

Most Christians think the Apostle Paul wrote the book in the Bible known as *Romans*. But the Bible says I wrote it. Me! Go to Romans 16:22 in the King James Version and read, “I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.”¹

Okay, okay, that is my attempt at a little humor and wordplay, as is made clear in modern translations. I “wrote *down*” the letter that Paul dictated to me. Paul often dictated his letters, and I was fortunate to be the scribe for this long and scholarly letter. I’m not a big deal. The only mention of me, my name anyway, in the Bible is when Paul let me slip in this little personal greeting. Better than nothing, right?

The Bible doesn’t tell you more about me, but early Church tradition leads you to believe I was from Iconium, in modern day Turkey. If that is so, you might presume I met Paul in Iconium on his first missionary journey, approximately ten years before the writing of *Romans*.

Romans was written in the late 50’s AD while Paul was visiting Corinth. Paul stayed with Gaius while in Corinth.² Timothy and a long list of others were in Paul’s entourage. He was there to take up a collection for the destitute church in Jerusalem. Paul was intent on gathering an offering from the Corinthians, and from other churches, and personally taking it to Jerusalem.

Romans is different from most of the other letters of Paul’s in a way that most people today don’t think about. With the possible exception of *Ephesians*, all of Paul’s other letters were written to churches or individuals to address particular problems or circumstances. He did not have to do that with this letter for at least two reasons: Rome was a new church and hadn’t developed significant problems known to Paul, and Rome was under the influence of Paul’s two faithful trainees...Priscilla and Aquila!³

Months before *Romans* was written, Paul had been expelled from Ephesus. After that, Priscilla and Aquila also left Ephesus and went back to Rome where a church met in their home. They were living in Rome when Paul wrote *Romans*.⁴ Perhaps you remember that Paul first met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth after they had been expelled from Rome with all the other Jews many years before?

¹ Romans 16:22 King James Version

² Romans 16:23

³ Romans 16:3

⁴ Romans 16:3-5

Romans was placed as the first of Paul's letters in the New Testament not because it was written first, but because it was the longest one written to a church. Paul wrote it toward the end of his Third Missionary Journey. This was a time when Christianity was growing, churches were being started, the Judaizers were still contentious, and there were false teachers opposing Paul. It was also a time when some of the doctrinal aspects of Christianity needed more clarity.

If *Romans* seems a little stilted and formal, you need to forgive Paul. He had a lot of material to cover as he gave guidance to the new church in Rome during rapidly changing circumstances. Nero had been the emperor for a few years, and he was proving to be, shall we say, incredibly erratic in his behavior.

There is another huge difference in Paul's letter to the Romans that many don't consider. Its long-term effect. There is no reason to think that any of the other churches that Paul wrote to continuously existed into the modern age without interruption. The church in Rome? It is the location of what is known in the modern world as...the Roman Catholic Church.

It is likely that when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, the church in Rome consisted of a pretty wide mix of Jews from various countries, Roman slaves and citizens, and people from other countries. Paul personally knew many of them. You can infer that from his closing statements in Romans Chapter 16 plus some of the things he says in his letter. With such a broad audience, you can expect that his letter covers many topics. With inspiration from the Holy Spirit, Paul addresses things in a way that all future generations will be inspired and informed.

At the start, Paul reveals why he is eager to preach the Gospel – because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. Not just Jews. Not just rich people. Not just a few good people. *Everyone* who believes! This will be extremely good news to his audience of such varied backgrounds.

Paul then introduces a theme that he will follow in many other places – *the righteous shall live by faith*. Paul takes this quote from the prophet Habakkuk, and will develop it into a foundational piece of his theology.⁵

Paul launches into a lecture on how God and his righteousness are revealed through nature so that nobody has an excuse for their immoral behavior. Evildoers will be punished, and those who do good will be rewarded with glory, honor and peace.

As Paul moves through this section, he uses some phrases that might remind you the time you live in. Right now. . When he talks about people who go against God's nature, he says, "God

⁵ Habakkuk 2:4

gave them over to debased minds to do what ought *not* to be done;” he calls them “inventors of evil;” and says they not only do evil things but give approval to those who practice them.⁶

As typical, Paul brings the Jews into the conversation. He says that the Jews have an advantage because they had the Old Testament first. But...in the end...God treats all people equally. Nobody can be considered righteous on their own, but righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. For all people, *all people*, have sinned and fall short off the glory of God, but all are justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption of Jesus Christ.⁷

Returning to a theme that permeates his writings, Paul quotes the prophet Habakkuk, “The righteous will live by faith.”⁸ He uses Abraham as an example of someone who believed God and was deemed to be righteous. Here is how Paul describes Abraham’s faith...he was “fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he promised to do.” Because he was fully persuaded, he was able to reason that God could bring Isaac back from the dead!⁹ That’s crazy! I can’t even imagine how being that “fully persuaded” could change my life. Are you with me on that?

Today people want more and more things. But one thing that everybody wants is peace. Paul gives this comforting message to the Romans: “Since you have justified through faith, you have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ What a relief that will be to the Romans living in a chaotic and dangerous city.

Rather than accusing the Romans of unrighteous behaviors, Paul simply makes this statement: “You are slaves to whatever you obey.”¹¹ Do you sin? You are a slave to sin. Do you have greed or sexual immorality? You are slaves to those. Do you constantly act with righteousness? You are a slave to righteousness. Simple.

The concepts of God and sin must have been mysterious to the Roman. Their gods were thought to behave in a completely different way. Roman gods acted capriciously, on any little whim, and had little regard for humans. A god who loved humans was a completely foreign concept. And sin was a completely new concept to the Romans.

⁶ Romans 1:28-32

⁷ Romans 3:22-24

⁸ Hab. 2:4

⁹ Hebrews 11:19

¹⁰ Romans 5:1

¹¹ Romans 6:5

Paul really gets the Romans' attention when he writes such things as: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this way – while we were sinners, Christ died for us."¹² "For the wages of sin is death. But...the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus."¹³

The Jewish Christians had a background in understanding the behavior God wanted from them, but the Gentile Christians were having to learn what it meant to behave like God wanted. The whole concept of sin must have been bewildering.

Then, as now, there were many Christians who couldn't get their actions in line. In order to encourage them not to give up, Paul lets them know that sin is a constant problem, even for him. He does not sugarcoat it, either. He tells them, from personal experience, that he doesn't do the good he wants to do, but the evil he doesn't want to do. When he behaves like that, he is under control of the sin that lives within him. But...he also says that he can only be delivered from that type of behavior by Jesus Christ. There is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus. Thank God!

As always, Paul makes it clear that life comes through the Holy Spirit. He tells the Romans that if they set their minds on physical things, they will live as physical beings and die that way. But if they set their minds on the Spirit, they will have life and peace.

Another concept that must have baffled the Romans? If they are led by the Holy Spirit, they can consider themselves as adopted children of God. To them, adoption was a huge privilege that only happened to a few people. To be an adopted child of God was an unimaginable privilege.

As adopted children, they expect to be heirs of their father and to be treated very well. It would have made sense for them to hear such things as: "We know that for those who love God, all things work together for their good." "If God is for us, who can be against us."
"Nothing...nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ."

I remember crying when Paul said some of those things. He would have to repeat them because I couldn't see my hands. I had always wondered how an all-powerful God could love someone like me. Now I know why. He loves me because of who he is! His very nature causes him to love me. Me! I, Tertius. Not a big deal. In anybody's book. God loves me!

¹² Romans 5:8

¹³ Romans 6:23