

Romans - Jews & Gentiles Together in One Church

1. Romans is unique in a couple of ways.

First, it was a church that Paul did not

plant and had not even visited (at least at the point at which he wrote his letter to them), though he had desired to visit them for some time and fully intended to do so in the near future [1:13;15:22-24].

Second, it is by far the most

complete statement of the gospel in a theological sense in the N.T.

2. We don't know who started the church— despite the Catholic claim that Peter did. There is no apostolic name associated with it. However we do have some pieces of info which help us see how the church could have been formed.

- There were Romans present on the day of Pentecost who well might have begun the church in their home city. This even more plausible since these “visitors” would have been Jewish proselytes - [Acts 2:10].
- Cornelius was a Roman centurion and came to faith early in the establishment of the church in Judea. [Acts 10:1ff].
- Aquilla & Pricilla were doing a house church when the Jews were expelled by Claudius in A.D. 49 [Acts 18:1-2]. Chpt. 16 also makes mention of the church that was “in their house”, which may be the original church or possibly another fellowship in the same city [Rom. 16:3-5].

The church in Rome was not at all unique in that it had Jews and Gentiles in its membership. Most all of the early church had at least some Jewish and Gentile mix. Outside of Jerusalem and Judea Jewish believers were usually in the minority in most churches since it was an overwhelmingly Gentile world. We've already seen the enormous struggle over gospel and the New Covenant played out in Paul's early missionary journeys, culminating in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, In particular there were problems understanding how the O.T. related to the N.T. and in particular how Judaism, which had been practiced for hundreds of years, related to the new Christian movement.

*** This is the occasion of the letter and the undercurrent that leads Paul to give such a complete survey of the gospel.

3. The gospel and the righteousness of God - 1:16-18:

A. *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,”*

This is the foundational passage for the whole letter. It not only introduces the body of the letter, but contains the key themes that Paul will concentrate on:

- Everyone is guilty as charged
- justification and God's righteousness
- salvation is by faith alone
- justification and sanctification
- Jews and Gentiles in God's plan

Paul weaves these themes together throughout the book relating each to the righteousness of God.

- B. Paul spends nearly three chapters hammering home the truth that all men are guilty before God
- the Jew with the law,
 - the classic immoral pagan
 - and even those who have never heard any truth through Jews or Christians.

So both Jew and Gentile have the same disadvantage: all have sinned and fall short of God's righteous standard [3:23]. The result of this universal condemnation is

death— i.e. eternity in hell – the inevitable result of God's wrath toward all sin and unrighteousness.

- C. So how does God forgive sin and bring acquittal for guilt when His righteous response must be wrath? Paul gives the amazing answer in 3:20-26:

“Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

4. The Law and the Gospel

- A. There were some questions that would understandably arise in a church that was becoming increasingly more Gentile. What is the function of the law, why was it given? Does it actually pull people into sin? What was Christ's, and therefore, the individual Christian's relationship to the law?
- B. Paul touches on the law and its relationship to the gospel in various passages, but he zeroes in on it most in chapter 7. Two verses are key (though really all of chpts. 7 & 8 are relevant):

7:5 - For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

Our sinful nature is so corrupt that even our best attempts to obey the law become twisted and made to serve our sinful passions. No wonder Paul cries out in 7:24 "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

7:6 - But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

This second passage could be paraphrased: 'But now that Christ has come we are released from the the law'. We are released from law, but now given a new life created by the Holy Spirit living within us. Paul explains it in another way in 8:3-4:

"For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

5. The Reliability of God

- A. Just as there were questions about the place of the law in the life of a believer, there were questions about God's treatment of His chosen people. It appears that God has cast off His elect people. Believers needed to understand the circumstances and theology of how God could "dump" his own people. There arose a genuine question: could God be trusted. In chapters 9-11 Paul deals with the issues surrounding those questions.

B. Paul's explanation goes something like this:

- The present situation does in fact correspond to God's purposes in history and His purposes in particular in salvation.
- Paul describes what God is doing as a mystery (11:25), i.e., that God is at this time in history bringing in Gentiles as well as Jews into the family of God (Eph. 3:1-6) The mystery, or surprise we might say, is not that God is saving Gentiles (the prophets continually predicted that), but that it's happening now.
- Israel has repeatedly merited judgement and rejection by God.
- But God has reserved a "remnant and will save His elect people"

Chapter 11 brings Paul's whole explanation to a comforting conclusion:

11:1-5

"I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah--how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*"

vs. 7 What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened,

vs. 25-26 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

C. So who is "all Israel"?

- 1) Is this national (ethnic) Israel? During what time period? Does this mean that no Jews are saved while the Gentiles are being saved, i.e., until God has saved all the Gentiles He intends to save, and then the Jews remaining at that time are will be saved? Do we look for a complete turning of every living Jew at some future date?
- 2) Does this refer to Jews and Gentiles alike, that is all the "elect"? This would make Israel in this passage an "idealized" Israel. Is this stretching the language too far? Wouldn't this make nothing of the distinction made here between Jews and Gentiles? [cf. Rom 9:6; Gal 6:16]

- 3) There are no easy answers to these questions. It seems a little too easy to idealize Israel. It seems that Paul's whole argument is based on a comparison and contrast of what God did with Israel and then with the Gentiles, which will all be reversed yet again with the final turning of Israel. And yet this idea creates the difficulties mentioned above. Things which we can conclude are these:
- 1) Israel is in fact idealized in 9:6. That would seem to make it possible here.
 - 2) It is sometimes argued that the comparison and contrast which Paul uses in his argument assumes a literal Israel. But what about the Gentiles. They are not a national entity or an ethnic group, so are they literal in the same way? It would seem more consistent to see both in terms of the elect from both groups and therefore at least in some sense idealized.
 - 3) As as a tentative conclusion then, I would see "all Israel" as the elect, both Jewish and Gentle, i.e., the church.

So What!

1. We have found the enemy and he is US! We ourselves are the problem. Our sinful nature is battling us every step we take. We are not getting rid of it in our lifetime- this is why death is backhanded grace. Only through physical death can we be freed from our sinful nature. (this is the thought behind calling the sinful nature "the flesh").
2. The Christian life is about life in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit does everything.
3. Remember the "therefore" and what is it there for. Chpts. 12-16.
12:1-2.