrong. Ultimately, what matters is not the enjoyment that we get from food but the spiritual blessings associated with the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:13–23).

Paul himself tended to side with the people who recognized that foods and festivals were matters where believers could act with freedom, but he was quite clear that this freedom could need to be limited in the interests of the welfare of other believers. And that is the overriding concern rather than our own satisfaction, just as Christ denied himself (Rom. 15:1–6).

The last part of the discussion makes it clear that (broadly speaking, at least) the advocates of freedom, the so-called ‘strong’ believers were Gentiles, and the ‘weak’ were the Jewish believers, although Paul himself sides with the former group. Since God had called them both to share together in worshipping him, they should do everything possible to welcome one another instead of causing divisions (Rom. 15:7–13).

PAUL'S MISSION – TO ROME AND BEYOND (Rom. 15:14–33)

Finally, Paul reverts to the way in which he has felt it appropriate to write instruction of this kind to the Christians in Rome, since he believes that he may have something to add to what they already know. This instruction

is associated with his role as an apostle to the Gentiles. He glides into a statement about the way in which he has carried out this role in the Eastern Mediterranean and is now at last free to turn westwards and visit Rome on his way to Spain. Or almost free; first of all, there is the task of taking the collection raised among the Gentile churches to Jerusalem, and Paul voices his fears that there could be trouble from the non-Christian Jews and even a dubious welcome from the believers. Yet he is full of confidence and anticipation concerning his ensuing visit to Rome.

CLOSING GREETINGS (Rom. 16:1–27)

The body of the letter is complete. The closing section is a mixture of various personal elements. There is a commendation of Phoebe who is to visit Rome, and who presumably took the letter (Rom. 16:1–2). Then there are personal greetings to a host of people, but Paul does not simply name names; he comments on the work that many of them have done in the Christian mission or on other personal matters (Rom. 16:3–16). He warns the readers against people who promote ideas that do not accord with what the readers have learned previously (Rom. 16:17–20). He sends greetings from various people who are with him at the time of writing, including Tertius who acted as his amanuensis (Rom. 16:21–23). At the very end there is a complicated doxology, which refers to the God who has revealed the gospel for the Gentiles (Rom. 16:25–27).

SCRIBES DO STRANGE THINGS

Some curious things that happened in the copying of Romans by later scribes need brief mention.

The first is that some later manuscripts omit the words 'in Rome' in Rom. 1:7 and 15. This is probably linked to the practice of reading in church as part of a lectionary; since the letter was recognized to be appropriate for all Christians everywhere the specific reference to Rome was deleted in public reading. (Strangely, this did not happen with any other Pauline letters. The problem in Eph. 1:1 [see p. 164] is of a different kind.)

The second oddity is that the doxology, which is printed at the end of the letter, where it is found in the most reliable manuscripts, floats about in the manuscripts (see the footnote in NRSV). In some it occurs at the end of chapter 14 and in some others it occurs both at the end of chapter 14 and at the end of chapter 16! Since the double occurrence is inconceivable in the original letter, it would seem that some scribes were puzzled by it appearing in some manuscripts at the end of chapter 14 and in others at the end of chapter 16; not knowing which was the correct place, they put it in both places just to be on the safe side.

But why should it come at the end of chapter 14? The most probable explanation is linked to the activities of the second-century Christian, Marcion, who had some radical views about the New Testament. He objected to anything that sounded pro-Jewish, and therefore he limited his collection of Scriptures to the Gospel of Luke and the letters of Paul; even this was not 'pure' enough to suit him, and he cut out the passages that he did not approve of, including Romans 15 and 16. It is therefore conceivable that the doxology became attached to the briefer Marcionite version to make a fitting conclusion to an otherwise incomplete letter.

There is also another, related, possibility. When sections of text are found in more than one place like this, the suspicion may arise that they are not an original part of the text at all, but represent a later interpolation which the scribes were not sure where to insert. The majority of scholars argue that the doxology is different in style and content from Paul's normal writing, and is a later addition to Romans by somebody else who tried to produce a fitting climax for this letter. Certainly it is an appropriate ending to the letter, and in my view the stylistic arguments against it being a Pauline composition are not compelling; it is unlikely to be a late addition to the letter, and is more probably by Paul himself or by somebody very close in time to him.

AGAIN – THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER

We return to the question of why Paul wrote this letter and reconsider the suggestions listed earlier:

- The view that Paul wrote mainly with his relations with Jerusalem in mind. It is difficult to see why he should write on these issues specifically to the church in Rome, especially as there is no indication in the letter that it was debate with Christians in Jerusalem that was motivating him. The problems in Romans 14—15 are Roman problems rather than Jerusalem problems.
- The theory that Romans was a kind of 'circular letter' intended for several destinations is not at all compelling. More importantly, the contents of the main part of the letter are clearly intended for Rome (Rom. 1:15; 15:22–29). This is not to say, however, that the contents could not be read with profit by other churches.

- Whatever fuller understanding of the purpose of the letter that we come to hold, Cranfield's commonsense understanding that Paul sets out his gospel for the Roman Christians in view of his hoped-for visit is an indispensable and essential element in it.
- Whatever the actual details of this situation, it seems very probable that Paul would write the letter in the light of his knowledge of the church picked up from his various contacts.
- My own view is that Dunn's threefold summary of the purpose as missionary, apologetic and pastoral has commended itself in my reading of the letter.

THE COMPOSITION OF ROMANS

Romans is perhaps the easiest of Paul's letters to situate in its appropriate place in his career. From the letter itself we have already seen that he had reached the point where he felt that he could turn his attention from the Eastern Mediterranean and look towards the west. Up to this point he had not visited Rome but had 'often been hindered from coming to you' (Rom. 15:22). These hindrances will have included his sense of duty to the work on which he was presently engaged, but they may also have included the difficult situation for Jews in Rome at the time when Aquila and Priscilla were forced to leave the city. But now his intention was to take the collection that he had raised for the poor Christians in Jerusalem and then come to Rome. In 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul was still raising this money, and therefore Romans will come later than these two letters (1 Cor. 16:3-4; 2 Cor. 8-9).

In Acts 19:21 we read how Paul resolved to leave Ephesus and go through Macedonia and Achaia (i.e. Corinth) and then go on to

Jerusalem. He said, 'After I have gone there, I must also see Rome.' In Acts 20:1-3 he carried out the first part of this plan, going through Macedonia to Achaia where he stayed for three months. He then changed his plans slightly and instead of going direct to Syria he took a detour by visiting Macedonia once again. According to Luke, the reason for the detour was because of Jewish plots against him. Now Romans 16:1, 23 includes greetings from various Christians who belonged to Corinth or its immediate neighbourhood: Phoebe from Cenchreae; a man called Gaius who was host to the church and is probably the same person as one of the earliest members of the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14), although it was a very common name; and 'Erastus the city treasurer'.

An inscription from Corinth states:

Erastus pro aedilit[at]e s(ua) p(ecunia) stravit

'Erastus for his aedileship laid (this pavement) at his own expense.'

Although complete certainty is not possible, it could well be that Paul's friend is the same person.

We thus have an interlocking case: the personal travel plans of Paul place Romans clearly at this time when he was intending to take the collection for the poor from Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem; and the personal greetings in Romans 16 point unmistakably to Corinth (the reference to Phoebe is sufficient on its own to prove the point, and the other two references fit in nicely as confirmation). The almost irresistible conclusion is that Romans was written during that three-month stay in Corinth and can be dated to c. AD 55.

THE PROBLEMS OF ROMANS 16

Why 'almost irresistible'? Why not 'only possible'? We have two further problems to deal with before we can close the matter.

Romans 16, the chapter which ties the letter to Corinth, is an unusual chapter for a number of reasons.

- It contains an extraordinarily long set of greetings to people in whatever church is being addressed: no fewer than 26 people are named. Paul had never been to Rome. How did he know so many people, especially when we remember that no other Pauline letter greets so many people by name?
- Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3) had left Rome at the time of Paul's first visit to Corinth and then moved to Ephesus where they still were when we last heard of them, whether from Acts (Acts 18:26) or from Paul himself (1 Cor. 16:19, written by Paul from Ephesus). Later still they are in Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:19). So were they back in Rome again at this time?
- In Romans 16:5 Paul greets 'Epaenetus . . . the first convert in Asia': what is he doing in Rome?
- None of the people greeted here are mentioned in Paul's later letters from Rome.
- The strong warning against people who cause trouble in Romans 16:17-20 is surprising, since no such group has been mentioned in the body of the letter.
- Although no early manuscripts of Romans actually omit chapter 16, the earliest manuscript we possess (Papyrus 46) places the doxology (Rom. 16:25-27) in between chapter 15 and 16 instead of at the end of chapter 16.

This evidence has been taken to show that Romans 16 was not addressed to Rome but to Ephesus, a church that Paul knew well,

and where several of these named people might be more aptly placed. Two types of theory have been developed.

TWO VERSIONS OF ONE LETTER

Version for Rome	Rom. 1—15
Version for Ephesus	Rom. 1—16.

On this theory, of course, Corinth remains the place of composition of the entire letter.

TWO SEPARATE LETTERS

Letter to Rome	Rom. 1—15
Letter to Ephesus	Rom. 16.

On this theory, while the short letter to Ephesus was clearly written in Corinth, the letter to Rome could have been written at any appropriate point in Paul's travels from Ephesus to and from Macedonia and Achaia.

The obvious objection to this second theory is that a letter consisting entirely of greetings

A LETTER THAT IS 63% GREETINGS

Aurelius Dius to Aurelius Horion, my very dear father, warmest greetings. I say my prayers for you every day before the gods of this place. Don't worry, father, about my studies. I am working hard and I'm taking relaxation; I'll be all right. I send my greetings to my mother Tamiea and my sister Tnepherous and my sister Philous; I greet also my brother Patermouthis and my sister Thermouthis; I greet too my brother Heracle . . . and my brother Kollouchis; I greet my father Melanus and my mother Timpesouris and her son. Gaia salutes you all; my father Horion and Thermouthis salute you all. I pray for your health, father. [Addressed] Deliver to Aurelius Horion from his son Dius.

(A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri*. London: Heinemann, 1932 No. 137, as cited by J. I. H. McDonald, 'Was Romans XVI a Separate Letter?' *NTS* 16 (1969-70) pp. 369-72)

is inconceivable. However, this objection is over-ruled by the discovery of other ancient letters doing virtually that!

Nevertheless, this ingenious theory is probably to be rejected. Consider some points on the other side:

- We have already commented on the amount of travel to and from Rome undertaken by people in a position to do so. In the case of Jews such as Aquila and Priscilla, many found their way back to Rome once Claudius had died and his edict lapsed.
- Archaeological evidence shows that some of the names of people mentioned here are more likely to have been resident in Rome rather than in Asia (just as one is more likely to come across the Duke of Argyll's servants in Scotland rather than in Wales).
- The warning tone in Romans 16 fits in with earlier exhortations in the letter suggesting some tension in the church at Rome, and a concluding warning is not without precedent in other letters (1 Cor. 16:22; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 6:12–13; Phil. 3:17–19).
- The letter to the Romans is incomplete if it concludes at 15:33 and we have to assume that the closing greetings have been lost.
- If chapter 16 was not originally part of Romans, why was it tagged on at the end of it and why was the original closing section removed to make way for it?
- Since Romans 16 was less 'edifying' than the main part of the letter, it is likely that some congregations omitted it from their lectionaries, and it would be appropriate to read the doxology at the conclusion of the section of Romans that was read in church (cf. its position in Papyrus 46).

These points seem fairly conclusive to me that Romans 16 was part of one whole letter meant for Rome.

Digging deeper

From Romans 16 what can be learnt about the following:

- the meeting places of the Roman church (see vv. 5, 14, 15);
- how Paul viewed the ministry of women;
- what qualities Paul admired in his fellow-Christians;
- the racial mix represented by the various names (you will need access to a commentary and be able to cope with some Latin and Greek for this one).

FOR TODAY'S ROMANS

Paul, as a child of his age, addressed his contemporaries. It is, however, far more important that, as Prophet and Apostle of the Kingdom of God, he veritably speaks to all men of every age . . . If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul; and if we be enlightened by the brightness of his answers, those answers must be ours. (K. Barth *The Epistle to the Romans*. London/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1963 p. 1.)

So begins one of the most significant theological studies of Romans in the twentieth century. What problems and solutions in Romans might be enlightening for us today in the twenty-first century? Here are a few suggestions, all of them intended as discussion-starters:

- The essential equality of all human beings, both as sinners who all alike have offended against God and as the potential objects of his saving action in Christ (Rom. 3:20–24). Despite all the differences between people, Paul would insist that all share the same sinful nature and that all can be changed into new people by the power of the gospel.
- An incisive treatment of the inability of people to avoid yielding to sinful impulses apart from the new life imparted by the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 7:14–8:11). Where Marxism and some other political philosophies disbelieve in human fallenness and look to political solutions to deal with society's problems, Paul would insist that we take our captivity to sin seriously, but also recognize that God's Spirit can transform human nature.
- A vision of the re-uniting of humanity into one people through faith in the Messiah (Rom. 11:32; 15:7–13). Paul lamented the deep divisions that existed in the ancient world between the Jews and the Gentiles, and saw how these could be overcome by a common recognition of Jesus as God's Saviour for all humankind. Can the same solution work for today's conflicts?
- A vision of a renewed cosmos with important implications for our attitude to ecology. This is admittedly not a central concern of Paul compared with the problems of humanity, but nevertheless there is the recognition that the universe shares in the corruption and decay of humanity and that it too looks forward to transformation by the power of God (Rom. 8:19–25).

ESSAY TOPICS

INTRODUCTORY

- Is the purpose of Romans to be understood more in the light of Paul's own situation or more in the light of the situation of the Christians in Rome?
- What are the principles for Christian behaviour that underlie Paul's teaching in Romans 12–13?

INTERMEDIATE

- How far can Romans be regarded as a statement of the central aspects of Paul's gospel? What, if any, important issues are not touched on in it?
- If you were a Jewish Christian who believed that observance of the law was necessary for Gentile Christians, would you find Paul's argument in Romans persuasive? What objections might you raise, and how do you think that Paul might respond to them?

FURTHER READING

*denotes books assuming knowledge of Greek; most can be used by all students.

INTRODUCTORY

P. S. Minear *The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans*. London: SCM Press, 1971 (reads Romans against its Roman background).

R. Morgan *Romans*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995 (basic introduction with some attention to the influence of Romans).

Commentaries

C. K. Barrett *The Epistle to the Romans*. BNTC. London: A. & C. Black/New York:

Harper, 1957 (classic, middle-length commentary).

F. F. Bruce *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*. TNTC. Leicester: IVP/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985 (good, entrance-level).

C. E. B. Cranfield *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985 (abbreviation and simplification of his major work, for which see below).

J. R. W. Stott *The message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*. BST. Leicester: IVP/Downers Grove: IVP, 1994 (exposition and modern application by a master).

J. Ziesler *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. London: SCM Press/Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1989 (excellent short commentary for students, raising all the major questions).

INTERMEDIATE

K. P. Donfried (ed.) *The Romans Debate*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991 (essays on the purpose of Romans from scholars of varied persuasions).

D. S.-J. Chae *Paul as Apostle to the Gentiles*. Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997 (an understanding of Romans in the light of Paul's apostleship).

D. M. Hay and E. E. Johnson (eds) *Pauline*

Theology. Volume III: Romans. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995 (essays by modern scholars).

M. D. Nanos *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996 (argues that Paul is writing to a situation in which Christian Jews were still part of the Jewish community and offers an interpretation of the letter that is radically different from the consensus).

A. J. M. Wedderburn *The Reasons for Romans*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991 (fresh survey of the problem of the purpose of Romans).

*N. T. Wright *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991/Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992 (essays on Pauline theology with particular reference to Romans).

Commentaries

*C. E. B. Cranfield *The Epistle to the Romans*. ICC. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, Vol. I, 1975; Vol. II, 1979 (traditional exegesis of the Greek text).

*J. D. G. Dunn *Romans*. WBC. Waco: Word, 1988; 2 vols. (detailed work from the 'new perspective' on Paul and Judaism).

Moo, D. J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. NIC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996 (detailed work on the English text).