

The Gospel According To Paul: Romans

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OPENING SECTION OF THE LETTER (1:1-17)

1. Opening Lines (1:1-7)

(1) Sender (1:1)

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God . . .

(2) Christological Confession (1:1-6)

*. . . which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, **3concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,**⁴**and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.**⁵**Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,**⁶**among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;***

Paul had never been to Rome, the Christians there had heard of him and his grand interpretation of Christianity, but needed to hear, in his own words, a development of "his gospel," his message of divine deliverance for a ruined or destroyed human race, which had enslaved itself to the Satanic powers of sin. Paul begins with a Christological statement (1:2-6) with reference to who he believed Jesus of Nazareth to be and **everything following flows out of that statement**. His beliefs with reference to Jesus of Nazareth serve as the core of his good news of divine deliverance.

(3) Addressees (1:7a)

To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:.

(4) Greetings (1:7b)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

2. Thanksgiving (1:8-10)

*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, **that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.** ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit **in the gospel of His Son**, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, ¹⁰making request if, by some means, now at last I may **find a way in the will of God to come to you.***

3. Expressed Desire to Visit Rome (1:11-15)

*For I long to see you, that I may **impart to you some spiritual gift**, so that you may be established-- ¹²that is, that I may be encouraged together with you **by the mutual faith** both of you and me. ¹³Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), **that I might have some fruit among you also**, just as among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴I am **a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians**, both to wise and to unwise. ¹⁵So, as much as is in me, **I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.***

4. Statement Of Paul's Thesis (1:16-17)

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. ¹⁷For 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."

This statement is packed with powerful themes that Paul unpacks and develops throughout this part of the letter (1:16-11:36). Each theme is

discussed in view of an opposing theme which stand in juxtaposition to it; e.g., **the gospel** (as opposed to the law), **the power of God** (as opposed to the impotence of the law), **salvation under the gospel** (as opposed to condemnation under the curse of the law), **to everyone** (the universality of the gospel as opposed to the exclusiveness of the law), **who believes** (as opposed to those who attempt to earn their salvation through works of the law), **to both Jews and Greeks** (as opposed to the Jew exclusively), **the righteousness of God** (as opposed to man's own righteousness or righteousness of the law), **which is revealed through faith** (as opposed to a righteousness which is attained through the keeping of the statutes, judgments, and commands of the Law).

Application of the Roman Letter to the Contemporary Reader

How does one make use of a letter written to a group of Christians in Rome, Italy over 2,000 years ago? The application of any document over 2000 years old to a people living in another time and place than that of the original readers would depend on the nature and content of the document in addition to the identity of those amenable to its content. If the content of the document is of such a nature that it would be authoritative for and applicable to any and all persons identifiable with the original recipients, then its contents may implicitly apply to such readers even though not explicitly addressed (i.e., directly addressed) to them.

In the case of a document believed to be given by inspiration of God, those believing themselves to be amenable the authority of that writer, or the one for whom he is authorized to speak, may be said to be amenable to the instruction or teaching given in that document. It would be the case that a letter of Paul the Apostle of Christ would be applicable to other Christians living in other times and places if what was written is germane to both groups. The New Testament letters are occasional documents; i.e., there was an occasion that called for the writing of the letter. If Christians living at a different time and place than the original recipients have needs which would warrant the use of the information or instruction of that letter, then we could say that the later readers may draw from the letter implicitly what would be useful and applicable to the original recipients of the letter.

Even though explicitly addressed to the Roman church of the first century AD, the teaching of this letter would be implicitly applicable to any

other Christians amenable to the teachings of an Apostle of Christ. To all those who are Christians, as were these people in Rome, the explicit instructions of Paul would be applicable to them as it would to anyone, in any place at any time, having amenability to the teaching of Christ's representative; i.e., an apostle of Christ.

This is how one applies the teaching of the text of Scripture. Application is, essentially, putting oneself into the story. In this case it would mean putting oneself into the story associated with this letter and assuming oneself as part of the original audience, listening to this letter being read to the church in Rome, Italy, in the year 57 AD. The understanding intended for the original reader is the understanding that must be sought by the reader of later times. What was expected of the original reader in terms of application of the instruction or understanding of the teaching is the same for the reader of another time, if the application and understanding is true to its original intent.

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