

## **Building a Life**

### A Right Life: Paul's letter to Rome

We are all looking for how to live a right life, with our friends, family, at work, and in the final analysis a life that counts for something. Paul's letter to the Romans, his *magnum opus*, focuses upon the issue of righteousness/right living with God, with others and the world, and with self. Paul, writing to a city he'd never visited, set out his version of the Gospel in order to pave the way for what he thought would be missionary work to Spain. Paul never made it to Spain, but did make it to Rome, albeit in chains. Nevertheless, he wrote the Roman letter with the purpose to explain how all people, both Jews and Gentiles, have rebelled against the Lordship of God, and thus have accepted a new Lord named "sin." Under their new Lord, people are unable to relate properly to God, to their world, or even to themselves. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God opened a new way for people to return to proper relationships and move out from under the slavery to sin. In the Roman letter, Paul explains the scope of the Gospel better than in any other New Testament writing.

### **Romans Background Sheet**

#### **Roman Vocabulary**

Romans contains a number of key theological terms, which need definition if one is going to understand both what the letter meant in Paul's day and what it means for us today. What better way to begin Romans than to understand its basic vocabulary.

#### **1. Jew and Gentile (1:18-3:20)**

Paul divides the world into Jews and Gentiles/Greeks, as two approaches in the way humanity tries to get life right. The Gentiles acquire knowledge of God primarily through what we call natural or creational revelation. They approach life from a world view that is inherent in reality itself. The Jew in Paul's argument gets knowledge of God through direct revelation, from the Torah/Law and from the direct voice of God. Gentile and Jew are more than ethnic categories, they are basic world view choices for getting life right.

#### **2. Flesh/Body and Spirit (ch. 8)**

Paul is a good Jew in that he does not separate body and spirit, as did the Greek/Gentile world. Paul would say a person does not *have* a body but *is* a body. Bodies for Paul are morally neutral, and are the concrete way humans form relationships in the world. *Flesh* does not mean bodily life. For Paul flesh defines a way of living bodily life that is opposed to the will of God. Therefore the flesh opposes the Spirit. The *Spirit* for Paul is God's Spirit (active presence) directing people to live bodily in a way that conforms to God's righteousness.

### **3. Righteousness (1:16-17; 3:21-26; chs. 7-8)**

Righteousness means *right relationships* among God and humans, human to human, in societies, and finally in the cosmos among the animal and physical world. Righteousness and justice are two of the chief characteristics of the Old Testament God (Jer 9:24). God wills and has the power to make life right. He does so preeminently through giving of himself in Jesus Christ on the cross, confirmed in the resurrection, and sealed to us by his Spirit.

### **4. Sin (chs. 5-6, 8)**

Sin is human decision to reject God and go our own way, living beyond our designated role as creatures, whether in the style of Jew or Gentile. Sin is something that we both inherit and also confirm by our choice. Sin results in behaviors (sins) and ends in death, because death is the result of choosing to separate ourselves from the creator who gives life. Human sin affects all relationships, causing a groaning in both the human and the non-human world. Sin is also something we start but cannot fix.

### **5. Grace and Faith (1:16-17; 3:21-26, ch. 4)**

Grace is God's free decision in Jesus Christ to bring about right relationships in the cosmos. Faith is human decision to respond to the grace of God, who has reaches out in faithfulness to heal and reconcile. Abraham is the major role model for what faith looks like. Faith is never blind; it always rests on the grace of the faithful God.

### **6. Law (chs. 2, 6-7)**

Law refers to the revealed will of God, first for Israel, who was supposed to share it so that all humanity would be blessed. The Law is good in that it teaches humanity how to live a righteous life. But the Law also defines sin, because people do not will to live righteously, desiring rather to make lifestyle choices resulting in death. Thus the Law has both a life-giving and a death-bringing effect.

### **7. Adam and Christ (chs. 5-6)**

Adam = man = human is the same term found in Genesis (Gen 1:26-28; 5:4), and refers to both an individual person and also to a class of creatures. We are all Adam in the sense that we are all human. And because we are all Adam, we all sin. Christ refers to a specific person, Jesus of Nazareth, in the role of God's anointed who becomes for us the representative human in which we can find the right life by participating in his life.

### **8. Gospel (1:3, 16)**

Gospel means the good news of the story of Jesus Christ, who is God come in the flesh to provide a way out of sin to a right life with God, each other, and with the cosmos. The proof of God's presence in Jesus Christ is the resurrection.