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# Galatians and Romans

## Paul's Gospel

Paul's Letters to the Galatians and the Romans focus on the essence of the Christian faith. They do this in two very different ways. Galatians is the earlier of the two letters, written in the heat of an argument. Romans is devoid of controversy, and Paul is able to present his understanding of the faith calmly. Since both writings deal with very similar issues, we examine them together to show the development of Paul's thought.

## Galatians

### Getting Started

- 1 Read the Letter to the Galatians. What do you discover about Paul in this letter?
- 2 Note the controversy between Paul and Peter. What do you think it is all about?

### Preliminary Comments

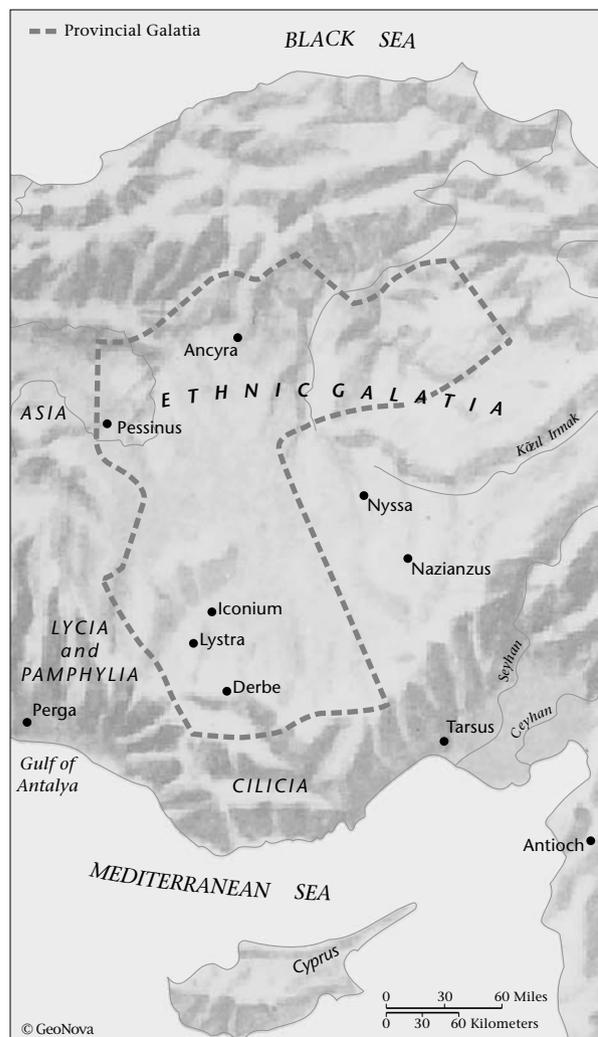
The essence of the dispute between Paul and his opponents centers on the role the Law plays in the path to

salvation. Paul's opponents taught that Jesus' followers (whether they came from the world of Judaism or the pagan world) still needed to fulfill the requirements of the Jewish Torah. For Paul, this is a denial of the role and position of Jesus Christ. The path to salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not in obedience to the stipulations of Jewish Law. Faith in Jesus Christ has set us free. That is why some scholars have referred to Galatians as "the letter of Christian freedom."

Galatians witnesses to the struggle the early Christians experienced in reconciling Jesus' teaching with that of their Jewish traditions. Because Paul's views won out in this dispute and his writings are in the New Testament, one tends to forget that Paul's opponents were as equally sincere and convinced of their understanding of the meaning of Jesus Christ. For new converts to Christianity, it was obviously a confusing time.

### Background Information

Paul writes this letter "to the churches of Galatia" (1:2). Where exactly these churches are situated is one of the critical issues that must be addressed before we read the letter. Scholars are divided in their answers: (1) the central region of Asia Minor, around modern Ankara



### THE TWO GALATIAS

in Turkey; or (2) the southern coastal region of Asia Minor.

#### The Northern Galatian Theory

The traditional view, held by most scholars, is that Paul was writing to churches in the central region of Asia Minor near Ancyra, modern Ankara, Turkey. Supporters of this view argue that the name Galatia refers to the area where the original inhabitants, Galatians (Gauls or Celts), had lived. Arguments in support of this location are based on Paul's calling them "Galatians" (Greek *Galatai*, 3:1), in an ethnic sense. The Acts of the Apostles does not describe Paul's missionary activity in this region, but one must remember that Acts does not give a comprehensive account of everything Paul did. Further, it is possible to see in some references his probable work in this area: "They (Paul, Silas, Timothy)

### Reading Guide to Galatians

#### Opening Formula (1:1-5)

#### Body (1:6-6:10)

##### *Polemic: Paul's Strong Defense of the Gospel (1:6-4:31)*

The Issues of the Adversaries (1:6-10)

Paul Defends His Gospel (1:11-2:14)

The Core of Paul's Gospel (2:15-21)

Arguments in Defense of Paul's Gospel

(3:1-4:31)

##### *Ethical Exhortation to Keep Their Freedom in Christ (5:1-6:10)*

#### Final Greetings (6:11-18)

went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6).

#### The Southern Galatian Theory

Supporters of this view understand the name Galatia as a reference to the Roman province of Galatia (the southern coastal region of Asia Minor). In 25 B.C.E. the last king of the Galatians died, and Rome enlarged the original northern territory of the Galatians to incorporate the southern region as well, as far as the Mediterranean Sea. It included cities such as Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Acts 13-14 describes Paul visiting these cities during his first missionary journey. The Southern Galatian theory would date the letter shortly after Paul's visit during his second missionary journey *ca.* 50 C.E.

While arguments support both possibilities, the Northern Galatian theory (the ethnic use of the term Galatia) has more support. This theory would place the letter during Paul's third missionary journey, probably from Ephesus. Paul's three-year stay there (54-57) would have made it possible for him to hear news about other missionaries undermining his message in that region, thus prompting his energetic response. Consequently, we would date the letter *ca.* 54/55.

### A Walk through Galatians

#### *Galatians 1:1-5: Opening Formula*

Paul begins with a defense by identifying himself as an apostle (1:1), one sent on a mission by Jesus Christ and God the Father. He sends greetings in general from "all the members of God's family who are with me" (v. 2). His greetings summarize his gospel of freedom (vv. 3-5). Paul's response to his opponents' attacks is one of anger; hence this is the only one of Paul's existing letters that lacks the traditional thanksgiving!

**Galatians 1:6-4:31: Polemic:****Paul's Strong Defense of His Gospel**

The body of the letter falls into two distinct parts: a polemical section in which Paul issues a strong defense of his gospel message (1:6-4:31) and an ethical part in which he exhorts his readers to uphold their freedom (5:1-6:10).

**The Issue and the Adversaries (1:6-10)**

Paul shows how surprised he is to learn that the Galatians are deserting the gospel that he had preached. He curses anyone who preaches a different gospel (1:8).

**Paul Defends His Gospel (1:11-2:14)**

This section conforms to the rhetoric used in a court defense (*apologia*). One can almost imagine Paul as the defendant in the case, the missionaries in Galatia as the accusers, and the Galatians as the judge! Paul gives three arguments to support his understanding of the gospel.

1. Divine call to become an apostle to the Gentiles (1:11-24). Paul describes his call and subsequent events. After then spending three years in Arabia, he makes a brief visit to Jerusalem where he meets Cephas (Peter) and James. From there he moves to Syria and Cilicia (Tarsus, his hometown).
2. The Jerusalem Council (2:1-10). Support for Paul's gospel comes as well from the agreement that he reached with the leaders of the community in Jerusalem, James, Cephas (Peter), and John, 14 years after his call. Acts 15 gives a somewhat different account of these events. According to Paul the outcome of this meeting was a compromise with "the pillars" of the church (v. 9): Paul's mission was to the Gentiles, while Peter's was to the Jews. Those from the Gentile world who became followers of Jesus were not required to be circumcised. Finally, Paul is asked to "remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do" (v. 10).
3. The Antioch dispute (2:11-14). Paul recounts how he stood up to Peter (and those who came from James, v. 12). He criticizes the hypocrisy of Peter, who stopped sharing meals with Gentile believers. In a sense this foreshadows what was happening among the Galatians with the arrival of those who wanted believers to continue Torah observance.

**The Core of Paul's Gospel (2:15-21)**

This is the heart of Paul's letter as well as his gospel. Paul uses the concept of justification (Greek *dikaio syne*) derived from a legal context to express God's deal-

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ings with human beings. From Paul's perspective all humans are sinners and deserve God's judgment and punishment. But instead of condemning humanity, God extends mercy to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. This is God's great gift or grace. This gift comes not through obedience to works of the Torah but through faith in Christ. Paul opposes those who place their trust in "works of the Torah" because they are relying upon themselves (self-righteousness) to earn salvation, whereas salvation is a gracious gift (v. 21).

**Arguments in Defense of Paul's Gospel (3:1-4:31)**

Paul makes six arguments from experience and Scripture to defend his gospel.

1. The gift of the Spirit (3:1-5). Paul refers to the Galatians' experience. They received the Spirit when Paul preached among them — it did not come from doing the works of the Torah.
2. The evidence of Scripture (3:6-14). Referring to the example of Abraham, Paul shows how Abraham was justified not by works but because he believed. God also promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in Abraham. Likewise, the Gentiles who believe are justified by their faith, not by doing works of the Law nor by being circumcised.
3. The purpose of the Torah (3:15-29). Paul sees the Torah as preparing the way for Christ. He compares the Torah to a "disciplinarian" (the slave who takes care of a child and leads that child to school). It was intended to lead one to Christ, but once Christ has come the purpose of the Torah has been fulfilled (vv. 25-26).
4. Freedom from slavery to the elements of the world (4:1-11). Paul again speaks to the Galatians' experience. Their knowledge of God frees them from the slavery they experienced in their former lives. Why do they want to return to slavery?
5. The experience of friendship (4:12-20). The Galatians were Paul's friends. How can Paul's accusers turn the Galatians against him so quickly?
6. The allegory of Hagar and Sarah (4:21-31). In contrast to the way in which Paul's opponents interpret this allegory, Paul shows that Hagar, the slave woman, represents those who refuse to accept the message of Jesus and remain slaves of the Torah. By contrast, Sarah, the free woman, represents those who are made free through faith in Christ.

### **Galatians 5:1–6:10: Ethical Exhortation to Keep Their Freedom in Christ**

In the second part of the body of this letter Paul turns to ethical exhortation. His theme is: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (5:6). Paul encourages the Galatians to live by the Spirit, not by the flesh, and presents lists of vices (vv. 16-21) and virtues (vv. 22-26) to illustrate the life they must lead and what they must avoid.

### **Galatians 6:11-18: Final Greetings**

Paul takes up the pen and writes in his own hand summarizing his gospel: “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!” (6:15). His sufferings bear witness to his share in Christ’s sufferings. These “marks of Jesus branded on my body” (v. 17) outshine the marks of circumcision. In his usual style Paul concludes with a final blessing (v. 18).

## **Critical Issues in Studying Galatians**

### **Relationship between Acts 15 and Galatians 2:1-14**

This relationship has been a source of much scholarly examination. As noted in our discussion of the Acts of the Apostles, there are certainly discrepancies between these two accounts. However, the contexts in which they were written were very different and each passage must be understood within that setting. Galatians was written ca. 54/55, some five years after the Council of Jerusalem (49). Paul has very clear memories of the disputes, and some of the issues still continue. Acts, however, was written in the mid-80s, long after the matter had been resolved. Consequently, Luke presents a simple record of a resolution that was to become the practice of the Christian church.

### **Who Are Paul’s Opponents in Galatia?**

Scholars have advanced many proposals. The evidence of the letter itself supports the view that Jewish Christian missionaries came into the Galatian communities and argued that Gentile believers had to be circumcised and abide by the stipulations of the Torah. They are the same group that Paul encountered in Philippi and Corinth, called Judaizers: Jewish Christians who held that Jesus’ followers had to remain within the world of Judaism.

## **Theological Themes in Galatians**

### **Paul and the Law**

Throughout his ministry Paul wrestled with the relationship of Jesus’ followers to the Jewish Torah. His

central message is that Christ was the fulfillment of the Torah and that believers were set free from obedience to it. For Paul, the issue concerned Christ’s role in salvation. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection believers have been freed from the curse that the Torah brings (3:13). Justification comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not through performing works of the Law. The essence of the distinction between these two ways of life rests upon whether one trusts in what Christ has done or whether one relies upon oneself to work one’s own salvation.

### **The Equality of All in Christ**

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). The equality of which Paul speaks is one that comes through union with Christ. He does not mean a social equality, but a theological unity that he expresses elsewhere through the images of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-31) as well as the wild olive branches grafted onto the vine of Israel (Rom 11:17-24).

### **“The Faith of Jesus Christ”**

Traditionally this phrase has been understood as the Christian’s faith *in* Christ (an objective genitive). A recent proposal regards the phrase as a subjective genitive, namely the faith *of* Jesus Christ, his faithfulness to the will and plan of his Father. This faithfulness of Jesus led to his death and resurrection and brought about justification for the sinner. The two proposals are not necessarily exclusive: both are essential in the plan of God’s justification. The believer must place trust in what Christ has accomplished. At the same time, Jesus’ fidelity to the plan of his Father is essential in the process of justification. Both dimensions emerge in 2:16: “And we have come to *believe in Christ Jesus*, so that we might be justified by *the faith of Jesus Christ*.” (see NRSV footnote).

# **Romans**

## **Getting Started**

- 1 Read the Letter to the Romans. Note some of the important teachings that Paul stresses.
- 2 Paul uses a number of quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures. List some of them.

## Preliminary Comments

Paul's Letter to the Romans is his longest and the last of his "genuine" letters to have survived. Without doubt it is Paul's most important writing because it contains a wonderful synthesis of his basic teaching. It is also the most significant and influential writing in the history of Christianity. Over the course of the centuries this letter has inspired Christian thinkers in seeking to communicate their understanding of Christianity to a new generation of believers. For St. Augustine, Romans was the inspiration behind his conversion to Christianity, and he based his teaching on grace and sin upon his reflections on this letter. At the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Romans was the source for Martin Luther's teaching on justification by faith and John Calvin's reflections on predestination. In the 20th century the Protestant theologian Karl Barth produced a monumental commentary on Romans.

## Background Information

Paul did not found the church in Rome. We do not know the exact origins of the Christian community in the capital of the Roman Empire, but evidence indicates that Christians were here early on. The narrator of Acts of the Apostles notes that present in Jerusalem at the time of the first Pentecost were "visitors from Rome" (Acts 2:10). This probably reflects a more theological than historical purpose. Nonetheless, it shows that in the perception of early Christianity the message of salvation had reached this community early.

Ancient inscriptions and writings reveal a large Jewish presence in the Roman capital. In his *Life of Claudius* (25.4) the Roman historian Suetonius writes that in 49 C.E. the emperor Claudius "expelled the Jews from Rome because of their constant disturbances incited by Chrestus." Some scholars suggest that Suetonius, a pagan historian, inaccurately reproduced the name *Chrestus* for *Christus*! This could imply the presence of Christians in Rome at this time and that the disturbances in Rome could have arisen from tensions between Jews and the Jewish followers of Jesus.

The emperor Nero (54-68) revoked Claudius's edict with the result that many of those Jews and Christians

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who had been expelled returned *ca.* 54. Paul wrote this letter a few years later while in Corinth during his third missionary journey (in the winter of 57/58).

While it is not possible to assign one specific motive for writing this letter, it is probably the result of a number of reasons. Paul intended to visit Rome on his way to Spain, so he took the opportunity to introduce himself and his thought to this community. Because the letter was not prompted by specific issues or problems (as with his other letters), Paul was able to present his essential message calmly and precisely.

## A Walk through Romans

### *Romans 1:1-15: Opening Formula and Thanksgiving*

Paul expands his usual opening with a summary of the gospel (1:1-6) so he might instantly connect with his readers, who would recognize the essence of their own faith. In the thanksgiving section (vv. 8-15), he acknowledges how their faith echoes throughout the world and then sets out the purpose of the letter: his intention of visiting them and sharing his faith. However, he is mindful that he is preaching in a church he has not founded, so he expresses his desire that they mutually strengthen each other's faith.

### *Romans 1:16-11:36: Doctrinal Issues*

The body of the letter divides into two parts: doctrinal issues (1:16-11:36) and ethical matters (12:1-15:13).



The Forum in Rome. The oldest of the city's public squares, it comprised a complex of open spaces and government buildings, temples, and shops. (Paul Achtemeier)

**Reading Guide to Romans****Opening Formula (1:1-7)****Thanksgiving (1:8-15)****Body (1:16-15:33)****Doctrinal Issues (1:16-11:36)**

Righteousness of God Revealed through the Gospel (1:16-4:25)

Theme: The Power of the Gospel (1:16-17)

God's Judgment of the Sins of Jews and Gentiles (1:18-3:31)

The Example of Abraham (4:1-25)

Salvation for Those Justified by Faith (5:1-8:39)

God's Election of Israel (9:1-11:36)

**Ethical Matters (12:1-15:13)**

The New Life in Christ (12:1-13:14)

Attitude toward Others (14:1-15:13)

**Paul's Travel Plans and His Reason for Writing (15:14-33)****Final Greetings (16:1-27)**

Commendation of Phoebe and Greetings to the Community (16:1-23)

Final Doxology (16:25-27)

**Righteousness of God Revealed through the Gospel (1:16-4:25)**

The first doctrinal section reflects on God's righteousness which is revealed through the gospel. It opens with a statement of Paul's theme and his understanding of the gospel message (1:16-17): the righteousness (Greek *dikaïosyne*) of God and justification by faith. Paul uses language taken from the legal system. By the "righteousness of God" he understands God's action of pardoning believers for their sins because of their faith in Jesus Christ. God is merciful and just and pardons the Jew first, then the Gentile because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Turning first to God's judgment of the Gentiles (1:18-32), Paul argues that they were able to come to a knowledge of God through the created world. They refused to acknowledge God and this led to idolatry (v. 23) and to depraved behavior that was against one's nature (vv. 24-32).

In 2:1-11 Paul uses the style of a diatribe in which he speaks to an imaginary Jew whom he accuses of a false sense of superiority. If Jews act the same as the Gentiles, they too are deserving of punishment. Reward or punishment will be meted out to people in the future according to their deeds: to the Jews first, whom God

will judge according to their fidelity to the Law, and then to the Gentiles, whom God will judge according to their hearts and conscience (2:5-16). The only requirement for justification is faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ and not works of the Law is the important thing (3:27-31).

In 4:1-25 Paul uses the example of Abraham to illustrate and support his argument that faith justifies. He bases his position on Gen 15:6: that "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (4:3; see also Gal 3:6). Two chapters later in Genesis, God introduces circumcision as a requirement for the covenant (Gen 17:11-12). Since Abraham's faith came before that requirement, Paul concludes that faith comes before circumcision and is more important in the path to justification before God. Abraham is the father of all who believe, those who have not been circumcised as well all those who have (4:11-12). Paul's argument proceeds in the way a rabbi of the time would have argued, taking the phrase "it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (v. 22) as applicable not just to Abraham but also to Abraham's descendants (v. 24). Paul concludes with a return to his thesis: "It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification" (vv. 24-25).

**Salvation for Those Justified by Faith (5:1-8:39)**

Justification by faith brings with it peace with God, who pours the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers (5:1-5). Before the coming of Jesus, humanity was in need of justification and reconciliation. The cross of Christ showed God's immense love: "while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (5:8), bringing justification and reconciliation with God. Paul does not lose sight of his apocalyptic expectations: although the believer has already been reconciled to God, the believer has not yet been saved. Salvation is awaited in the future return of Christ: "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (5:10).

Paul turns to another example, Adam, to show how all humanity sinned before God (5:12-21). He contrasts the actions of Christ and those of Adam: Just as the actions of one person, Adam, resulted in sin and death for all humanity, so those of one person, Christ, resulted in salvation and life for all (v. 18). Paul sees humanity divided into two groups: those who are in Adam (in sin) and those who are in Christ (under grace) (v. 19).

For Paul a new member shares in Christ's life and death through baptism, and in 6:1-11 he explains the spiritual consequences of baptism. Using imagery taken from the baptism ritual (v. 4), Paul stresses that the old self was crucified with Christ, was buried with

him (by going down into the baptismal water) and then, just as Christ was raised from death by the Father, they were raised to new life (symbolized by rising from the baptismal font). Once again Paul distinguishes between the present situation and that which is to come. Believers have already shared in the death and resurrection of Christ, but they await the future hope of glory when they shall be united to Christ in the fullness of his resurrection (v. 8).

In ch. 7 Paul reflects on the meaning of the Mosaic Law. As a faithful Jew, Paul sees the Law as God's greatest gift which communicates knowledge of God's will. Fidelity to it will bring the fullness of God's blessings. However, Paul's reflections lead him to the conviction that the Law is unable to accomplish what it was intended to do. He presents a monologue with a very personal and insightful reflection on his own interior life (vv. 7-25), which is in fact representative of the struggle of every human: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (v. 15). Paul experiences an interior struggle between what he knows to be right (the Law), and the evil tendencies within him leading him astray. The Law is unable to resolve that struggle. Instead it is the power of grace that comes to him from Jesus Christ that liberates him.

Having shown the limitations of the Law, Paul reflects upon life led in the Spirit (8:1-39). The believer becomes an adopted child of God, able to call on God in the words of Jesus as "Abba! Father!" (v. 15). Life is led now in the Spirit, but it also gives a future hope of glory for which the creation groans in labor pains (v. 22).

### God's Election of Israel (9:1-11:36)

This third doctrinal section considers God's choice of Israel in the context of God's plan of salvation for all humanity. The real problem for Paul is this: If Israel is God's chosen nation, how is it possible that the people of Israel have now rejected Christ? He is adamant that God's promises have not failed. God did foresee both the rejection of the Israelites and the call of the Gentiles. Paul continues to stress that salvation is for all. It is useless to seek salvation simply through one's deeds or through deeds of the Law. Throughout this section Paul quotes extensively from the Hebrew Scriptures to illustrate his argument.

Paul concludes that God has not rejected the people of Israel (11:1). Throughout their history the majority failed, yet God saved a remnant (vv. 2-10). The "stumbling" of Israel at the moment has the positive effect that salvation has now been offered to the Gentiles (vv. 11-12). Paul sees a divine plan here: the people of Israel have rejected Jesus, which has made it possible for the

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Gentiles to accept Jesus and become part of Abraham's descendants through faith. But in the end, all Israel will be saved (vv. 25-32). Verses 33-36 conclude this section with a beautiful hymn praising the mind of God: "To him be the glory forever. Amen" (v. 36).

### *Romans 12:1-15:13: Ethical Matters*

Since this ethical discourse follows the long theological section, Paul is in effect saying that what God has done for believers in the person of Christ (chs. 1-11) should now evoke a response on behalf of the hearers/readers (12:1-15:13). In 12:1-8 Paul introduces his well-known imagery of the body of Christ: there is one body yet many members with different gifts "according to the grace given to us" (v. 6).

Chapter 13 reflects on the attitude of the Christian toward the state (vv. 1-7). Paul recommends that those who are followers of Christ respect their allegiance to the civil authorities. He calls the Christians in Rome to be model citizens and to pay their taxes. Paul follows with a reference to the law of love (following the teaching of Jesus) which encapsulates all the other commandments (vv. 8-10).

### *Romans 15:14-33: Paul's Travel Plans*

The body of the letter concludes with a reference to Paul's travel plans. He speaks with pride of his missionary activity and "what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed" (v. 18). Paul mentions his hope of going on to Spain (vv. 24, 28) after visiting Rome. His present plans are to take the collection that had been generously given by the communities in Achaia and Macedonia to the poor in Jerusalem. Paul concludes with a request for the Romans to pray for him and ends with a blessing for them (v. 33).

### *Romans 16:1-27: Final Greetings*

This chapter contains a word of recommendation for Phoebe (vv. 1-2). We will discuss below its position in the letter. Paul greets 26 people, many of whom he names. We know only of a few of them from Acts and Paul's other letters. The closing (vv. 21-23) contains greetings from other Christians at Corinth as well as a greeting from Tertius, the scribe.

## Critical Issues in Studying Romans

### *Unity and Integrity of the Letter*

The Chester Beatty Papyrus II (P<sup>46</sup>, ca. 200 C.E.) contains a Letter to the Romans with only 15 chapters. This has led many scholars to postulate that originally Ro-

mans had only 15 chapters and that ch. 16 was actually a separate letter of recommendation on behalf of Phoebe. They view this letter as addressed to Ephesus and in the course of its transmission, being such a short letter, it was copied at the end of Romans and with time taken to be part of that letter. A further argument is that in Romans Paul is writing to a community whom he has never met. Why then would he include so many references to people in the final chapter? It would make more sense to see ch. 16 as written to a church that Paul knew.

However, these arguments are not totally persuasive. While  $\mathfrak{P}46$  does not include ch. 16 as part of the Letter to the Romans, the textual evidence among ancient manuscripts for its position as part of the letter is very strong. The list of individuals to whom Paul sends greetings may be his way of connecting with people he knew within a strange community. Having been singled out by name, they could testify to the community on Paul's behalf and introduce and recommend him. The existence of the letter without ch. 16 may represent an attempt in the course of the transmission to give Romans the spirit of a general letter. By removing the final chapter with all its references to specific people, Romans then was not associated with any particular community and hence might have a more universal flavor.

## Theological Themes in Romans

### *Righteousness of God and Justification of the Sinner*

This is the major theme that weaves its way throughout the letter. Since Romans sets forth Paul's basic understanding of God and humanity's relationship with God, his view of righteousness and justification occupies center stage. No other letter considers this thought so fully. Romans 3:9-31 gives the most comprehensive reflection on the concept of righteousness.

The word "righteousness" (Greek *dikaioσύνη*) is applied to God, who works the salvation of humanity (3:21-22). The word originates in the context of the legal system and captures the idea of human beings brought before the judgment seat of God, where God acquits them and shows his graciousness. In this context Paul argues that all humans are sinners: "What then? Are we any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (v. 9). The death of Jesus on the cross brought the sinner justification, which was communicated through the faith of the believer: "They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith" (vv. 24-25).

Paul uses the term "justification" (Greek *dikaiosis*) to express the effect of God's gift of righteousness on the sinner. In judgment God has acquitted the sinner, not because of anything the sinner has done, but because of what God's Son has done (5:10-11). Faith in Jesus Christ is the central factor that brings the sinner into relationship with Jesus, and through his acceptance of the gift of God's righteousness the sinner is justified. This gift is open to all people: Jew as well as Greek.

### *The Concept of Original Sin (5:12-21)*

At the time of Paul there was much speculation on the Genesis account of Adam and his influence on the human race. In the Hellenistic world many myths dealt with the origins of humanity. One such myth spoke about a "First Man" who fell from the region of light and entered the material world, becoming head of the human race. In Alexandria, Egypt, the Jewish philosopher Philo (ca. 20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.) reflected on the two creation stories in Genesis (1:1–2:4a; 2:4b–25) against the philosophic background of his world. He saw in the first creation account the First Man, Adam, created in God's image as the perfect being, and he identified him with Divine Wisdom, God's Son. In the second creation account he saw the description of the Second Adam, the man of clay, the one who fell and sinned.

In both the Hellenistic and Jewish worlds a connection was made between sin and death. The writer of the 2nd-century B.C.E. book of Sirach says: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die" (Sir 25:24). The Jewish work *4 Ezra* (ca. 100 C.E.) speaks of evil growing in the human heart and leading to death: "For an evil heart has grown up in us, which has alienated us from God, and has brought us into corruption and the ways of death, and has shown us the paths of perdition and removed us far from life — and that not just a few of us but almost all who have been created!" (*4 Ezra* 7:48; trans. Bruce M. Metzger, in *OTP*, 1:538).

While it is difficult to prove that Paul ever knew any of the above writings, they reflect the common thought of both the Hellenistic and Jewish worlds of the 1st century C.E. Paul's starting point was the person of Christ, and he came to read Genesis in the light of Christ and the interpretations of Genesis circulating in his world. Paul is above all concerned with the grace that Christ brought to the human race, a gift open to all. To contrast this gift of grace for all through Christ, Paul turns to the Adam narrative, where one person, Adam, brings sin and death for the human race through his act of disobedience: "Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all" (5:18).

Paul never uses the terminology of "original sin." It

was only in drawing on four centuries of Christian reflection on this passage of Romans that Augustine (354-430 C.E.) ultimately constructed a theology of original sin in opposition to Pelagius (*ca.* 354-418), who denied original sin and argued that everything was innately good. Augustine argued that through sin Adam fell from an original state of grace, and through human generation this state of alienation from God was passed on to every human born into this world. Augustine's view triumphed and became an established doctrine within the Roman Catholic church (see the Council of Trent, "Decree on Original Sin" Session 5, 17 June 1546).

### ***Paul's Attitude to the State (Romans 13)***

At the time of Paul there were no nation-states as we understand them today. Rather, the Roman Empire encompassed provinces comprising very diverse peoples and a complex arrangement of governance. Paul speaks in 13:1-7 about obedience to "governing authorities" (v. 1) whose power came from God. Consequently, every person should be subject and obedient to them: "Whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (13:2). In particular one shows obedience to rulers by paying taxes to them (vv. 6-7).

This passage has been variously interpreted over the course of time. It has led to a very submissive attitude toward authority and leaders as divinely appointed. But does Paul teach that a Christian must obey civil authority unquestioningly? Again Paul must be seen in the context of his world as well as that of the rest of the New Testament writings. He was writing at a time when the Roman emperors were promoting peace throughout the empire. There were no persecutions against Christians, who could worship unhindered. But the situation was to change a few decades later with persecutions initiated under Nero Caesar (54-68) and later under Domitian (81-96). The book of Revelation (written during the time of Domitian) shows a markedly different attitude to authorities. Rome is compared to Babylon and portrayed as corrupt and evil (Rev 18:1-24).

## **The Letters of Paul**

Consequently, Paul's teaching on obedience to authorities must be interpreted against its context. It must not be transposed into very different situations where the authorities have betrayed the power given them by God. Paul is not advocating a "blind obedience." He just does not envisage a different situation.

## **Questions for Review and Discussion**

### ***Galatians***

- 1 What is the role of Law in Paul's thought in Galatians?
- 2 Discuss Paul's use of family and adoption images in Galatians.

### ***Romans***

- 3 Summarize Paul's major theological views as portrayed in Romans. Which do you consider to be the most important?
- 4 What does Paul's ethical teaching in Romans have to say to a person of the 21st century?

## **Further Reading**

### ***Galatians***

Cousar, Charles B. *Galatians*. Interpretation. Atlanta: John Knox, 1982.  
 Gaventa, Beverly R. "Galatians." In *ECB*, 1374-84.  
 Matera, Frank J. "Galatians, Letter to the." In *EDB*, 476-78.

### ***Romans***

Heil, John Paul. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Reader-Response Commentary*. New York: Paulist, 1987.  
 Reumann, John. "Romans." In *ECB*, 1277-1313.  
 Robinson, John A. T. *Wrestling with Romans*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979.