



An Introduction To The Book Of Romans

I. AUTHOR: The Apostle Paul

A. Externally¹ and internally² the evidence has been overwhelming in critical scholarship in favor of Pauline authorship of this letter.³ Once Pauline authorship is accepted for works like Galatians, and the Corinthian letters, than a work like Romans may also be ascribed Pauline since the topics are so similar, and there are no substantial difficulties⁴

B. Although some have denied Pauline authorship (e.g., Evanson, Bauer, Loman, Stek), it is no longer disputed⁵

C. Some consider Tertius to have composed Romans in accordance with Paul's instruction ([Romans 16:22](#)), however it is more probable that Tertius was Paul's secretary who either wrote the letter in long-hand from Paul's dictation, or who first took Paul's letter in shorthand and then wrote it out in long hand with Paul's final approval⁶

II. DATE and DESTINATION: From Corinth in the winter of A.D. 56-57 to Rome

A. Date: Winter A.D. 56-57 from Corinth

1. A Relative Chronology: Romans was probably written during Paul's third missionary journey from Corinth.⁷

- a. The letter was written when Paul was about to set out for Jerusalem (15:25)
- b. Paul also considers himself to have completed his missionary work among the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire (15:19,23)⁸ , therefore, the journey is most probably the one recorded in [Acts 20](#)--21 which begins from Corinth (cf. [Acts 19:21](#); [20:1-3](#)).
- c. Paul desired to go to Rome (1:10-13), but had been prevented (1:13; 15:22); now he hopes to go there on his way to Spain (15:23-28), but first he is going to Jerusalem with the offering for the poor from the Gentile churches (15:25-27)
- d. Therefore, in view of Paul's setting, Corinth seems to be the place from which Paul wrote ([Acts 20:1-3](#))

Other indications that Paul wrote from Corinth are:

- 1) Paul commends Phoebe as a servant of the church in Cenchreae, Corinth's eastern seaport (who probably carried the letter to the Romans) 16:1-2
- 2) Paul sends greetings from Gaius in whose house he was staying who may well have been the same Gaius mentioned in [1 Corinthians 1:14](#) as the one whom Paul baptized in Corinth 16:23
- 3) The greeting from Erastus the city treasurer may have been the Erastus who stayed in Corinth (cf. [Acts 19:22](#); also [2 Tim. 4:20](#)).

2. A More Absolute Chronology: Paul probably wrote Romans between A.D. 56-57

- a. Paul seems to have stood before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, in the summer of A.D. 51 on his second missionary journey⁹
- b. After staying many days in Corinth ([Acts 18:18](#)) Paul set out for Syria and remained some time in Ephesus (perhaps early fall AD 52; [Acts 18:19-21](#))
- c. Paul then returned to Caesarea, went down to Jerusalem, and then up to the church in Antioch where he spent some time (perhaps late fall of AD 52 through winter of 52/53; cf. [Acts 18:22-23](#))

d. Paul began his third missionary journey from Antioch through the Galatian region (spring-summer of A.D. 53) and reached Ephesus in the fall of A.D. 53 where he remained for two to three years (AD 53-56; [Acts 19:8,10; 20:31](#))

e. Therefore, Paul's return to Corinth through Macedonia was probably in the spring or summer of AD 56 ([Acts 20:2-3](#))

f. Paul probably arrived in Corinth in late fall of AD 56, and remained through early 57

Therefore, Romans, which was written from Corinth on the third missionary journey (see above), was probably written in the winter and early spring of AD 56-57.¹⁰

B. Destination: A Jewish/Gentile Church in Rome

1. There was an early church in Rome (possibly from before A.D. 49)

a. There was certainly a church already in Rome when Paul wrote the book of Romans (1:13; 15:23-24)

b. From a statement by Suetonius, there may be evidence that Christianity was in the capital of Rome by A.D. 49¹¹

c. This church may well have been started through converts of Paul who lived in Rome¹², rather than through any particular evangelistic effort¹³ since neither Paul (in Romans), nor Luke (in Acts),¹⁴ nor any other NT document mentions any.

2. The Composition of the church in Rome was probably mixed (Jewish/Gentile)

a. Rather than one large church, the Romans seem to have been made up of five household churches:

1) Five households are greeted (16:5,10,11,14,15)

2) Paul does not address the letter to the "Church" at (cf. [1 Cor. 1:2](#); [2 Cor. 1:1](#); [1 Thess. 1:1](#)), but to "all

that are at Rome”¹⁵ (1:7).

b. The Romans were made up of both Jews and Gentiles (with a probable emphasis upon Gentiles)

1) Paul writes to Gentiles

a) Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles (1:5; 11:3; Gal. 2:7-8)¹⁶

b) Paul speaks to Gentiles who receive mercy through Jewish unbelief (11:12-13)

c) Paul compares the Romans with *other* Gentiles, not just Gentiles (1:12-14)

d) Paul refers to the Jews as “my” brethren, and not “our” brethren (9:3)

e) Out of the twenty-four names in chapter 16, over one half are Latin and Greek

2) Paul writes to Jewish believers

a) Paul wrote with many references to the Old Testament (but see Galatians too)

b) Paul speaks of Abraham as “our” father in 2:1 (but see 1 Corinthians 10:1 where he does the same thing)

c) Chapters 9--11 are about the nation Israel (but they show that those who had privilege could lose it)

d) Paul describes a Jewish/Gentile problem in the church (“weak and strong”)

III. THE INTEGRITY OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS

A. The last two chapters of Romans are considered to be problematic to the integrity of the book

B. Chapter 16 has been considered to be, in whole or in part, a portion of an epistle sent to Ephesus; but, this is not a necessary conclusion¹⁷

1. Even though Paul had never been to Rome, he sent greetings to a large number of people there, and it would have been more reasonable if they were people from Ephesus where he was for three years. Also Paul does not mention these people from his later epistles sent from Rome

But Paul never concludes letters to churches which he personally knows with long addresses; rather, he only does this with the letter to Colossae (another church which he had never visited). This would have commended Paul well to the church since so many knew him

Paul probably does not mention these Romans in any of his other letters because there was no occasion, they were not his closest workers, and they had no connection with the churches to which he later wrote

2. It is unlikely that Priscilla and Aquila would have moved from Ephesus to Rome and back to Ephesus again (cf. [1 Cor. 16:19](#); [2 Tim. 4:19](#))

But extraordinary travel facilities connected to and from the capital of Rome; Aquila and Priscilla may have been well off, and even had a business establishment in both cities at once; they just appointed a Gentile manager while they left under the decree of Claudius¹⁸

3. The calling of Epaphroditus the 'first convert to Christ from Asia' ([Rom. 16:5](#)) would have more meaning in Ephesus, than in Rome

But if Epaphroditus did go to Rome, it would be natural for Paul to greet him, and to mention what he would naturally remember--that he was the first convert of Asia

4. If Paul was unknown to the church in Rome, then his recommendation of Phoebe would be of little value

But this is not a necessary conclusion since Paul was not an obscure person, and the writing of his letter speaks of a level of his authority with the Romans

5. The warnings of 16:17-19 appear to be more around the antinomianism of Ephesus than the Jewish-Gentile relationships of Romans

While there is no mention of these problems among the Romans, this does not mean that these words could have no relevance to them;--especially in view of Paul's own struggles with them

6. Chapter 16 may have been a later appendix to the conclusion stated in chapter 15

But the ending of 15:33 is without precedent among Paul's letters

7. Therefore, the evidence is inconclusive that chapter 16 is an appendage from an Ephesian letter. If there was an Ephesian letter, why did only its greetings survive? Also, there is no manuscript support that Romans ever circulated without the concluding chapter (even though the textual history is complicated). The Chester Beatty papyrus¹⁹ (P⁴⁶) places the doxology (16:25-27) at the end of chapter 15, but still ends with chapter 16.

C. The Recensions of the Epistle: The enormity of textual evidence²⁰ indicates that the letter did circulate in a shorter recension. Although a difficult issue, it was probably originally a longer letter which was shortened by Marcion²¹ and then copied by scribes who did not know of his editing. When the final chapters were found, they were added without editing the doxology at the end of chapter 15.

IV. REASONS WHY PAUL WROTE ROMANS:

A. Paul planned to do missionary work in Spain (15:24,28) and thus visit the Romans for prayer and financial support

B. Paul was interested in the Roman church, and intended to come for many years (1:13; 15:22-24,28-29; cf. [Acts 19:21](#))

C. Paul wanted to preach the Gospel and impart a spiritual benefit to the Romans (1:11,15)

D. Since the book has so many doctrines, Paul wanted to instruct the Romans in their faith

E. Perhaps Phoebe was going to Rome so it was a good opportunity to write (16:1-2)

V. PURPOSE FOR THE BOOK OF ROMANS:

A. To create an interest in Paul's Spanish mission; however, this does not account adequately for the theological nature of the mission

B. To present a full statement of Paul's doctrinal position of the Gospel making this more of a treatise than a letter which arose from historical situations

C. Paul writes to address certain "intellectual" questions (especially concerning the place of a universal religion over against Jewish nationalism) which the saints in Rome are concerned about (which perhaps he learned about through Aquila and Priscilla)²²

There may also have been practical difficulties which are reflected in Paul's ethical injunctions in chapters 12--15²³

D. To address tones of anti-semitism which might have arisen due the Claudius' decree²⁴

VI. THE THEME OF ROMANS

Paul desires to proclaim the gospel to the Romans because it is the power of God through which He reveals the righteous status of life²⁵ for all people through faith 1:16-17

¹ The Apostolic Fathers held to Pauline authorship: 1 Clement 32.2 (cf. [Rom. 9:4f](#)); 35.5 (cf. [Rom. 1:29-32](#)); 50.6f (cf. [Rom. 4:7-9](#)); Ignatius, [Eph 19:3](#) (cf. [Rom. 6:4](#)); Magn. 6:2 (cf. [Rom. 6:17](#)); 9.1 (cf. [Rom. 6:6](#)); Trall. 9:2 (cf. [Rom. 8:11](#)); Smyrn. 1.1 (cf. [Rom. 1:3f](#)); Polycarp 3.3 (cf. [Rom. 13:8-10](#)); 4:1 (cf. [Rom. 6:13](#) and 12:12); 6.2 (cf. [Rom. 14:19](#) and 12); 10.1 (cf. [Rom 12:10](#))

Every early list of NT books includes Romans among Paul's letters.

² Internally, the linguistic, stylistic, literary, historical, and theological evidence all support Pauline authorship.

³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 1:1-2.

⁴ See Harrison who writes, "From the postapostolic church to the present, with almost no exception, the Epistle has been credited to Paul. If the claim of the apostle to have written the Galatian and Corinthian letters is accepted, there is no reasonable basis for denying that he wrote Romans, since it echoes much of what is in the earlier writings, yet not slavishly" (*Romans*, EBC, pp. 3-4).

⁵ Cranfield, *Romans*, pp. 1-2.

⁶ Cranfield offers a lengthy discussion in *Romans* 1:2-4.

⁷ Much of this is dependent upon the integrity of chapters 15 and 16 to the letter (see below). Apart from this integrity, it is almost impossible to reconstruct the occasion for the epistle (see Guthrie, *NTI*, p. 396 n. 1).

⁸ From Jerusalem to Illyricum (the eastern shore of the Adriatic or modern Yugoslavia).

⁹ This absolute date is derived from the inscription found at Delphi which shows that Gallio was proconsul of Achaia in A.D. 52-[54] which means that he was probably proconsul of Achaia from mid-51 to mid-52, and Paul probably stood before him early in Gallio's governorship since the Jews would be attempting to win a new governor to their side (see Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:12-13).

¹⁰ See also Cranfield's computations from the replacement of Felix, as governor of Judea, backwards (*Romans*, 1:14-16).

¹¹ Suetonius records that Claudius banished Jews from Rome in AD 49 Because there had been rioting at the instigation of one called Chrestus ("*Claudius 'Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit*" [*Claudius* 25]) See Guthrie, *NTI*, p. 393; Cranfield, p. 16.

¹² Guthrie suggests that the message spread from the Pentecost event in Acts where Jews and proselytes from Rome were present (cf. [Acts 2:10](#); Guthrie, *NTI*, p. 394), but this is unlikely since there was no instruction for these believers. Nevertheless, their lack of clear instruction could explain why Paul writes such a lengthy treatise on the gospel.

It may be more probable that Paul "founded" the church through his converts because: (1) Paul mentions so many names, (2) Paul would not build upon another's foundation, and (3) there is no evidence that Peter founded the church.

¹³ Some have identified the founding of the church with Peter, however, Paul never mentions Peter in *Romans* even though he mentions twenty-four other people. Paul also never mentions Peter in his prison epistles, or 2 Timothy which were written from Rome.

Also when Priscilla and Aquila came from Rome to Corinth, it was because of an edict from Claudius in AD 49-50 (cf. [Acts 18:2-3](#)), which would place their arrival before Peter moved from Jerusalem (e.g., he was in Jerusalem for the Jerusalem council in fall of AD 49; see also Guthrie, *NTI*, p. 394).

Tradition may have claimed both Peter and Paul as their apostles because they were both martyred in Rome (Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:17).

14 On the contrary, Luke implies that the gospel has already reached Rome before Paul arrives since believers come to meet Paul as he arrives ([Acts 28:14-15](#)).

15 The Greek reads: πάντων τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ.

16 But Acts also emphasizes that he was to go to all peoples--both Jews and Gentiles ([Acts 9:15](#)).

17 See Guthrie, *NTI*, pp. 400-404 for a more extensive discussion.

18 A possible reconstruction of their travels may be: (1) [Acts 18:1-3](#)--they left Rome in AD 49 because of Claudius' edict, (2) They came to Corinth and met Paul on his second missionary journey; he was also a tent maker, (3) Paul arrived in Corinth in AD 51, (4) Paul left Corinth for Ephesus in AD 52, and went back to Jerusalem while Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus, (5) [Acts 18:26](#)--Priscilla and Aquila correct Apollos in the knowledge of the gospel, (6) in spring of 56 they are still in Ephesus when Paul returns on his third missionary journey ([1 Cor. 16:19](#)), (7) in the winter of 56-57 they are in Rome when Paul writes to the Romans from Corinth, and (8) in the autumn of 67 they are in Ephesus again when Paul writes ([2 Tim. 4:19](#)).

19 See its description by Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (Second Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 37-38.

20 See Guthrie's discussion (*NTI*, pp. 405-406).

²¹ Guthrie, *NTI*, pp. 409-413.

²² As Guthrie says, “For this reason Paul deals with the fundamental Christian principle of ‘righteousness’ as contrasted with the Jewish approach, and then discusses the problem of Israel’s failure and her relationship to the universal Christian Church” (*NTI*, p. 399).

Paul desires to promote unity in the body. Therefore he more fully defends his message against Judaizers in Rome. He himself is in a context of personal Jewish opposition ([Acts 20:3](#)). Paul does acknowledge the priority of the Jews (1:16; 2:9-10) as well as the advantage of being a Jew (3:1-2; 9:4-5), but he emphasizes that God is God of the Jews and the Gentiles (3:29-30), that God has temporarily halted His program for rebellious Israel (9--11), and that a believing remnant will continue (11:5) until the full number of Gentiles comes in (11:25). Therefore, God is seen as being good in his universal plan of salvation (3:26).

²³ But this is also a natural pattern for Paul to address the theoretical (1--11) before the practical (12--15).

²⁴ The decree from Claudius was against Jews living in Rome ([Acts 18:2](#)). Paul often addresses benefits of being a Jew throughout his letter (1:16; 2:9-10; 3:1-2; 9--11). Perhaps in doing this he was combating a natural movement among the Roman Gentiles.

²⁵ This is interpreting the genitive (θεοῦ) as objective (righteousness as God’s gift) rather than subjective (e.g., righteousness as God’s activity). This is a very difficult decision; see Cranfield for some in-depth discussion concerning these two views (*Romans*, 1:96-99). Righteousness is the moral character of God reflected in the gospel. All righteousness is a revelation of who God is. But Paul is emphasizing the righteous status which is given to men by God throughout the letter (cf. [Rom. 5:17; 10:3; Phil. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:21](#)).

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