

EDITED BY DOUGLAS E. BROWN & KEN RATHBUN

ABOUNDING GRACE

THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS
ON PAUL AND ROMANS

IN HONOR OF MYRON J. HOUGHTON



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Abounding Grace: Theological Essays on Paul and Romans in honor of Myron J. Houghton
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Douglas E. Brown
Ken Rathbun
March 2026

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ABBREVIATIONS

BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (2nd Edition)</i>
BDAG	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (3rd Edition)</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BKC	<i>The Bible Knowledge Commentary</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CTR	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
DBSJ	<i>Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal</i>
DPL	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i>
EBC	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
ExAud	<i>Ex Auditu</i>
GTJ	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IVPNTCS	The IVP New Testament Commentary Series
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JGES	<i>Journal of Grace Evangelical Society</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSNTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplemental Series</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
MBSS	Message of Biblical Spirituality Series
MNTC	The Moffatt New Testament Commentary
MSJ	<i>The Master's Seminary Journal</i>
NAC	The New American Commentary
NCB	The New Century Bible Commentary
Neot	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NIB	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	<i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
NIDNTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>

<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
<i>NIGTC</i>	<i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NPNF^I</i>	<i>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Series 1</i>
<i>PNTC</i>	<i>The Pillar New Testament Commentary</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SE</i>	<i>Studia Evangelica</i>
<i>Sidic</i>	<i>Journal of the Service internationale de documentation judeo-chrétienne</i>
<i>SNTSMS</i>	<i>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</i>
<i>StudBT</i>	<i>Studia biblica et theologica</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TNTC</i>	<i>Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i>
<i>TU</i>	<i>Texte und Untersuchungen</i>
<i>VR</i>	<i>Vox Reformata</i>
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>ZECNT</i>	<i>Zondervan Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament</i>

PREFACE

This collection of essays was written in honor of Dr. Myron J. Houghton on the occasion of his retirement from Faith Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Myron devoted his life to the study of the Bible and especially systematic theology. He had an incredible ability to digest complex theological issues and explain them in clear, accessible ways. As a voracious reader and life-long student, he endeavored to understand and explain theologians and their theological systems on their own terms. One of his legacies to his students and colleagues was a desire never to create straw man arguments. He always sought to understand and critique scholars in context and demanded the same of his students.

For nearly fifty years, Dr. Myron taught and trained thousands of men and women at Denver Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary as well as Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary. All the contributors to this volume knew and loved Dr. Myron. Most of us were his students. Some of us also had the privilege of being his colleagues.

Why another collection of essays on Romans? Romans had a special place in Dr. Myron's theology and teaching. We all benefited from his understanding and passion for Romans. Romans was one of his signature courses that he taught annually. We often joked that Dr. Myron taught Romans in every one of his courses since it always seeped out into his teaching in some way, shape, or form. We are thankful to God for how Dr. Myron introduced us to the argument and theology of Romans.

Studying Romans is a journey, not a destination. We hope that these essays on Paul and Romans will assist students, pastors, laypeople, and even scholars in their journey to better grasp "the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom 11:33). We have named the book *Abounding Grace* based on Romans 5:20: "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." We believe this title is fitting not only to represent the scope for these essays but also to represent Dr. Myron's life and ministry.

Editors

Douglas E. Brown and Ken Rathbun

Chapter 1

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF DR. MYRON J. HOUGHTON¹

Lance Augsburg



No one says “Schenectady” quite like someone who spent their formative years in that part of New York. I still love to hear it roll off the tongue of my theology professor, and friend, Dr. Myron J. Houghton. Not only does Schenectady, New York, have a pleasant ring—it also has a significant history. While you may not find it in most history books, it is the place that God reached into the Houghton family with His saving grace. Twin brothers Myron and George, and their sister Ginger, came to saving faith in Christ through the neighborhood witness of a backyard Bible club.

It was there in Schenectady, in a nearby church, that God began to form young Myron’s thoughts about God and His Word—what Dr. Houghton would later call “my theology” in the opening section of his systematic theology notes. However, as his students know, the characteristics of his theology were forged by more than just a backyard Bible club. Though one could credit his 11 different degrees from 10 different institutions for his preeminent understanding of theology, it was truly his skillful exegesis of Scripture that defined his theology and pedagogy.

During his days at Moody Bible Institute, Myron developed a passion for ministry and theology. An avid reader and lover of books, education was a natural fit for him. So, he studied, and learned, and read. Rinse and repeat. It is important to note, however, that in all his studies, he did not lose sight of the ministry. What good were books and learning without the opportunity to minister the Word to people in desperate need of a right understanding of Scripture, and a right relationship with God? It was during his graduate studies at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Minneapolis, in May of 1966, that Faith Baptist Church of St. Paul ordained Myron J. Houghton for the gospel ministry. From that point on, the roads would never be the same. As he liked to tell his nervous passengers with that classic grin on his face, “They don’t call me ‘Rev.’ for nothing.”

1. Lance Augsburg, “The Life & Legacy of Myron J. Houghton,” *Faith Pulpit*, Faith Baptist Theological Seminary, April 29, 2019. Used by permission.

It wasn't until 1971—the same year he graduated with his first doctorate from Dallas Theological Seminary (and, notably, an M.L.A., from Southern Methodist University)—that Dr. Houghton began to fill the seat on the “other side” of the classroom. That year he joined the faculty of Denver Baptist Bible College. It certainly wasn't the end of his days as a student, but it was the beginning of a monumental career as professor. Coincidentally that year also marked Dr. Houghton's introduction to the Augsburger family—a connection for which I am deeply grateful. “Dr. A.” was serving as President of DBBC at that time, and his son Bernie was also on the faculty there. It just so happened that Myron and Bernie were both bachelors and struck up a vibrant friendship, which has continued to the present day.

For the next five decades Dr. Myron Houghton would continue to teach and learn. Five decades. In 1983, just before DBBC merged with Faith Baptist Bible College, Dr. Myron joined the FBBC faculty. Though he has transitioned to teaching primarily in the seminary (FBTS), Dr. Myron continues to teach at FBBC&TS in anticipation of his retirement at the end of this 2018–2019 school year. In his years of teaching, after 1971, he would earn another four degrees, including a Th.D. and an honorary doctorate. As his students liked to joke, it seemed he knew more about Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, and Orthodox theology (not to mention Baptist theology) than any of us knew about our own Baptist theology.

A pedigree that robust makes an individual exceptionally qualified to teach. But it wasn't just the pedigree that made Dr. Myron a distinguished, often favorite, professor. For some, it was his eccentricities: the fact that, at any given moment, he might pull a foam dart gun out of the drawer and fire it at drowsy students, or that he kept books in his oven, or that when they called his home with theology questions they found they reached either the “Ayatollah of Ankeny” or “Houghton's mortuary: you stab ‘em, we slab ‘em.” For others it was his quick wit. Few students dared challenge his pun-prowess. He has a response for just about everything.

It was my own love for puns that precipitated our connection. During my senior year of high school our youth group visited Faith Baptist Bible College. Somehow, we connected with Dr. Houghton at the local Village Inn. True to form, he was showing us a trick with a dollar bill that would turn George Washington's profile into a mushroom. I responded that it appeared that President Washington must have been a pretty fun guy (fungi). Dr. Myron exclaimed his classic laugh, and we struck up a friendship. A few months later, during my freshman year at FBBC, he would invite me out for dinner—a weekly appointment that would continue for the next 16 years. In fact, I'll leave shortly to meet him for dinner tonight. I share that, not so that you will sympathize with me over the fact that I have eaten so many meals at Village Inn, but rather so that you might sense his propensity for relationships.

As a single man, he was accustomed to eating out. As a relational professor, he was intentional about inviting students to join him. Hundreds of students through the years can attest to his hospitality and care in this way. His goal? Good Christian fellowship. It was possible that theology would come up, but usually only if the student asked about it. Instead, Myron preferred to chat about

life, ministry, and of course, any related puns. Through the years, Dr. Myron enjoyed regular meals with students, colleagues, the local Catholic priest, a Greek Orthodox friend, and countless others. He enjoyed hearing what God was doing in his friends' lives and how he might pray for or help in such endeavors.

In my own assessment, it is that trait that makes him such a wonderful professor. He is, in his very core (and by God's grace) a giver. He sees the needs of others, he cares, and he works to meet those needs. In the classroom, through the years, students can attest to the clarity and skill with which he would walk through a text of Scripture. His explanations were textual, clear, accurate, and practical. Countless times I came away from his class lectures or sermons thinking, "That text is amazing—I get it!" There may be no greater aim, nor feat, for a theology professor.

While reading and question sets certainly aided in the students' broader theological fluency (and added to the late nights), they were not the primary formative tool of Dr. Myron's classroom. The clear explanation of the Word formed the students' theology. Thus, a legacy of five decades of students have been shaped in their theology, not just by Dr. Myron J. Houghton, but by a right understanding of Scripture. He taught us how to read, study, think, and conclude. He forever shaped my understanding of law, gospel, and grace. The clear distinction between God's purpose for the law and my standing (and resultant demands) under grace affects my Bible study and preaching on a weekly, even daily basis. It is hard—maybe impossible—to grasp the number of God's servants ministering today that have been impacted by the teaching ministry of Dr. Myron.

When considering his legacy, it may be that many will remember the things he enjoyed. From maple-glazed old-fashioned donuts and cashews, to Sherlock Holmes and Harry Potter, he enjoyed many things. Many will remember his generosity. Only he, and the Lord, truly know how many student mission trips, financial needs, building projects, crisis aid, and outstanding debt repayment he funded. He loves to give. But I think most will conclude that his legacy consists of his love for the Lord, his love for His Word, and his love for students of the Word. His legacy is seen in the hundreds, even thousands, of God's servants who love the Lord, love His Word, and study His Word accurately, all the more for the time they spent with Dr. Myron J. Houghton.

There's so much more I could say, but that's all for now—I'm excited to get dinner with my friend.

DR. MYRON HOUGHTON: REGULAR BAPTIST THEOLOGIAN AND EDUCATOR¹

Don Anderson



Dr. Myron Houghton, longtime theology professor at Denver Baptist Bible College and Seminary and Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, has retired after almost 50 years of teaching.

“Dr. Myron” did not simply teach theology; he was a true theologian in the fullest sense of that word. And as a theologian, he has had a significant impact on the theological convictions of Regular Baptist pastors and missionaries and on the Regular Baptist movement as a whole.

His Academic Training

Myron’s academic credentials are quite impressive.

- Diploma, Moody Bible Institute
- BA, Pillsbury College
- Central Baptist Theological Seminary
- BD, Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary
- Certificate, St. Stephen’s Course of Studies in Orthodox Theology
- ThM, Grace Theological Seminary
- MLA, Southern Methodist University
- MA, St. Thomas Theological Seminary
- PhD, Dallas Theological Seminary
- ThD, Concordia Seminary
- DHL, Central Baptist Theological Seminary

1. Don Anderson, “Dr. Myron Houghton: Regular Baptist Theologian and Educator,” *The Baptist Bulletin Magazine*, July 9, 2019. <https://baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/dr-myron-houghton-regular-baptist-theologian-and-educator/>. Used by permission.

If you are counting, that's three masters' degrees, two earned doctorates, and one honorary doctorate. (And for the record, the old BD [bachelor of divinity] degree has been replaced today by the MDiv degree. So the BD degree is almost like another master's degree.)

Did you also notice some of the more unusual institutions for a fundamental Baptist to attend? St. Stephen's Course of Studies in Orthodox Theology. St. Thomas Theological Seminary. Concordia Seminary. Did Dr. Myron waver in his beliefs and look around for a place to land? No, not at all. He pursued degrees from schools of other theological persuasions so he could understand those beliefs.

His Teaching

Dr. Myron began his teaching career at Denver Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in 1971 and served there until 1983. There he taught mainly theology courses. In 1983 he moved to Faith Baptist Bible College to teach, first in the graduate program and then in the seminary when it opened in 1986. In the seminary he was chair of the Theological Studies Department and director of the MA in Theological Studies program until his retirement this year.

As you can tell by now, Dr. Myron was a man immersed in the study and teaching of theology. A list of the courses he taught at Faith shows his passion.

- Systematic Theology I, II, III, IV
- Theology Seminar
- Law and Grace
- Romans
- Baptist Theology
- Dispensational Theology
- Wesleyan Theology
- Roman Catholic Theology
- Lutheran Theology
- Reformed Theology
- Orthodox Theology
- Pentecostal Theology

From time to time, Dr. Myron also taught advanced courses for the 10 major theology subjects (e.g., Advanced Bibliology, Advanced Christology, Advanced Eschatology). You can see his deep interest in theology and helping his students understand the truths of the Scriptures.

As you might guess, along with Dr. Myron's passion for theology has come a passion for books. Probably no one knows how many thousands of books he has, but space has frequently been an issue. Dr. Myron never married (and may never have spent a lot of time in the kitchen), so rumor has it that when he lived in an apartment on the Faith campus, he used the oven to store some of his books.

His Writings

In addition to his nearly 50 years of classroom teaching, Dr. Myron has helped people understand theology through his writings. Check out the *Faith Pulpit* articles at faith.edu for a list of his 33 articles. (In fact, he has written more *Faith Pulpit* articles than any other author.) You will see such articles as “The Active Obedience of Christ,” “The Importance of Justification,” “Distinguishing Law, Gospel, and Grace,” and “Reasons for Holding a Non-Charismatic Position.”

Perhaps Dr. Myron’s magnum opus is *Law and Grace*, published by Regular Baptist Books in 2011. This study of the book of Romans presents a dispensational framework for distinguishing the concepts of law and grace. Few, if any, books today set forth such a clear view of these important theological issues.

Dr. Myron also has updated and expanded RBP’s *Charismatic Confusion*, written by the late Dr. Ernest Pickering. (Fittingly, Dr. Pickering was Dr. Myron’s theology professor at Central Baptist Theological Seminary.) Dr. Myron’s additions to the book update the charismatic movement and explain more recent developments. He evidences in his updated material reasons to believe in the temporary nature of some spiritual gifts.

His Position

Dr. Myron’s earliest church connections were with a liberal Protestant church in his hometown of Schenectady, New York. Through the later influence of Dr. Bryce B. Augsburg, then pastor of Marquette Manor Baptist Church in Chicago, Dr. Myron became a Baptist with separatist convictions. He spent some time in separatist Conservative Baptist Association churches, but he saw the danger of allowing churches in that group to hold dual affiliation.

In keeping with his convictions, Dr. Myron looked for a seminary that held to Baptist and separatist convictions, and in 1966 he enrolled at Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary. While there he joined his first Regular Baptist church, Northland Baptist Church in Grand Rapids. Over the years he increasingly embraced the Regular Baptist position and held membership in GARBC churches in Dallas, Denver, and now Ankeny, Iowa.

In his May 2005 *Baptist Bulletin* article “Why I Am a Regular Baptist,” Dr. Myron explained why he identifies with the Regular Baptist movement. As you might expect, he does so because of the GARBC’s theological and separatist positions. He wrote, “I was not brought up in a Bible-believing home or church, but by God’s grace I heard the gospel and trusted Christ as my Savior. Through studying in various schools and being affiliated with Baptist associations, my convictions developed; and as a Regular Baptist, I proudly affirm the truths found in the Articles of Faith and Purpose Statement of the GARBC constitution.” In that article he specifically identified his appreciation for the GARBC doctrinal statements on baptism by single immersion, the universal church, the pretribulation Rapture, and the cessation of sign gifts.

His Influence

Through nearly 50 years of teaching theology from a separatist, Baptist position, through his close affiliation with the Regular Baptist movement, and through his careful writings, Dr. Myron has influenced and shaped the theological convictions of hundreds of Regular Baptist leaders. In fact, Dr. Myron has arguably trained more Regular Baptist pastors and missionaries than any other living theologian. For this lifetime of effective service, Regular Baptists owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Myron Houghton.

THE UNFINISHED TASK OF MYRON HOUGHTON¹

Kevin Mungons



Dr. Myron Houghton started every semester the same way, with the same simple words about his theological method: “An authentic evangelical theology will examine every doctrine in light of the gospel.” Then he would look up, pause, and add, “This has yet to be done,” an ongoing challenge that summarized his life journey.

Myron Houghton died on July 14, 2020, in Ankeny, Iowa, due to complications from COVID-19. He was 78.

He was born on July 26, 1941, in Schenectady, New York, followed by an unannounced blessing 27 minutes later: a twin brother, George. Their lives would be intertwined in ministry until the very end, when both contracted the coronavirus and were quarantined in separate rooms of the same care facility.

An Education or a Car?

When both boys were 9, they came to Christ through the influence of a Vacation Bible School and a home Bible club. Later, when Myron earned his driver’s license, his father promised he would pay for either a new car or Myron’s education. Years later Myron still laughed about the deal. He eventually earned 11 degrees and certificates, including two doctorates, from 10 institutions. In retrospect, the car would have been much cheaper!

He enrolled at Moody Bible Institute and joined Marquette Baptist Church on Chicago’s South Side. Pastor Bryce Augsburg invited the young man for Sunday dinner and immediately noted his leadership potential. Weekly dinners became informal teaching sessions on Baptist theology—and taught Houghton the mentoring potential of a shared meal. The experience ignited a 60-year relationship with the Augsburg family. Near the end of his life, Myron was cared for by Augsburg’s grandson Lance, pastor of Maranatha Baptist Church in Grimes, Iowa.

1. Kevin Mungons, “The Unfinished Task of Myron Houghton,” *The Baptist Bulletin Magazine*, July 17, 2020. <https://baptistbulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/the-unfinished-task-of-myron-houghton/>. Used by permission.

After graduating from Moody in 1962, Myron finished his undergraduate degree at Pillsbury College (BA, 1964), then joined George at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Minneapolis. Both attended Faith Baptist Church of St. Paul, leading to their unique double ordination service on May 12, 1966.

Law and Grace: The Fork in the Road

The Houghtons came of age during a time when the theological landscape was rapidly shifting. As a student in 1962, Myron had joined the Evangelical Theological Society. He remained active in the group throughout his career, and at his passing he was one of the longest-tenured members of ETS. When discussing his developing theological method, he described his theology as *evangelical*, meaning gospel-centered, and saw the ultimate goal of all Scripture as making one wise unto salvation. But Myron also described his theology as *churchly*. He freely acknowledged that all groups, including Baptists, arranged their doctrines in various levels of importance. As a fundamentalist, Myron avoided formal cooperation with people and groups who denied fundamental doctrines such as inerrancy. But on an informal level, he would share coffee or lunch with just about anyone.

He continued his studies at Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary (BD, 1967) and Grace Theological Seminary (ThM, 1968), then rejoined his brother at Dallas Theological Seminary, where both earned doctoral degrees. Their complementary research interests, George in church history and Myron in systematic theology, would position the twins to make a unique impact. George joined the Dallas faculty, and Myron was hired at Denver Baptist Bible College, where his mentor Bryce Augsburger had become president.

The Denver years ignited a formative period of study in comparative theological systems. While studying in Dallas, Myron had also earned a master's degree from Southern Methodist University (1971); now he would add a master's degree in Catholic theology from St. Thomas Theological Seminary (1977). He developed a seminary course on Law and Grace, a subject he called the "fork in the road," the point at which various theological systems diverged into their distinctive beliefs. Not content merely to teach his personal theological system, he searched for ways to help students develop their own beliefs.

His answer hinged on a rigorous approach to theological method, the starting point of each course he taught, whatever the subject. But his answer also hinged on a technique he learned from Bryce Augsburger: the teaching power of a shared meal. To his students, Myron's ministry around the lunch table was just as important as his lectures.

In 1983 Myron was hired at Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa, where his brother had become dean of education. Three years later the college began a seminary, and Myron became chair of systematic theology. With both twins teaching at the same institution, students naturally dubbed them Dr. Myron and Dr. George.

Their personal lives took different paths. George met and married his wife, Karen, but Myron was becoming increasingly comfortable with his own singleness. On his left hand he began wearing a silver ring inset with an interlocking Trinity symbol, a reminder of his single-minded calling as a theology teacher. He continued

studying theological systems, earning a ThD in Lutheran theology from Concordia Seminary of St. Louis (1986) and a graduate certificate from St. Stephen's Course of Studies in Orthodox Theology (1995).

As he continued teaching, Myron saw more theology students who followed trends and personalities with "a tendency to cherry-pick various parts of a theological system." He believed the problem stemmed from an incomplete theological method, leading to inconsistent, even incompatible ideas. His publication of *Law and Grace* (Regular Baptist Press, 2011) not only captured the teaching of his signature seminary course; it also helped students understand how doctrinal ideas could connect in a consistent pattern of belief.

Myron's Legacy: Theologically Equipped Students

In time, Myron took on the role of elder statesman, a trusted advisor who was frequently consulted on theological questions. "He was a theologian without peer," says Kevin Bauder, chair of systematic theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

The semesters flew by quickly. Time flies like an arrow—"and fruit flies like a banana," Houghton would have added, ever the lover of bad puns. His lectures were spiked with humorous quips that live on as penciled additions to his class notes. No topic was immune. Death and cremation? "My last chance for a hot body," he would say, before beginning a serious discussion on the end of life.

In the spring of 2019 he began his final semester with his usual challenge: to examine every doctrine in light of the gospel. His teaching career would soon draw to a close, but that unfinished task would be carried on by his students.

"Other theologians wrote more," says Kevin Bauder. "Other theologians cultivated a coterie of students who follow them verbatim and copy their conclusions. But Myron Houghton wasn't interested in students copying his conclusions—he wanted to equip them theologically. So there aren't a lot of 'Little Myrons' running around copying his exact positions, but there's a whole generation of pastors who are better equipped to think through the difficult issues that are approaching."

The GARBC's national representative, Mike Hess, agrees: "The GARBC will always be indebted to Dr. Myron Houghton. For several decades, pastors and Christian leaders who were trained and mentored under Dr. Houghton have faithfully served in GARBC churches, passing on the solid theological training they received. Dr. Houghton was a true Christian statesman and gentleman. He also exemplified what it meant to be a distinguished theologian who had a heart to train God's servants for several generations (2 Tim. 2:2). His brilliant mind, quick wit, and heart for the Lord and His church will be long remembered."

Reflecting Christ's Glory

Houghton's retirement turned out to be short.

"The end came sooner than we thought," Lance Augsburger says. "I would have loved another meal together, more time to talk theology, and ask him about writing another book—but we prayed, 'Lord, You do what is best.' All of this was the Lord's timing."

Both brothers had contracted COVID-19 and were quarantined in the same care facility, unable to see each other. As their 79th birthday approached, Myron was growing weaker. Karen Houghton finally intervened. “I talked to the care center and asked, ‘Can’t you do something so George can see Myron one more time?’”

George, who was doing better than Myron, was granted an exception and allowed a brief visit, which he later described in a phone interview from the care facility.

“Finally I got to talk to Myron last Friday after supper. I hadn’t been able to see him for some time, but they took me down to his room and gave us some time together.”

By that point Myron did not look well, and George understood the end was near. So what do you say to the twin brother you will never see again—at least here on earth?

“You say whatever the Lord brings to mind,” George explains. “Most of all, you remember the comforting words of Scripture.”

He sat next to the bed and talked to Myron while holding his hand. “By that time he was not very alert, but they allowed me to pray with him and assure him of the presence of the Lord.”

A final hug, then a final word of encouragement: “The Lord has promised He will never leave us or forsake us.”

Which brings us to the matter of “last words.” What does a theologian say at the end of his life’s journey—or in this case, when the end comes sooner than expected?

Myron Houghton left his benediction at the end of *Law and Grace*:

This is how our study of Law and Grace ends—a look to the future, and a promise of hope. Our life on earth may seem difficult, but in view of eternity, our earthly experiences are only a light and momentary affliction. So we invest our remaining time here on earth in studying God’s Word more faithfully. As we gain a better understanding of what Christ has done for us, we will respond with a new zeal for devout and holy living.

The more we respond to God’s work in our lives, the more we will be able to reflect Christ’s glory in eternity. But this will not become a cause of eternal pride for any of us. People will not wander around Heaven, noticing a person’s reflected glory as if to say, “My, how faithful this one must have been.”

No, we will see each other and say, “What a wonderful Lord Jesus Christ whose brightness is being reflected!”

*The Bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth
But on His pierced hand:
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land.*

GOODBYE, UNCLE MYRON¹

Kevin Bauder



Edmund Burke, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, spoke of the “unbought grace of life.” What he meant was that we receive from our forebears a patrimony of ideas, perspectives, habits, attitudes, and sensibilities that together make life more humane. We pay nothing for this patrimony: it is given to us freely. Our duty, then, is to preserve it as best we can and to hand it along to those who come after us.

As we grow older, we ought to grow increasingly aware of how indebted we are to people whom we shall never be able to repay. Part of piety (in the proper sense of the term) involves recognizing these individuals and crediting them for the “unbought grace” with which they have gifted us, sometimes at significant cost to themselves. We cannot pay our debt, but we can and should acknowledge to whom it is owed.

One of the individuals to whom I owe much is Myron Houghton. The first time I saw Myron, I was in college, and he was on our college’s chapel platform, pretending to be his twin brother, George. He introduced George as “my brother, Doctor Houghton.” George then stepped forward and introduced Myron as “my brother, Doctor Houghton.” Finally, Myron explained that they were “womb mates.”

A couple of years later I became Myron’s student at Denver Baptist Theological Seminary, where he taught systematic theology. The first day of class he introduced his students to “six characteristics of my theology,” a summary of his theological method. He repeated these six characteristics in every theology course that he taught. He explained that his theology was exegetical (centered upon the right handling of Scripture), evangelical (gospel-centered), fundamentalist (church-centered), devotional, philosophical, and historical. Years later I took a doctoral course on theological method and discovered that Myron’s “six characteristics” required almost no revision. They still summarize my theological method.

Myron was a learned man. He had a diploma from Moody Bible Institute, a bachelor’s degree from Pillsbury Baptist Bible College, an MDiv from

1. Kevin Bauder, “Goodbye, Uncle Myron,” *In the Nick of Time*, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, July 17, 2020, <https://centralseminary.edu/?s=goodbye+uncle+myron>. Used by permission.

Grand Rapids Baptist Theological Seminary, a ThM from Grace Theological Seminary, a PhD from Dallas Theological Seminary, an MLA from Southern Methodist University, an MA from Saint Thomas Seminary in Denver, and a ThD from Concordia Seminary in St Louis. He completed a certificate program (equivalent to the MDiv) for Saint Stephen's Course of Study in Orthodox Theology. He also studied at Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis and Covenant Seminary in St. Louis where (as one alumnus told me) he was remembered as something of a legend. Myron collected diplomas like some people collect stamps.

For Myron, however, the attraction did not lie in the degrees themselves. Rather, he was fascinated with systems of thought, especially theological systems. He wanted to be prepared to respond to them, and he was convinced that a good response had to be based on an accurate understanding. He pursued this diversity of educational experience so that he could converse intelligently with a wide array of theologians. As a professor Myron taught us that we did not understand an opponent until we could describe his position so well that he recognizes himself in it.

He carried this emphasis on listening and understanding into his teaching. For example, though he seldom used the term, Myron was a moderate (4.5 point) Calvinist, but he was not content merely to expose his students to Calvinism. When I took his soteriology course, he required every student to read an entire ThM thesis arguing for an Arminian understanding of divine election and human freedom. He wanted us to be informed, and above all, he wanted to be fair.

Myron continued this emphasis in his book on *Law and Grace*. In his argument, Myron followed Edward Fisher (*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*) in a particular Reformed view of the relationship between law, gospel, and grace. To ensure that other views receive fair treatment, however, Myron quoted their exponents at length—sometimes for pages at a time. If these quotations slow down his argument, they also clarify the issues.

Myron Houghton was probably the most widely respected theologian to represent contemporary fundamentalism in the marketplace of ideas. Certainly, he was the only one to gain much of a hearing outside fundamentalism itself. This recognition was not so much the product of his writing as of the conversations in which he engaged. Through meaningful discussion, he helped many to clarify their thinking, and he also drew many to a fuller understanding of the truth.

Teaching at Denver Baptist Bible College and Seminary, then at Faith Baptist Bible College and Seminary, Myron Houghton communicated a sound system of theology. More importantly, he taught his students to think theologically, to love ideas, and to love conversation about those ideas. He supplemented his teaching with good humor and a personal interest in his students, whom he often hosted at some local restaurant.

With declining health, Myron retired from teaching only a year ago. Last week he tested positive for COVID-19. This week he passed into heaven. His departure is a stunning loss for the Church Militant.

In and out of the classroom, Myron was a man of conviction who understood and advocated the ideals that distinguish fundamentalists from other evangelicals. He also exhibited the ability to understand and converse charitably with theological

opponents while never surrendering his commitment to the truth. This combination, so rare among fundamentalists, may be his most important legacy.

The apostle Paul notes that we do not have “many fathers” in Jesus Christ. Myron, however, was certainly a well-loved theological uncle. He was the thinker who first made me put shape to my theology. I am not alone in my admiration for him as a scholar and a man of God. Many of us owe Myron a debt that we shall never be able to repay, a debt for the “unbought grace of life.”

Chapter 2

THE OCCASION AND PURPOSES OF ROMANS

Douglas E. Brown



A few months ago, someone in my church asked me a tough question: “If you were stranded on an island and could only take three books of the Bible, which three would you take?” I thought to myself, “What an impossible choice!” But after reflecting on it for a while, I knew that one of them would have to be Romans. The Apostle Paul’s epistle to the Romans holds one of the greatest positions in the canon of Scripture throughout church history.¹ Numerous Christian leaders have credited their conversion to reading Romans, including Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Wesley. Simply put, Romans is “the fullest, plainest and grandest statement of the gospel in the New Testament.”² John Calvin wrote of Romans, “When any one gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.”³

Though Christians have studied and examined Romans for nearly 2,000 years, there is no consensus as to why Paul wrote this letter. For most of church history, theologians were content to see Romans as a summary of Paul’s teaching and doctrine. This kind of reading minimizes Romans as an occasional letter and approaches it rather as a theological treatise or tractate with an epistolary frame.⁴ Since the rise of historical critical approaches to the New Testament, however,

1. Benjamin L. Merkle, “Is Romans the Greatest Letter Ever Written?” *SBJT* 11/3 (2007): 18–32.

2. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 19.

3. John Calvin and John Owen, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), xxix.

4. See Richard Longenecker’s explanation and proponents of this long-held view in *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 94–97. Many cite Philip Melanchthon’s statement that Romans was a “compendium of Christian doctrine” (in *Loci communes*, 1521); but see Robert Plummer, who argues that Melanchthon’s understanding of Romans is more nuanced (“Melanchthon as Interpreter of the New Testament,” *WTJ* 62 [2002]: 257–265).

scholars have insisted on viewing Romans as an occasional letter and worked to reconstruct its historical setting. The scholarly proposals are numerous and complex.⁵ Alexander Wedderburn summarizes, “Why Paul wrote Romans is still something of an enigma. There is as yet no consensus as to why Paul should write precisely this letter with these contents to this church at this moment in his, and its, history.”⁶ Historical reconstructions tend to focus on one of two viewpoints for why Paul wrote Romans. The first viewpoint focuses on Paul and his own ministry as he anticipates his trip to Jerusalem and future mission towards Spain. The second viewpoint focuses on the problems and circumstances among the Christians in Rome. Longenecker labels these options as either *missional* or *pastoral*.⁷ There is a consensus among scholars that Paul wrote Romans for multiple reasons. Donfried suggests that it is unwise to try to argue for a single purpose.⁸

The burden of this essay is to explore the occasion and purposes of Romans. I will not attempt to review the plethora of proposals but instead work through Romans to argue for three basic purposes for why Paul wrote the letter. Ultimately, the content of the letter must be understood along with its occasion to provide convincing evidence of Paul’s purposes.⁹ Here are the three purposes for Romans that I am proposing.¹⁰ First, Paul wrote to explain and defend his Gospel to the Roman church. Second, Paul wrote Romans to unify the Gentile and Jewish factions within the church at Rome. Third, Paul wrote Romans to invite the Roman Christians to join with his mission to reach the western Mediterranean region as far as Spain. Ultimately, I will argue that these three purposes are interdependent to bring all peoples into “the obedience of faith” for the glory of God (Rom 1:5; 16:26–27).¹¹

The Background and Occasion of Romans

Understanding the background and occasion for Romans is crucial in piecing together Paul’s reasons for writing. We will first consider Paul and his circumstances when he wrote Romans. Then we will consider the circumstances of the Christians at Rome.

5. See R. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 92–166 for an overview of the proposals. See also Karl P. Donfried, ed. *The Romans Debate*. Revised and Expanded (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991).

6. Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 1991), 1.

7. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 92. So also Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2nd Ed. NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 15.

8. Donfried, *The Romans Debate*, lxx.

9. Moo, *Romans*, 15.

10. See the helpful article by Will N. Timmins, “Why Paul Wrote Romans: Putting the Pieces Together,” *Themelios* 43.3 (2018): 387–404.

11. All Scripture quotations are from the ESV, unless noted otherwise.

Paul and His Circumstances

Both conservative and critical scholars agree that Paul is the author of Romans (Rom 1:1). He dictated the letter to Tertius, who recorded it as his amanuensis (16:22). Most scholars believe that Paul composed Romans between A.D. 55–58 during his three-month winter stay at Corinth (Acts 20:1–3; 1 Cor 16:5–6).¹² He lodged at Gaius's house (Rom 16:23; cf. 1 Cor 1:14). Paul most likely commissioned Phoebe, who supported Paul and resided near Corinth at the port town of Cenchrea, to deliver the letter to Rome (Rom 16:1–2).

This was a transitional period in Paul's ministry. He had just completed his third missionary journey (Acts 19) and now considered the eastern Mediterranean regions from Jerusalem to Illyricum (the northwestern Balkan peninsula) as evangelized (Rom 15:19). When he wrote Romans, he had set his eyes on reaching the western Mediterranean regions with the gospel as far as Spain (Rom 15:24, 28). But before he could pursue this new mission field, Paul planned to take the love gift collected by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem (Rom 15:25–28). He then planned to visit Rome for the first time on his way west (Rom 15:24, 28, 32; cf. 1:8–13).

The Church at Rome

The origins of the church in Rome are a bit of a mystery. Although some ancient sources credit the founding of the Roman church to Peter,¹³ it is more likely that the church started as a result of Jewish converts bringing the gospel to Rome. Perhaps they were pilgrims from Pentecost. Luke stated in Acts 2 that "visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes" were present (Acts 2:10–11); no doubt some believed and returned to Rome as soon as the early to mid-30s A.D.¹⁴ Or, perhaps Jews seeking business opportunities in Rome introduced the gospel to the Jewish community, such as Aquila and Priscilla, who were originally from Pontus (Acts 18:2). Regardless of how the gospel was introduced to the Romans, one thing is clear: the church at Rome started among the Jews and was predominately Jewish for several years. F. F. Bruce states, "[I]n its earliest stages Roman Christianity was thoroughly Jewish, and long after the apostolic age

12. A.D. 57 is the most likely date for Romans.

13. E.g., Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.14 (ca. A.D. 303); *The Liberian Catalogue* (A.D. 354) lists Peter as the first bishop of Rome serving for twenty-five years.

14. "Ambrosiaster," the anonymous Latin commentator on Romans affirmed the Jewish origins of Christianity (ca. A.D. 375). He stated, "It is clear that in the times of the apostles there were Jews living in Rome because they lived in the Roman Empire. Those of them who believed in Christ passed this belief on to the Romans, so that they too might keep the law by confessing Christ. . . . [Paul] praised their faith, particularly as they had not seen any signs of [miraculous] powers, nor had they received their faith in Christ from any of the apostles" (Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1–2 Corinthians*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Gerald L. Bray, trans. Gerald L. Bray, Ancient Christian Texts [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009], 1).

it continued to exhibit certain features of its Jewish provenance.”¹⁵ Longenecker concurs: “Theologically all the Christians at Rome, whether ethnically Gentile or Jewish, looked to the Jerusalem Church for inspiration and guidance, revered the Mosaic law, and followed some of the Jewish rites and practices, but were not ‘Judaizers’ like those who troubled Gentile Christians in the Roman province of Galatia.”¹⁶ Rome contained one of the largest populations of Jews in the Roman Empire outside of Israel; some estimate that 40,000 to 60,000 Jewish slaves and freedmen lived in Rome in the first century A.D.¹⁷ Jewish Christians and perhaps also some Gentile Christians in Rome were observing the Mosaic law, as was the case throughout the Roman Empire. The relationship between Christians and the law plays a large role in the argument of Romans.

The Jewish base of the Roman church changed in A.D. 49 when Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome by edict. Luke corroborated this event in Acts 18:2 as the reason that Aquila and Priscilla left Rome for Corinth. When Paul met them in Corinth, they evidently were already Christians. The Roman historian Suetonius (ca. A.D. 125) mentioned the Edict of Claudius: “He banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus.”¹⁸ Many scholars assume that Suetonius’s reference to “Chrestus” is a misspelling or corruption of the Greek *Christos*—a near certain reference to Christ.¹⁹ In other words, the disturbance that led to the expulsion of the Jews from Rome was most likely a conflict between Jewish nonbelievers and Jewish Christians concerning Christ. Similar types of conflicts erupted throughout Paul’s missionary endeavors such as in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:44–52), Iconium (Acts 14:1–7, 19), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9) and Corinth (Acts 18:12–17).

The Edict of Claudius lapsed in A.D. 54 with the death of Claudius. Soon the Jews returned to Rome, but the dynamics of the Roman church had changed. In those five years Gentile Christians flourished and multiplied; by the time Paul wrote Romans in the mid-50s Gentiles had become the majority of the church. F. F. Bruce explains, “Paul indeed has to remind the Gentile Christians that, even if they are now in the majority, the base of the community is Jewish, and that they must not despise their Jewish brethren just because they outnumber them (Rom 11:18).”²⁰ David deSilva provides this insight: “Both sides now had to adjust:

15. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 299.

16. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 136.

17. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 69. David deSilva. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 559.

18. C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *Life of Claudius*, 25.2. Tiberius also expelled the Jews from Rome in A.D. 19 (F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 22).

19. See Moo, *Romans*, 4; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*. Second Edition. BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018), 687; Bruce, *Romans*, 22.

20. Bruce, *Romans*, 24.

the Jewish Christians to a church which was no longer under their direction, the Gentile Christians to a group of estranged sisters and brothers whose practices some found difficult to integrate and whose objections were difficult to understand or honor.”²¹ This background to the beginnings of Christianity in Rome is critical to understanding Paul’s purposes in writing Romans. Paul’s epistle to the Romans has much to say about Jews and Gentiles, both in relation to the church at Rome but also for the gospel and God’s redemptive plan.

The Purposes of Romans

Romans is unique among Paul’s New Testament epistles in that Paul wrote to a church in which he did not play a part in planting or pastoring. At the time he wrote Romans, he had not even visited the capital of the Roman Empire (Rom 1:10, 13). This is surprising because Paul identified himself as the Apostle to the Gentiles (1:5–6; 11:13) and had not yet had an opportunity to minister in the epicenter of the Gentile world. So, Romans was, in part, Paul’s introduction to the Christians in Rome. Before we consider Paul’s reasons for writing Romans, we need to examine how Paul introduced himself to the Romans in Romans 1:1–15. This section forms part of the epistolary frame for Romans and divides into two sections: Paul’s salutation (1:1–7) and Paul’s thanksgiving and prayer (1:8–15).

In Romans 1:1–7, Paul identified himself as Christ’s servant, called to be an apostle, and set apart for the Gospel (1:1). He continued that through Jesus Christ “we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among the nations (ἐν πάσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν), including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:5b–6).²² Paul announced that he has been called and commissioned by Jesus Christ as an apostle to the Gentiles and therefore has apostolic authority over the Roman church, who were also called by Christ. Paul was not simply asserting his authority over the Romans but rather was persuading. Part of Paul’s purpose for Romans was to persuade the Romans to come under Paul’s “sphere” of apostolic authority and to partner with his mission to the Gentiles even though he was not the original church planter (see 2 Cor 10:13–18). Paul’s normal practice was to preach the Gospel in unreached regions (Rom 15:20), but now he saw how a partnership with Rome could strategically and effectively complete his mission. His primary concern in Romans 1 was for the Romans’ benefit; in Romans 15 it was partnering with the Romans for the gospel.

Paul’s concern for the Romans in relation to his apostolic authority becomes clearer in the next paragraph, Romans 1:8–15. First, Paul offered thanks to God for the Roman believers because their faith was being proclaimed throughout all the other churches in the eastern Mediterranean (i.e., “the whole world”) (1:8).

21. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 601.

22. Later he clarified, “I am an apostle to the Gentiles” (11:13) and “a minister (λαειτουργὸν) of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” (15:16). See Acts 9:15; 13:44–14:7; 22:21; 26:18; Galatians 1:15–16; 2:7–8; Ephesians 3:1–12.

Second, Paul expressed an intercessory prayer for the Romans (1:9–15). His request was not typical of his prayers though. Instead of praying specific requests for the Romans, he prayed that God would provide an opportunity for him to visit them (1:9–10). Sandwiched between Paul's thanksgiving and request is this causal statement: "For God is my witness, whom I serve (λατρεύω) with my spirit in the gospel of his Son" (1:9a). Thomas Schreiner explains, "The parenthesis of verse 9, then, is crucial because it clarifies that Paul's thanksgiving and desire to visit are in his service of the gospel as an apostle."²³ The context for this request, therefore, rested in Paul's apostolic call to the Gentiles.

In verses 11–15 he stated his reasons for wanting to come to Rome: (1) to impart a spiritual gift to strengthen the Romans (1:11), (2) to be mutually encouraged in each other's faith (1:12), (3) to reap a harvest among them and the rest of the Gentiles (1:13), and (4) to preach the gospel to them (1:15). These reasons reflect not only Paul's motivations for wanting to visit Rome but also provide the foundation for Paul's purposes in writing Romans. As Longenecker notes, "All of the data in the opening and concluding sections of Romans, that is in the epistolary frame of the letter, should be read as signaling Paul's major concerns and primary purposes in writing to the Christians in Rome."²⁴

Paul's First Purpose: To Defend His Gospel

Three out of Paul's four motivations for wanting to come to Rome directly involved the gospel. First, Paul wanted "to impart some spiritual gift to strengthen [them]" (1:11). This most likely does not refer to either Paul or the Romans receiving or exercising a supernatural ability but rather refers to Paul's explanation of the gospel in Romans. Gordon Fee explains, "In its present context, and especially in light of the letter as a whole, the 'Spirit-gift' that he most likely wishes to share with them is his understanding of the gospel that in Christ Jesus God has created from among the Jews and Gentiles one people for himself, apart from the Torah."²⁵ Michael Bird concurs, ". . . since writing was largely a substitute for personal presence, Paul was attempting to do in this letter what he could not do in person. Although Paul cannot strengthen the believers in person, he seeks to strengthen them all the same by laying out the gospel in theological depth in his letter."²⁶ Therefore, the letter of Romans was Paul's apostolic gift.

23. Schreiner, *Romans*, 56.

24. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 141. This is the main thesis of L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation*. JSNTSup 55 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), who compares the opening and closing epistolary frames of some of Paul's epistles with Romans to discern his purposes for writing.

25. Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 288.

26. Michael F. Bird, *Romans*, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 39. See also Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 148.

This interpretation leads directly to Paul's next two motivations for visiting Rome: to reap a harvest (1:14) and to preach the gospel (1:15). These reasons are bound together: Paul desired to reap a harvest by preaching the gospel in Rome and beyond. This is somewhat surprising for two reasons: the gospel had already been established in Rome (1:8) and Paul typically did not build upon another's foundation (Rom 15:20). Schreiner resolves this tension in part by recognizing that preaching of the gospel refers not only to initial evangelization but also to the bringing of everyone to "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:26).²⁷ The gospel is the ground for initial salvation, sanctification, and glorification. Paul hoped that his presentation of the gospel in Romans would help the Romans grow and mature in their faith and understanding of Christianity. In an excursus about the gospel, Moo unpacks this further.²⁸ He notes that in Paul's writings the center of the gospel is Christ's death and resurrection for our sins (1 Cor 15:1–5); however, it ultimately comprises all that God accomplishes through Christ. He concludes, "Perhaps we can picture Paul's gospel as a series of concentric circles, moving from Christ's death and resurrection for us in the center, and then outward to his incarnation and preexistence on one end and his return in glory at the other, and then outward further to all the implications of Christ's lordship for society and the created world."²⁹

The heart and theme of Romans is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul presented this gospel in Romans 1:16–11:36. Paul taught and presented the gospel in the form of a diatribe to defend and argue his case. A diatribe is "a dialogical form of persuasion used by philosopher-teachers in the Hellenistic world."³⁰ Stanley Porter elaborates, "In the epistolary convention, Paul of course writes both sides of the dialogue, but he raises issues, explains ideas, raises objections, and responds to them, all as a way of leading his audience through his argument."³¹ What best explains the apologetic tone in Romans? Many believe that Paul wrote Romans in part to answer critics about his gospel and his Gentile mission.³² Longenecker comments, "With their history, theology, and experience all rooted in the matrix of Jewish Christianity, it may be assumed that the Christians in Rome had some misgivings about Paul and his Gentile mission."³³ Consider some of these explicit statements

27. Schreiner, *Romans*, 58–59. See Romans 13:11b, "For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed."

28. Moo, *Romans*, 54–58.

29. Moo, *Romans*, 58. After Paul wrote Romans and arrived in Rome under house arrest, we know that he did get the opportunity to preach the gospel in Rome according to Acts 28:17–31.

30. Stanley E. Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 308.

31. Porter, *The Apostle Paul*, 308.

32. See Stanley E. Porter, "Did Paul Have Opponents in Rome and What Were They Opposing?" *Paul and His Opponents*, ed. Stanley E. Porter. Pauline Studies, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Brill, 2005), 149–68.

33. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 149–50.

of Paul. Paul launched the main argument of the epistle with this statement: “I am not ashamed of the gospel” (Rom 1:16). Twice he called the gospel “my gospel” (Rom 2:16; 16:26). He explicitly referred to one slanderous criticism in Romans 3:7–8: “But if through my lie God’s truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.” He also warned the Romans about false teachers who could cause divisions in the church (Rom 16:17–18). In addition, Paul asked a plethora of rhetorical questions in which he was either answering known charges or anticipating them.³⁴ The critics may have been internal to the church at Rome or perhaps interlopers from outside. Either way, Paul built a case to defend his gospel and persuade the Romans. Peter Stuhlmacher explains,

The dialogue we are witnessing in Romans is a real one in which Paul is wrestling for the hearts and minds of the Christians in Rome. In doing so he has in view the criticisms and objections which have been raised against his teaching and person mainly by his Jewish Christian opponents. . . . The reason for the astonishing detail of Paul’s arguments in Romans is that he wants to allay the arguments of his opponents and the slanderous rumors before he arrives.³⁵

What kind of misgivings and criticisms did Paul’s opponents have against him and his gospel? Discerning these involves a judicial “mirror reading” of Romans. A mirror reading is when the interpreter reads Paul’s explicit statements like a mirror to reflect the implied historical situation of the letter. Longenecker explains that mirror readings only work when the text is apologetic or polemic, which appears to fit Romans well.³⁶ The majority of the criticisms against Paul revolve around his teaching about the Mosaic law and his Gentile mission. Specifically, Paul was thought to promote antinomianism (Rom 3:7–8; 6:1; 7:7) and subvert God’s faithfulness to Israel (Rom 9:1–5, 14; 11:1, 14).³⁷ In other words, Paul’s critics questioned his ethics and his teaching about Israel in God’s redemptive plan.³⁸ Were these accusations true? No, they were at best misunderstandings or at worst malicious lies about Paul and his teaching about the law.

So how does Paul address these charges? Paul’s gospel in Romans is clear: God’s righteousness is revealed in Jesus Christ so that both Jews and Gentiles can be justified by faith apart from the works of the law and through God’s grace to bring about their obedience of the faith (Rom 1:5, 16–17; 3:21–26; 16:26).

34. See e.g., Romans 3:3, 4, 5, 6; 3:31; 6:1, 2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11.

35. Peter Stuhlmacher, “The Purpose of Romans,” in *The Romans Debate*. Revised and Expanded, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 240.

36. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 78–79.

37. Bird, *Romans*, 3. See Longenecker’s proposed list of criticisms against Paul (*Introducing Romans*, 154).

38. Bruce W. Longenecker and Todd D. Still, *Thinking Through Paul: An Introduction to His Life, Letters, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 160–70.

Concerning ethics, Paul taught that Christians are free from the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law—that is the Torah, but not free to sin. Christians are “under grace” and not “under law” (Rom 6:14–15; cf., 2:12; 3:19).³⁹ The Mosaic law as a covenant was abrogated at the cross and is therefore no longer binding on God’s people (Rom 10:4). Paul taught that the law was good and holy because it truly revealed the holiness and righteousness of God (Rom 7), but the law increased sin (Rom 5:21), could only condemn, and could never save (Rom 3:19–20). Therefore, Paul was not antinomian and never promoted licentiousness (Rom 6:1–2). Instead, Paul taught that one’s union with Christ, as pictured in baptism, and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit provided the believer with the capability to live a righteous life free from the dominion of sin (Romans 6–8).

But what about Israel? Wasn’t Paul’s teaching about the law against Israel and God’s faithfulness to Israel? No, to the contrary, Paul’s teaching in Romans celebrated God’s faithfulness to Israel. When most Christians first read and study Romans, they usually see Paul’s teaching about personal salvation, similar to how Martin Luther rediscovered justification by faith to launch the Reformation (especially in Romans 1–8). But upon further investigation, one starts to realize that Romans is steeped in the history of redemption and the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. From the outset and throughout Paul’s discussion of the gospel, he cast his argument against the backdrop of the law, Israel, and grace. This kind of reading of Romans is the only kind that makes sense of Romans 9–11. Romans 9–11 is not parenthetical to Paul’s argument. It is essential. It is the capstone to his gospel. So, what was Paul’s conclusion? God has not forsaken Israel, though the Mosaic covenant has been abrogated. Instead, God sovereignly inaugurated the “fullness of the Gentiles,” which was predicted in the Old Testament, to provoke Israel to jealousy (Romans 11). Paul stated with clarity that God will save all Israel and fulfill His irrevocable promises and covenants with the nation of Israel (Rom 11:25–32).⁴⁰ This explanation of Paul’s defense of the gospel leads directly to the second major purpose why Paul wrote Romans: to unify the Christians at Rome.

Paul’s Second Purpose: To Unify the Roman Christians

The second purpose why Paul wrote Romans is *pastoral*—to help the Christians at Rome resolve conflict between Jews and Gentiles in the church.⁴¹ This purpose

39. See especially Douglas J. Moo’s framework for the old and new realms (*The Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*. BTNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021], *passim*). Outside of Romans, Paul argued that NT believers are under the “law of Christ” (see Gal 6:2 and 1 Cor 9:21).

40. In Romans 11:26–27 Paul specifically spoke to the fulfillment of the New Covenant to national Israel. He cited Isaiah 59:20, 21 and 27:9 as evidence. Forgiveness of sins is one of the key provisions in the New Covenant promised to the “house of Judah” and “the house of Israel” (Jer 31:31–34). See also Romans 9:4–5 and 15:8.

41. Schreiner notes that this purpose for Romans is the majority position taken among contemporary interpreters of Romans (see his footnote 77) (*Romans*, 22). Longenecker recognizes that this a valid purpose of Romans but does not see it as a primary purpose (*Introducing Romans*, 156).

aligns well with Paul's stated reasons for wanting to visit Rome in the opening epistolary frame of the letter. In Romans 1:11 and 12, Paul sought to impart a spiritual gift to strengthen the Romans for mutual encouragement by each other's faith. As already argued, Paul's spiritual gift to the Romans is most likely the letter of Romans itself. Therefore, Paul wrote, in part, to strengthen and encourage them in their faith. These explicit statements in Romans 1:11 and 12 accord well with Paul's pastoral concerns for the Romans. Schreiner states, "Paul's emphasis on mutual encouragement may foreshadow his exhortation to unity in Rom. 14:1–15:13."⁴²

Paul's first pastoral concern was *theological*. Paul's explanation of the gospel in Romans 1:16–11:36 provided the theological foundation for resolving the conflict between the Jews and Gentiles. Schreiner notes, "Paul could not arbitrate the debate simply by declaring his opinion. He needed to summarize the basic content of the gospel he preached, especially as it pertained to issues relating to Jews and Gentiles. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Mosaic law and the place of Israel in salvation history are at the forefront of the discussion in Romans."⁴³

Paul's second pastoral concern was *practical*. In Romans 12:1–15:13, Paul wrote parenetic instructions to the Romans. Some scholars understand Romans 12:1–13:13 as general instructions for all Christians; but most take Romans 14:1–15:13 as Paul's specific instructions addressing the local conflict between Jews and Gentiles in Rome.⁴⁴ In this passage, Paul guided the Romans how to navigate the conflict and how to pursue peace in the church. Paul was most likely aware of the situation among the Roman Christians through his numerous partners and acquaintances there at Rome, such as Prisca and Aquila (Rom 16:3–16).

The conflict between the Jews and Gentiles in Rome most likely stemmed from disputes whether Christians were obligated to observe aspects of the Mosaic law or not. Paul mentioned two specific areas of Torah observance in Romans 14. The first was observing certain Jewish kosher food laws, specifically eating meat (Rom 14:2) and drinking of wine (Rom 14:21). Moo explains,

[M]any Jews living in the midst of a pagan culture decided to avoid eating meat because they could not be sure that the meat sold in the marketplace had been slaughtered and prepared in accordance with the requirements of Moses. For similar reasons, they would often refrain from drinking wine, for wine was associated with libations to the gods and was prepared in ways that might also violate Jewish kosher rules.⁴⁵

Schreiner concurs and labels the primary issue in Rome as table fellowship. He writes, "The main issue that surfaced was how Jewish and Gentile Christians

42. Schreiner, *Romans*, 59.

43. Schreiner, *Romans*, 24.

44. Moo, *Romans*, 765.

45. Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 193.

could enjoy table fellowship together since they differed on which foods were permissible.⁴⁶ The second controversial area of Torah observance involved observing certain days (Rom 14:5–6), which most likely referred to keeping the Sabbath and other holy days on the Jewish calendar.⁴⁷

The background to this conflict involved several factors as already discussed. First, the church in Rome had Jewish origins and lived under the authority of the Mosaic law from its beginning. Second, the sociological dynamics within the church changed because of the expulsion and return of the Jews caused by the Edict of Claudius between A.D. 49–54. Third, at the time of Paul's writing Romans in A.D. 57 Gentiles comprised the majority within the Roman church. Scholars have proposed numerous scenarios to explain the sociological makeup of the Roman church and the background to Romans 14 and 15.⁴⁸ Paul simply used two labels for the two groups involved in the dispute: the weak (Rom 14:1–2; 15:1) and the strong (Rom 15:1). The weak, comprised mostly of Jews, believed Christians lived under the authority of the Torah and advocated for Torah observance in the areas of kosher dietary restrictions and Sabbath keeping. The weak had more strict scruples shaped by the law. The strong, comprised mostly of Gentiles (although Paul identified with this group in 15:1), believed Christians were free from the authority of the Torah and were practicing Christian liberty.

The following is my summary of the situation in Rome. The Gentile majority were exercising their Christian liberty by not observing Jewish food laws and the Sabbath. This exercise of Christian liberty was fairly new at Rome, where prior to the Edict of Claudius, both Jewish and Gentile believers were observant of the law. Some of the Gentiles, however, were not exercising their liberty privately, but publicly. In fact, some were encouraging observant Jews to violate their consciences by eating non-kosher. This dispute led to quarrels in the church (Rom 14:1). The weak were passing judgment on the strong (Rom 14:3, 10). The strong were proud and despised the weak (Rom 14:3, 10; cf. 11:20). The strong were flaunting their liberty over the weak without Christian love and causing them to sin by creating stumbling blocks (Rom 14:13–19; cf. 1 Cor 8:7–13). The situation was divisive and could destroy individuals (Rom 14:15) and the church (Rom 14:20). Moo recaps the situation well: “[Paul] is particularly annoyed with the strong for

46. Schreiner, *Romans*, 687.

47. The situation in Rome is similar to the problem of Christian liberty at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 8–10. The main issue at Corinth, however, was food offered to idols (εἰδωλόθυτος) not Torah observance as at Rome. Many of the same principles apply to both situations, but Paul's resolution in 1 Corinthians 10 concerning idolatry takes a dramatic turn from Romans 14–15 which makes no mention of idolatry.

48. See the surveys of proposals by Porter, *The Apostle Paul*, 298–301, 309–310; Longenecker, *Introducing Romans*, 117–20; Peter Lampe, “The Roman Christians of Romans 16” in *The Romans Debate*, Revised and Expanded, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 216–30; Francis Watson, “The Two Congregations: Romans 14:1–15:13” in *The Romans Debate*, Revised and Expanded, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 203–215, and Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective*, Revised and Expanded (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 163–91.

their attitude of condescension toward the weak and the lack of love they are displaying toward them. So, although he rebukes the weak for their judgmentalism, he spends most of his time berating the strong for their selfish use (abuse) of their liberty in Christ.”⁴⁹

What were Paul’s instructions to resolve the conflict? The primary command in Romans 14:1–15:13 is to “welcome one another” (15:7).⁵⁰ Paul instructed the strong to welcome the weak (Rom 14:1) and infers that the weak should welcome the strong (Rom 14:3). The primary reason they should welcome each other is because God had welcomed them all on the basis of the gospel (Rom 15:7; cf. 14:3, 18). God’s acceptance of the weak and the strong at Rome is critical because it means that the problem in Rome was not fundamentally about the nature of the gospel but more about unity of the body of Christ.⁵¹ This was different than the situations at Antioch (Gal 2:11–21), Galatia (Gal 3:10–14, 4:8–11) and Colossae (Col 2:16–23), where works of the law were being confused with the gospel and fundamentally undermined justification by faith alone. Instead, Paul saw the observance of the law by the weak as a matter of personal piety rather than an attack on the gospel.⁵² Even though Paul was not “under law” (Rom 6:14, 15), he did occasionally live under the law as means of evangelizing observant Jews (1 Cor 9:19–23). Moo is correct to put the issue of Torah observance in Romans 14–15 in the category of “adiaphora—things neither prohibited nor required by the Christian faith.”⁵³

Paul’s instructions in Romans 14:3–12 were directed to both the weak and the strong but emphasize what the weak need to do. All of them are to welcome each other and stop condemning each other for three reasons. First, God has welcomed them (14:3). Second, Jesus is Lord (Rom 14:4–9). Since every Christian is a slave of Christ and serves the same Lord, each believer must stand on his own before Christ since he is accountable primarily to Him. Third, Jesus is judge (Rom 14:10–12). Since each believer will give an account directly to Christ at the judgment seat, the weak should not condemn their fellow Christian (14:10–12). God reserves the right to judge and assess the believer’s behavior and motives. Since the tendency of the weak was to judge, Paul’s last point was especially directed towards them.

Paul’s instructions in Romans 14:13–15:6 were directed primarily to the strong. The first paragraph in Romans 14:13–23 reflects a chiasmic structure that focuses

49. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 194.

50. Προσλαμβάνω means “to admit fully into fellowship” in Romans 14 and 15 (*NIDNTTE*, 3:84).

51. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 194. Schreiner asserts, “Paul would not have tolerated the weak if they contended that adherence to food laws was necessary for salvation” (*Romans*, 692).

52. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 194–95.

53. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 195.

on the theological point in Romans 14:17–18.⁵⁴ This structure lends itself to some repetition. On the merits of their argument alone, the strong were right—Christians are not under law and are not obligated to Torah observance. Twice Paul affirmed that all things are clean (Rom 14:14, 20); he aligned himself with the strong in Romans 15:1. But their practice of Christian liberty was self-serving and selfish, disregarding how it was impacting their fellow Jewish believers and the unity of the church. In addition to despising and judging the weak (Rom 14:3, 10, 13), they were flaunting their liberty causing their fellow Christians to stumble and sin (Rom 14:13, 15, 20–21). What was missing was Christian love (Rom 14:15, 19; 15:1, 2), a concern for the church (Rom 14:19, 20; 15:2), and a concern for God’s glory (Rom 14:6, 17–18; 15:5–7; cf. 1 Cor 10:31). Instead of flaunting their liberties publicly, they could exercise their liberty privately (Rom 14:21–22). Paul wanted the strong to follow the example of Christ (Rom 15:3, 4) and to forgo their own liberties for the peace and mutual edification of the church (Rom 14:19; 15:2). Paul concluded this section with an intercessory prayer for the Romans that they would live in harmony for God’s glory (Rom 15:5–6).

Paul finished this pastoral section of Romans with one of the most interesting and controversial paragraphs in his letter—Rom 15:7–13. He began with the final exhortation summing up his expectation for both the weak and the strong in Rome: “Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom 15:7). This completes the *inclusio* started in Romans 14:1–3. The doxological statement “for the glory of God” punctuates the entirety of Paul’s instruction in 14:1–15:6. God’s glory is the ultimate purpose why the Romans should resolve the dispute and restore fellowship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul then brought this pastoral section to a climax with this profound theological declaration (Rom 15:8–9). Christ became a servant to the circumcised for two purposes: (1) to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and (2) so that the Gentiles might glorify God. Paul supported this statement with four Old Testament quotations demonstrating that God’s plan was to include both Jews and Gentiles in redemption all along: 2 Samuel 22:50 (= Psalm 18:49), Deuteronomy 32:43, Psalm 117:1, and Isaiah 11:10 (Rom 15:9–12). God’s sovereign plan of salvation was for Gentiles to join with Jews in an endless strain of praise of the one true God. Paul’s statement is fascinating because it proves the critical role that Israel plays in redemptive history as a “kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6). Bird explains, “It is not the case that salvation is for Jews and Gentiles and the Jews just got the first bite of the apple before it was finally offered to Gentiles. No, it was that the promises were cocooned around Israel; thus it must be to and through Israel that salvation is revealed. We might say that salvation is for the Jew first *so that* it can be for the Gentile second.”⁵⁵ Foundational to God’s plan is Christ’s ministry to fulfill the promises of God in Israel’s covenants.

54. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans*, 196.

55. Bird, *Romans*, 484.

What is the controversy concerning Paul's conclusion? Some interpreters of Romans see Romans 15:7–13 as the climax to the entire epistle, thus making unity between Jews and Gentiles the primary purpose of Romans.⁵⁶ Moo's proposal is better: "As I argue in the introduction, this exhortation to the two groups in the Roman church is not the main driving force of the letter; but it is one of the key converging motivations that led Paul to write about the gospel the way that he has in Romans."⁵⁷ Instead of bringing the entire letter to a climax, this short paragraph merely brings this section, Romans 14:1–15:13, to a close. Paul evoked the greater themes of Romans because they precisely answer the underlying reason why the church is having disunity. Moo explains, "[T]he dividing line between these two groups was basically the issue of the continuing applicability of the Jewish law."⁵⁸ So Paul's gospel elucidated in Romans 1:16–11:36 is the theological foundation that answered the dispute in the church in Rome.

Paul's Third Purpose: To Enlist the Roman Christians as Partners in His Mission

The third purpose why Paul wrote Romans was *missional*—to enlist the Roman church as partners in his missionary endeavors. The missional purpose of Romans is anticipated in three ways in Paul's opening epistolary frame in Romans 1:1–15. First, as discussed, in his opening greeting, Paul introduced himself as the apostle whom Christ appointed "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:5–6). As Christ's apostle to the Gentiles, Paul announced that he was the apostle over the Roman church even though he had no part in planting the church and had not even visited. Second, Paul stated that one of his motivations for wanting to visit Rome was for mutual encouragement (Rom 1:12). This included his desire to help the church resolve their conflict (Rom 14:1–15:13), but it also involved his desire to enlist the Romans' assistance to help him (Rom 15:14–32). Third, Paul explained his desire to reap a harvest among the Romans and among "the rest of the Gentiles" (Rom 1:13). This no doubt anticipates his ministry in Rome but also his plans to evangelize Spain (Rom 15:24, 28).

Paul developed the missional purpose of Romans further in Romans 15:14–33.⁵⁹ This passage is unique because it gives us an extended window

56. See e.g., N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 1991), 235; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*. WBC 38B (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 844; James C. Miller, *The Obedience of Faith, the Eschatological People of God, and the Purpose of Romans*. SBL Dissertation Series (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 17–18, 61–95. Bird, *Romans*, 483; Schreiner, *Romans*, 684, 726.

57. Moo, *Romans*, 890. Longenecker recognizes Romans 14:1–15:13 as one of the "subsidiary purposes" and not a "primary purpose" of Romans (*Introducing Romans*, 156).

58. Moo, *Romans*, 890.

59. Robert Funk coined this passage Paul's "apostolic parousia," which is a common feature in Paul's epistles ("The Apostolic Parousia: Form and Significance" in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R.

into Paul's missionary philosophy and *modus operandi*.⁶⁰ Arlund J. Hultgren calls Romans "Paul's manifesto for his mission in the future."⁶¹ Miller echoes, "Romans served a strategic purpose in the furtherance of Paul's missionary plans."⁶² The closing frame of Romans 15:14–33 has several parallel themes with the opening frame of Romans 1:1–15:⁶³

Similar Themes between Romans 1:1–15 and 15:14–33

1:8	Thanksgiving / Blessing	15:33
1:9	Paul's Commendation of the Romans	15:14
1:9	Prayer	15:30–32
1:9, 15	Paul's Evangelical Task	15:16, 19–20
1:11–12	Paul's Desire for Mutual Benefit	15:23–24, 28–29
1:13a	Hindrances in Visiting Rome	15:22
1:3, 13b	Paul's Ministry to Gentiles	15:15–21
1:14	Indebtedness	15:25–27

Bird summarizes the significance of these parallels: "It is in 1:8–15 and 15:14–33 that we get the closest indication as to what the purpose of Paul's letter really is. And we have to say that it becomes clear that Romans is partly at least a fundraising letter."⁶⁴ Romans 15:14–33 divides into three sections: (1) Paul summarized his past missionary endeavors in the eastern Mediterranean (Rom 15:14–21); (2) Paul articulated his future ministry plans to Jerusalem, Rome, and then Spain (Rom 15:22–29); and (3) Paul requested prayer from the Romans for his trip to Jerusalem and his visit to Rome (Rom 15:30–33). All three sections give us clues for why

Niebuhr [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 249–68). Jervis defines an "apostolic parousia" passage as "a section of a Pauline letter that was particularly concerned with Paul's apostolic presence. Here Paul sought to make his presence felt either by means of the letter itself, reference to an emissary, or mention of a hoped-for visit" (Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans*, 110). She then compares Romans 15:14–33 with other "apostolic parousia" texts: 1 Thess 2:17–3:13, 1 Cor 4:14–21, Phil 2:19–24, Gal 4:11–20 (*Purpose of Romans*, 111–131).

60. See Steve Strauss, "Missions Theology in Romans 15:14–33," *BSac* 160 (2003): 257–74.

61. Arlund J. Hultgren, "Paul, Romans, and the Christians at Rome," *Word and World* 39.3 (2019): 204.

62. Miller, *Obedience of Faith*, 19.

63. Adapted from Bird, *Romans*, 503 and Moo, *Romans*, 902.

64. Bird, *Romans*, 502.

he wrote Romans. Moo writes, “This section therefore reveals the degree to which Paul’s past ministry and especially his anticipated itinerary shape the content and emphases of the letter.”⁶⁵

In the first section, Paul summarized his missionary work for the past two decades of ministry “from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum” (Rom 15:14–21). After commending the Romans for their faith (Rom 15:14), Paul writes, “But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God” (Rom 15:15). Here Paul called his epistle a “bold reminder”—helping the Romans grow in their understanding of the gospel (Rom 1:16–11:33) and applying the gospel to their lives and especially the conflict in Rome (Rom 12:1–15:13). What is most pertinent in Romans 15:14–21 to the purpose of Romans is how Paul reiterated his apostolic calling by Christ to reach the Gentiles. He used priestly language to demonstrate his role: “to be a minister (λειτουργὸν) of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service (ἱερουργεῖν) of the gospel of God, so that the offering (προσφορά) of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:16).⁶⁶ This cultic language shows metaphorically how Paul serves as a priest of God on behalf of the Gentiles so that their offering is pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1–2). Paul was again asserting subtly but convincingly his rightful authority over the Roman church (see Rom 1:1–6, 1:13–15). In Romans 15:17–21, he proves his calling with evidence of all that Christ has accomplished through him: his work for God (15:17), bringing Gentiles to obedience by word and deed (15:18), signs and wonders (15:19), power of the Spirit of God (15:19), evangelism and church planting from Jerusalem to Illyricum (15:19), fulfilling the ministry of the gospel (15:19), and fulfilling Old Testament prophecy to reach the Gentiles (15:21).

In the next two sections, Paul laid out his future ministry itinerary (Rom 15:22–33). He stated three missional goals and invited the Romans to participate with each one. First on the agenda was Paul’s trip to Jerusalem to deliver the love offering to the poor from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Rom 15:25–27). Paul had been raising funds for a few years (Acts 24:17; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9) and was now ready to deliver the gift. His stated motive for the offering fits the theology of Romans: “indeed they [the Gentiles] owe it to them [the Jews]. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings” (Rom 15:27). Paul saw the love gift as a conciliatory act to help heal fissures between Jews and Gentiles throughout the church. Moo explains,

Specifically, the Gentiles (i.e., Gentile Christians) have “received a share in the spiritual things” of the Jewish Christians—that is, in the gospel and

65. Moo, *Romans*, 902.

66. Λειτουργός refers to “one engaged in administrative or cultic service”; Paul is a metaphoric priest, “an apostle to the nations/gentiles” (BDAG, 591). Ἱεουργεῖν means “to act in some cultic or sacred capacity, *perform holy service, act as a priest*.” Here, to “serve the gospel as a priest” (BDAG, 471). Προσφορά refers to a voluntary sacrifice or offering (BDAG, 887). See also φιλοτιμέσθαι in Rom 15:20, which refers to Paul’s honor of rendering public service (BDAG, 1059).

all its associated blessings. Paul alludes here to a central theological theme of the letter: that the salvation enjoyed by the Gentiles comes only by way of the Jewish Messiah and the fulfillment of promises made to Israel (1:16; 4:13–16; 11:17–24; 15:7–8).⁶⁷

How did Paul invite the Romans to participate in his trip to Jerusalem? He asked them to intercede for him (Rom 15:30–32). His requests were straightforward: (1) pray for safety from unbelievers, (2) pray that the gift will be accepted by the saints, and (3) pray that he then can come to Rome with joy. This invitation to pray was an important step in enlisting the Roman Christians for their support. Prayer support is support—it is critical to effective ministry.

Paul's second agenda item was to visit Rome (Rom 15:22–24, 28–29; cf. 1:9–15). In addition to his stated motives for visiting Rome in Romans 1:9–15, Paul added a new dimension in this paragraph. Paul made this short but very important statement: "I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while" (Rom 15:24). The word for "helped on my journey" is *προπέμπω*. Here it means "to assist someone in making a journey, *send on one's way* with food, money, by arranging for companions, means of travel, etc."⁶⁸ Moo writes, "Paul here hints at one of his main purposes in writing Romans: the need to get help from the Romans for his projected Spanish mission (see *propempō* in v. 24)."⁶⁹ Porter further elaborates, "Paul is seen as creating a useful platform for the continuation of his missionary work in the west. Just as Corinth, Ephesus, and Antioch had provided platforms for his work in the eastern Mediterranean, he envisioned Rome as his platform for moving farther west."⁷⁰ So in addition to prayer support, he was also looking for financial support from Rome to complete his mission. He was looking for partners in ministry. Paul capped his hopes for a future visit to Rome with this statement: "I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ" (Rom 15:29). This echoes Paul's desire for mutual encouragement (Rom 1:11–12)—a visit for Paul to encourage and minister to and with the Romans and a visit for the Romans to refresh and support him.⁷¹

Paul's third and ultimate agenda item was his Spanish mission. He mentioned this explicitly twice in Romans 15:24 and 28 but had alluded to going beyond Rome to unreached regions in Romans 1:13, "that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles." Why did Paul want

67. Moo, *Romans*, 921.

68. BDAG, 873.

69. Moo, *Romans*, 915.

70. Porter, *The Apostle Paul*, 308. See Bird, *Romans*, 509; deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 601.

71. So Schreiner, *Romans*, 752; Moo, *Romans*, 923.

to go to Spain? Romans 15:19 and 20 reveal Paul's missionary strategy.⁷² On one hand, Paul considered the eastern Mediterranean regions as reached (Rom 15:19). This does not mean that all people in the east had been reached for Christ. Rather, Paul meant that churches were now established in major cities such as Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi and Thessalonica that could lead to further missionary efforts in their respective regions.⁷³ On the other hand, Paul stated his desire to preach Christ in unreached regions (Rom 15:20).⁷⁴ It is likely that Paul saw Spain as the "end of the world" (Acts 1:8)—the western edge of the Roman empire.⁷⁵ If he could evangelize Spain, Paul could fulfill his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles.

Conclusion

Paul's epistle to the Romans is truly an incredible masterpiece. In this essay I have first attempted to put Romans in its historical context. By understanding the origins of the church in Rome, the dynamics between Jewish and Gentile Christians before and after the Edict of Claudius, and the strategic transition in Paul's ministry, we can better interpret the entire letter. Second, this essay was a quest to discover Paul's purposes for writing Romans. I have argued that Paul wrote Romans for three primary reasons: apologetic, pastoral, and missional. The *apologetic purpose* of Romans relates to Paul's explanation and defense of the gospel especially as it relates to a Christian's obligations to the Mosaic law and God's faithfulness to Israel (Rom 1:16–9:33). The *pastoral purpose* of Romans considers Paul's instructions to the Roman church about the division between the weak and strong (Rom 14:1–15:13). The *missional purpose* of Romans relates to Paul's invitation to enlist the Roman church as partners in his apostolic mission.

These three purposes are interconnected and interdependent. The argument Paul constructed in Romans 1:16–11:33 about the gospel and God's plan of redemption provided the biblical and theological foundation for resolving the conflict between the weak and strong in Romans 14:1–15:13. Once both Gentile and Jewish believers in Rome grasped God's redemptive historical role for Israel in reaching the Gentiles, then peace and unity for this divided church became achievable. In addition, Paul's apologetic argument of his gospel not only introduced him to the Romans but also alleviated and answered unfounded accusations, paving the way for their support. He effectively persuaded the Romans to place themselves in his sphere of ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles and to support him through prayer and finances (Rom 15:14–33). Finally, Paul understood that resolving the conflict at Rome was critical before the Roman Christians would

72. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 868–69. See especially Strauss, "Mission Theology in Romans 15:14–33," 462–65.

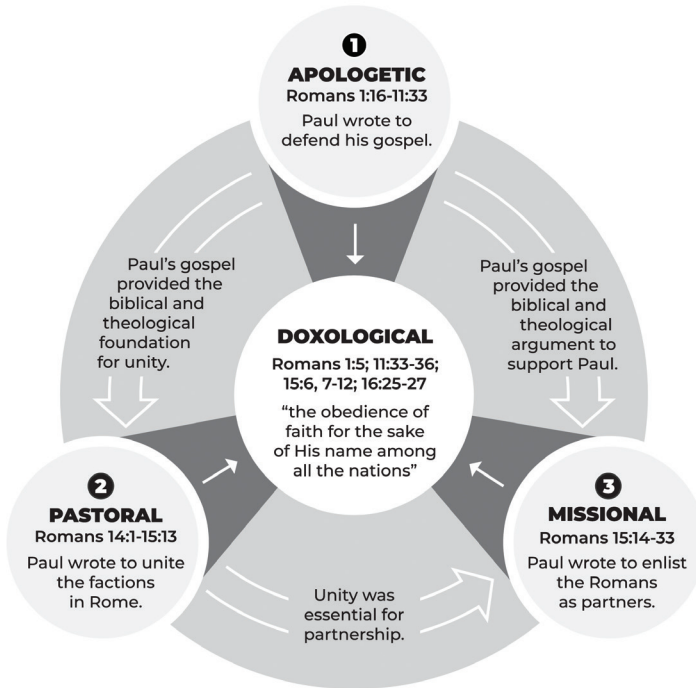
73. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 869.

74. See 1 Cor 3:10–16 and 2 Cor 10:13–16.

75. Moo, *Romans*, 917. Moo suggests that Paul may have seen his Spanish mission as a fulfillment of Isaiah 66:19.

or could collectively support Paul for his Spanish mission. A divided church can never effectively devote itself to evangelism and missions, but a unified church is a healthy church ready to partner with missionaries to complete the great commission. Paul knew that uniting Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome was essential before he could enlist them as partners to accomplish his mission.

REASONS FOR ROMANS



In closing, we need to consider the ultimate goal for why Paul wrote Romans—the *glory of God*. The apologetic, pastoral, and missional purposes of Romans are not ends in and of themselves. Paul pointed to the purpose of God’s glory in strategic places in his letter. Consider the inclusio in the letter’s opening and closing related to the “obedience of faith.” In the letter’s opening, Paul stated that God appointed him as an apostle “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” (Rom 1:5b). “For the sake of his name” points to the glory of Jesus. Interestingly in Paul’s letter best known for “justification by faith alone,” he heralded the goal of the gospel among all nations—*obedience* (Rom 1:5; 15:18; 16:19, 26). This obedience is an obedience produced by faith in the gospel.⁷⁶ Paul echoed these same themes in his concluding

76. The NIV reads “faith that comes by faith.” In the construction “obedience of faith” (ὕπακοήν πίστεως), “faith” (πίστεως) is most likely a genitive of production, producing obedience,

doxology in Romans 16:25–27: God revealed the mystery of the gospel to all nations for the “obedience of faith” to the glory of God through Jesus Christ forevermore. Paul’s argument is clear. As both Jews and Gentiles from every nation trust in the gospel, their faith will produce obedience resulting in eternal glory and praise for God. True worship springs only from genuine lives of obedience. Paul pointed to the ultimate purpose of God’s glory in two more sections of Romans. First, the doxology in Romans 11:33–36 serves as a fitting conclusion to Paul’s explanation of his gospel in Romans 1:16–11:36. Romans 11:36 states, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” Finally, Paul concluded his parenetic section on church unity with a doxological focus (Rom 14:1–15:14). Paul wanted the factions in Rome to live in harmony so that with one voice they might glorify God (Rom 15:5–6). Paul’s ultimate motivation for the weak and strong to welcome each other as Christ had welcomed them was the glory of God (Rom 15:7). Paul concluded this section with the grand picture of Gentiles joining with Israel to glorify God for his mercy (Rom 15:8–12). Let us join with Paul and all of the redeemed to offer glorious praise to our great God, “to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Rom 16:27).

as suggested by Dan Wallace (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 106). See Miller’s discussion about obedience in Romans, *Obedience of Faith*, 49–61.



Abounding Grace, adapted from Romans 5:20, is a collection of essays to honor Dr. Myron J. Houghton on the occasion of his retirement from Faith Baptist Theological Seminary. For nearly fifty years, Dr. Myron taught systematic theology and biblical studies at Denver Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary and Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary. While theology was his main academic discipline, Romans was one of his favorite courses. As students, colleagues, and friends of Dr. Myron, the authors of this volume produced essays to cultivate a greater understanding and love of Romans for both the academy and the church. The first part of *Abounding Grace* is a compilation of tributes about Dr. Myron's life and legacy. These tributes are a great memorial to those who knew him well and a great introduction for those who never had that privilege.



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