

The Argument of the Book of Romans

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The book of Romans stands as one of the most profound Biblical books, because of the richness of its theological content. While many topics are covered, the apostle does seem to have some central ideas, and the book remarkably weaves them all together. Paul's theme is best summarized in Romans 1:16-17. In these two verses, we find Paul's pride in this amazing gospel that bringing salvation to individual sinners through the righteousness of God. This gospel is the driving force of Paul's life, and it is the heartbeat of this epistle.

THE INTRODUCTION AND THEME (1:1-17)

The epistle begins with an introduction, as it is a letter. The introduction is 1:1-17, including the theme verses of the epistle. In this section, Paul introduces himself and lays the relational foundation of this epistle. Paul's apostleship and the gospel itself is introduced in 1:1-6. This introduction is particularly profound in its expressions about Christ. Paul's ministry is summarized in v5 as "to bring about *the* obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake." (NASB) Paul shares his heart for the Roman Christians (1:7-10) and his plans for his hopeful visit to see them (1:11-17). In the context of Paul's ministry plans, he explains his passion for the gospel which is the theme of this epistle, salvation to sinners through the righteousness of God granted by faith.

THE LOST CONDITION OF ALL MANKIND (1:18-3:20)

After introducing himself, the circumstances of the letter, and the theme of the gospel, Paul begins by indicting mankind for his sin that makes the gospel of his theme necessary. The primary purpose of section is to stop every mouth of man, so that all may be considered guilty in God's sight (3:19). In 1:18-32, Paul describes the painful march of depravity that mankind takes, through a "exchanging, giving up" process (Moo 2002, pp. 58-62), focusing primarily on Gentile vices and the general revelation given to them. In chapter 2, the discussion turns to the moralist, who is also just as guilty as the more common Gentiles described in chapter 1. In vv1-13, the emphasis is on the impartiality of God's judgment based on the law. Following that emphasis, the Gentiles are affirmed to have the conscience that makes them culpable for sin even without special revelation (2:14-16). Later on in 2:17-29, the Jews are specifically discussed, and the apostle condemns them for their disobedience to the law and makes them guilty in spite of their circumcision. In a brief parenthesis in 3:1-8, Paul affirmed that Jews do have advantages, but discussed the nature of God's faithfulness and righteousness in relation to his judgment of mankind. After that parenthesis, Paul concludes this section (3:9-20) by summarizing his indictment through Scripture, stating that "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin." (v9, ESV). The connection to the overarching argument is made in vv19-20, by pointing out that the human condition just explained has the corollary that the works of the law cannot justify men, leading to their salvation. This sets Paul's stage for the gospel he is going to expound.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF SINFUL MEN (3:21-4:23)

In 3:21, the next section of the book begins, taking us to 4:23. In this section, Paul explains the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which is the heart of Paul's gospel. Romans 3:21-26 is one of the most profound theological sections of Scripture, as it explains how God imputes His righteousness resulting in justification through the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. It is this sacrifice that allows God to be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (3:26). In 3:27-31, Paul addressed some basic objections and concerns to this doctrine, including the issue of boasting (3:27-28), the issue of Jew and Gentiles being justified by the same means (3:29-30), and the issue of the law's relationship to justification. With this basic exposition, Paul then discusses Abraham as the primary example of justification by faith (4:1-25). In that section, Paul addresses four contrasts in Abraham's life (Moo, pg. 89), faith versus works (4:1-8), faith versus circumcision (4:9-12), faith versus law (4:13-17), and faith versus sight (4:17-25). This entire discussion serves as the positive argument for justification by faith, whereas the negative argument was the discussion of depravity earlier in the epistle.

THE BENEFITS FOR THE JUSTIFIED BELIEVER (5:1-8:39)

The word *therefore* in 5:1 serves as an appropriate divider for the next division in the argument of Paul. In this section, Paul discusses what comes after justification in the believer. However, there is a recurring theme of hope in this section (Moo, pg. 100). In 5:1-11, the results of justification are explained as both present realities and future certainties. This theme is then further reinforced by comparing the work of Christ to the fall of Adam (5:12-21). The purpose of that discussion is Christ-focused, rather than Adam-focused. After elaborating on these benefits, Paul discusses the way Christians actually live after they receive this justification (6:1-23). In discussing this topic, Paul is focused on overcoming objections to the doctrine of justification by faith that he has already explained. The apostle affirms that believers who are justified died to sin, and therefore should live a new lifestyle (see especially vv3-6). After discussing the implications of this death to sin, Paul illustrates the idea from the law of marriage (7:1-6). After that illustration, Paul returns to discussing the law and its inability to produce the change in life that he is suggesting Christians can now experience (7:7-25). The conclusion of that section is Paul's whole point, that in Christ we can be delivered from this body of death (7:25). After this affirmation of the law's inability, Paul explains further the way that the "righteous requirement of the law" is fulfilled in us (8:1-13). In this discussion, he affirms the certainty of death as the consequence of sin, but life as the result of righteousness. After discussing the way believers can live righteously, Paul turns again to the theme of our future hope rooted in our adoption and the certainty of our future reign and redemption. (8:14-39). This section is a rich section, that discusses our adoption and future reign in spite of our sufferings (vv14-25), the assistance of the Spirit in our weaknesses in securing this hope (vv26-27), the reason for this hope (vv28-30), and concluding remarks on our sure hope and security in Christ (vv31-38). Truly, Paul is seeking to impress on believers the certainty of our future as culminating in our hope in Christ's final redemption of all His people and the world.

GOD'S WISDOM IN SALVATION HISTORY (9:1-11:36)

Following the peak of the previous section, Paul sought to then address the Jew and God's righteousness in salvation history to both Jew and Gentile alike (9:1-11:36). Paul begins by sharing his heart for his people, and explains why he is and should be so concerned about their rejection of Christ (9:1-5). Having laid this foundation, he discusses the nature of God's call of the Jews, both individually and as a group (9:6-13). The argument reaches its peak in vv11-13 and its illustration of this election principle. Immediately, Paul argues strongly that there is no injustice on God's part. (9:14-29) After explaining that lack of injustice, he then turns to salvation history by explaining the way that God has seen fit to give the gentiles the righteousness the Jews sought in a manner they did not seek to obtain it (9:30-10:13). As shown in this section, Paul has an explanation of the Jewish condition in view. He then affirms God's revelation of this righteousness through human preachers (10:14-15), but explains further how the Jews have rejected this message even though they heard it (10:16-21). After discussing the election and fall of the Jews, Paul explains God's future plans for Israel (11:1-32). In this section, he affirms God's plans for Jews today (11:1-6), explains further the nature of Israel's failure in regard to righteousness and the Gentile's acquisition of that same righteousness (11:7-25), and concludes the section by a wonderful declaration of hope for Israel (11:26-32). This entire section, on salvation history, concludes in a height of praise to God for His amazing wisdom in all of these things, and this conclusion notably focuses on hope (11:33-36).

PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS (12:1-15:13)

After this degree of hope, for both Jew and Gentile alike, Paul challenges both type of recipients of mercy to live for God. 12:1-2 explicitly calls us to offer ourselves to Him, and to live a holy life. The exhortations that follow are built on the theology of Ch. 1-11, but the purpose is more practical and specific than Romans 6 and its very theological discussion about the Christian life. The exhortations begin by calling us to fulfill the faith and ministry God has given to us (12:3-8), which is a very appropriate place to start. In 12:9-21, Paul offers general exhortations of a holiness (vv9-13) and specific exhortations regarding our holiness applied to ungodly people and their persecutions (vv14-21). In 13:1-6, Paul continues with an appeal to obey the rulers of this world, rooting this in the theology of government. After this appeal, we are challenged that love is our duty to everyone, which can be a good summary of everything that has been said so far in this section. This call to love is then explained by showing the Romans why holiness is so important, and it is rooted in our future eschatological hope. (13:11-14). In 14:1-15:13, Paul addresses the specific area of debatable things and how the Roman Christians are to relate with each other in that context. In 14:1-12, we are challenged to not judge each other, because God is our final judge. In 14:13-23, we are challenged not to stumble each other, because such stumbling hurts our own testimony and hurts our brothers who are in accepted by God. In 15:1-6, we find the flip side of the previous section. We must edify one another and please one other, as Christ did (v3). Finally, we are called to accept each other even if we don't agree on every detail of how we live out our faith (15:7-13). The section on living out our faith concludes on this appeal to dwell in unity with each other.

CONCLUSION (15:14-16:27)

The letter's concluding section is 15:14-16:27, and in it Paul returns to similar topics as he discussed in the prologue. In 15:14-33, Paul shares further about his confidence in the Roman Christians and his own ministry, including his upcoming travel plans to Spain that will include seeing them. This section helps us understand some of Paul's background and heart for the ministry to the Gentiles who never heard (vv20-21), but also for Jews (vv25-28). This discussion forms the basis of his request that they pray for him so that he can make it to Rome, and then Spain (vv29-33). In 16:1-16, Paul greets many varied people who were likely connected in some way with the church at Rome or the people who comprised the church. After greeting those people, he issued in 16:17-19 a brief warning for them to stay away from people causing trouble at the church that was not in line with "the teaching which [they] learned" (v17), while affirming his confidence in them. In 16:20-24, we find his concluding greetings from people with him, as well as a general benediction. Finally, in vv25-27, we find a fitting benediction for this epistle that brings us back to the theme of the gospel of God that was found in the prologue. In this conclusion, we are reminded of God's faithfulness to His people in this gospel that is rooted in the Scriptures, yet being made manifest in Paul's day in a unique way. The final end of obedience of faith is once again affirmed, and this obedience surely can include obeying the gospel by believing it so that sinners are justified, sanctified, and glorified and learning to obey the Lord as the result of the aforementioned gospel. The obedience of faith is sought in individuals, and by this obedience the salvation of God will reach all nations, Jews and Gentiles. Praise God for His salvation to poor sinners such as us!

REFERENCES

Moo, D. J. (2002). *Encountering the book of Romans: A theological survey*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.