



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

A Letter of Introduction

What Romans Aims To Do

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Introduction

1. In 2 Corinthians 3.1, as Paul was defending his gospel, he rhetorically asked, “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you?” The passage is one of several in the New Testament that allude to the practice of people carrying a letter of introduction and endorsement as they went to a place they had never been before or to authorize their actions (cf. Acts 9.2; 15.23, 30; 22.5; 23.25-30, 33).
2. In different ways, we are using the same principle as we begin this lesson and series.
 - a. First, this lesson is a “letter of introduction” to where this series is headed. We’re studying Romans 12 (and a little of 13), the first chapter of the practical application section of Romans (chapters 12-16). We need to establish the direction and rationale for our study.
 - b. Second, a big part of what Paul was doing in Romans was writing his own letter of introduction – of himself, but also of his ministry.¹
3. Within the letter Paul makes several comments that shed light on why he wrote Romans; all help us understand the letter, but, more importantly, help us see what is most important in it.

Body

- I. The Need for an Introduction.
 - A. It’s evident that there was a church in Rome that Paul had neither founded (cf. Philippi) nor visited.
 1. See Romans 1.8, 12.
 2. Other New Testament evidence.
 - a) Some from Rome were present on Pentecost (Acts 2.10); it makes sense that, having been schooled in the apostles’ teaching, (2.42) and/or forced out by persecution (8.1, 4), some would return home to the capital city practicing and sharing their newfound faith as they did so.

¹ See Karl Barth, *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* (SCM, 1960; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 11.

- b) Aquila and Priscilla, whom Paul met in Corinth, were already Christians who had come from Italy (Acts 18.2; see Rom. 16.3).
- B. Paul intended to visit Rome (1.11, 13; 15.22-23), a place where he knew some, but likely not all of the believers (Rom. 16.3-16).

II. Specific Aims.

- A. Paul wanted to present himself favorably in the hope of securing financial support from the Romans for work he wanted to do in Spain (Rom. 15.22-24).
- B. In the meantime, he solicited their prayers as he finished a task that had to be completed before he could visit.
 - 1. He had to complete the delivery of the collection from the Gentile churches to their Jerusalem brothers (15.25-28).
 - 2. He was concerned that, when he arrived in Jerusalem, he would need to be delivered from “unbelievers in Judea” and hoped that the saints there would accept his service and thus allow him to visit Rome (15.30-32).
 - 3. There was also the matter of him being misrepresented by some (see 3.8b; also Acts 28.20-21).
- C. Above all, Paul wanted them to understand and recall the basics of the gospel.
 - 1. He was confident about their general understanding (15.14), but wanted to give them a “reminder” (15.15) of things they already knew.²
 - 2. A combination of the thoughts in 1.2-4, 14-16 shows what Paul considered to be vital in the presentation of the gospel.
 - 3. So, in Romans he presents a sustained explanation of the gospel that shows who he is and what he was about. Therein we find the lessons for us.

III. What Matters Most.

- A. The gospel must be our heart and motivation.
 - 1. That Paul, given the opportunity to introduce himself and what he was about, composed this theological letter speaks volumes about what matters.
 - 2. He wanted all to know and understand the incredible news that God had brought salvation to all (1.14-16).
 - 3. He believed it important to develop a deeper understanding of the gospel as the longstanding plan of God to bring salvation (1.2-4).
 - 4. Appreciate what it means that Paul didn’t start with or limit himself to chapters 12-16, but developed those practical points only in light of the elaborated explanation in chapters 1-11.
- B. The gospel is supposed to change us.
 - 1. If we need to reflect on the significance of the depth of explanation in chapters 1-11 for the practicality of 12-16, we also need to consider the significance of the inclusion of those practical things as part of presenting the gospel.

² Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 301.

2. It is easy to think that once we've believed in the basic story of Jesus and mastered the basics of "good Christian living," we can go on with our lives without being unsettled.
3. Romans 12-16 won't allow that.
 - a) The word that governs the whole section is "transformed" (μεταμορφόω, *metamorphoō*) – change (12.2).
 - b) As Paul shows in chapters 1-3, the reason we need the gospel is sin, rooted in lives devoted to something other than the way God planned for us.
 - c) The gospel is supposed to get into our lives, probe us, disturb us, open us up more completely to the ways of God and leave us different from what we were before.
 - d) It is also supposed to keep making us different as long as we live.

Conclusion

1. In a sermon on the ethics section of the Sermon on the Mount, Lee Camp observed that often, once we understand we are saved by grace, we think Christianity is easy.³
2. I fear he's right – and that when we do that, we rob ourselves of the greatest blessings of our faith. The aim of the gospel is to change us from what we were – and sometimes are – into what God created us to be.
3. Romans compels us to ask whether we are willing to submit to the wonderful transformation he seeks to bring about in our lives.

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³ Lee Camp, "Law, Grace and Kingdom Ethics," presented at Lipscomb University, Nashville, TN, July 1, 2013.