

Study 1 - The Epistle to the Romans by Neville Clark, 20160622

The first of 8 studies at the TTG Bible Class, Adelaide, SA

Reading Romans 16.

It was 1534, when commenting on the book of Romans, that William Tyndale called it “the Principle and most excellent part of the New Testament, “the light and way into the whole Scripture,” he said, “no man can ever read it too oft or study it too well, for the more he would study the easier it is, the more it is cleaved, the pleasanter it is, the more groundly it is searched, the preciouser the things that are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth therein.”

Well, they are Tyndale's words in 1534, and there is no doubt this is one of the most profound of all Paul's writings, unique you know in a number of significant ways. It differs from most of Paul's other letters in that he did not establish this ecclesia. In fact at the time that he wrote this letter to the Romans here he had never even been to Rome, much less to the ecclesia or ecclesias, plural, as I will show you shortly that were in Rome. Not only that but he does not actually write to address any major doctrinal problems, or any major conduct problems. Now you think for example of Corinthians, where there were conduct problems that he addressed, and even doctrinal problems that he addressed. Of course he deals with doctrine, but there wasn't a big doctrinal problem, it appears, that he addresses in this epistle. Instead, what he does, he unites Jew and Gentile together and shows them how they can become righteous before God.

The righteousness of God

The key phrase to bear in mind here, this is the task that the apostle has to perform as he shows the righteousness of God in the book of Romans. Now we are saying that the series here is all about the righteousness of God. The book of Romans is about the righteousness of God. What does this mean? Here's what it means, How can a righteous God take an unrighteous man, and make him righteous, without compromising God's own righteousness? You see the problem? How can a righteous God take unrighteous people like you and me, make us righteous, or call us righteous, without compromising his own righteous principles? That's the burden of the book of Romans. How would God do that? Well, of course he would do it through the Lord Jesus Christ. You probably know, at least from first principles, how that would happen. The argument's based in Romans, you see? that's the path.

The Ecclesia at Rome

What do we know about Rome? I'm just going to show you now a brief sketch of the civil history of Rome and then I'm going to jump in and look at the ecclesial history. Tonight, I'm not going to begin at Romans Ch 1, I'm going to get to Romans 1 at the end. I'm just going to do the background this evening; we're going to introduce ourselves to the ecclesia and find out a lot in fact about who was here and what they were doing. In the next talk, we'll commence Romans Ch 1.

Here's the history of the Roman ecclesia.

There was a Jewish community in Rome, as early as the second century BC. Captives were taken to Rome after Pompeii's conquest of Judea in BC 63, so halfway into the 1st Century BC, Jewish captives were taken to Rome, many of them were subsequently released in Pompeii's trial, for his victory march through the main street of Rome a couple of years later. The Jews, however, having been forcibly or voluntarily migrated to Rome, occupied a very large quarter on the other side of the Tiber River, that is on the other side of the Forum, this would be the western side of the River Tiber which runs through Rome.

The Jewish community a sizeable one in Rome

The proximity of the Jewish quarter to the walls made it ideal for trading so Jews became quite enriched and quite wealthy and quite influential in Rome. Cicero comments on the size and influence of that community by BC 59. Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar were both favourable towards the Jews and they allowed Jewish freedom of religion, so things prospered at least in the synagogues in Rome, before Christ. After the death of Herod the Great, in BC4, historians tell us there were 8,000 Jews in Rome who complained against Archalaeus, now who is Archalaeus? Archalaeus was the son of Herod the Great, and they complained about Archalaeus' cruelty to the Jews back in Palestine. You might recall in Matt 2:22,

“Joseph,” it says, “feared to come back to Egypt with Mary his wife when he heard that Archalaeus did reign in the room of his father Herod,” This was a tyrant, as big a tyrant as Herod the Great was, and even in Rome, the Jews petitioned the government about the atrocities that were happening in Judaea at the hand of this man. Interestingly, we also find that because of an embezzlement case, the Jews were banished from Rome by Tiberius in AD 19. That’s an interesting story, you know, Josephus tells us this, how that four Jews in Rome, Persuaded a wealthy noble Roman lady who had converted to Judaism to make a substantial donation to the Temple in Jerusalem. They, of course, stole the money, that caused such a scandal in the city of Rome that Tiberius threw all the Jews out of Rome, he banished all Jews from the city of Rome. So the Jewish relationship with the Roman government was in fact, a little bit hot and cold, because of things like this that occurred.

The feast of Pentecost

By time we get to the New Testament record, we find in Acts 2:10 at the feast of Pentecost, where 3,000 people were baptised, there were Jewish migrants, if you like, from Rome who had come to Jerusalem for worship at the feast of Tabernacles. Now, we don’t know whether that was the beginning of the Roman ecclesia, but amongst the 3,000 that were baptised, of course, it is highly likely that one or two of that 3,000 might well have been from the city of Rome, given the size of the Jewish community in Rome. I would suggest therefore that most likely, as best as we are able to establish, that AD 30 or thereabouts, Acts 2:10 was most probably the commencement of the ecclesia at Rome as a consequence of Jews from Rome converting and being baptised amongst the 3,000 in Acts Ch 2, our best guess as to when this ecclesia might have begun.

Riots in Rome – the banishment of the Jews from Rome

Finally, there were riots subsequently after Christianity became established in Rome, historians tell us, caused by one Questus, as a consequence of which, Claudius Caesar in AD 49, banished all Jews from Rome again. Now, of course it is possible that there was a Jew called Questus, it is more likely, however, that it is a reference to Jesus Christ and as a consequence of which the riots and so forth that happened in Rome caused all the Jews to be banished from Rome. That is an interesting point, because that would suggest that the ecclesia by AD 49 in Rome was in fact, extremely active. As a consequence of the ecclesial activity in Rome there were riots on account of the Lord Jesus Christ, who clearly wasn’t alive in AD 49, so it must be the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ that in fact caused all the Jews to be exiled from Rome.

Paul writes the letter to the Rome Ecclesia in AD 57

Finally, the Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Romans in AD 57. So that’s how things look, if you like, from a civil point of view. Now come with me to Acts Ch 18, because this is where things begin now, as far as the ecclesia is concerned, at least the formal record as far as Paul is concerned. The ecclesia, as I suggest, most probably began back in Acts 2, but this can only be inferred, Acts Ch 18. This will get your feet on the ground, because here’s the reference that we have just made, Acts 18:1. We are in Corinth, we are at the end of the second missionary journey, it’s AD 50, in Acts 18:1. “After these things, Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth, and he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because, and look at it, Claudius AD 49, had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome, and you know now the reason that that occurred.

Paul lives with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth

And so Paul came to them and because he was of the same craft, he abode with them wrought, for by their occupation, they were tent-makers. So, Claudius’ decree came in AD 49 so Aquila and Priscilla are in Corinth now, lately come from Italy, because they were thrown out of Rome, v 2, as a consequence of the decree, so they have been in Corinth for the best part of a year, it appears, by the time you get to Acts Ch 18. The interesting thing about this, of course, and I will spend a little time on this in a moment, the interesting thing about this, is what this would mean to the ecclesia in Rome that it is now a 100% gentile ecclesia. It wasn’t just Christians that got thrown out of Rome, it was just Jews that were thrown out of Rome, so that even Jewish believers like Priscilla and Aquila were forced to leave the city of Rome. The ecclesia which was a Jewish and Gentile ecclesia by Acts Ch 18, has become a 100% Gentile ecclesia. I am stressing the point because as shortly you will see, that actually caused some problems in the meeting at Rome.

Well, Paul finishes his second missionary journey in Acts 18: 22 and it tells us that when he had landed at Caesarea and gone up and saluted the ecclesia, he went down to Antioch, and Antioch, of course, was Paul's home ecclesia, this is Antioch in Syria, just above Israel, his home ecclesia. Acts 18:23, you can rule a line between v 22 and 23.

Paul's third missionary journey

Acts 18:23 is the commencement of the third missionary journey. After he had spent some time there, back in Antioch, at his home meeting, he departed and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. So he retraces his old stamping ground and goes back through the ecclesias that he has created, and this is how things look. This is Paul's third missionary journey. You can see the # 1 there on the map, that's Antioch, that's where he is in v 22- 23 of Ch 18. He is now beginning the third missionary journey in Acts 18:23, it is the year, AD 53. Why am I showing you this? I'm showing you this, because it is in this third missionary journey that the Apostle writes the epistle to the Romans. You just have a look at the table down the bottom of the screen there, you can see he begins in Antioch, that's #1, he goes to Galatia, that's #2, Galatia is, of course, a province, not a city. He goes through Phrygia, #3, then to Ephesus, #4, then in to Macedonia, this is northern Greece, #5, then down to Corinth, in fact, it is called Greece in the record, in the Acts record, he goes to Greece, #6 and that is where he writes the epistle to the Romans.

Paul writes the epistle to the Romans in Acts 20:3

I will show it to you shortly, he writes Romans in Acts 20:3. I mean, we know the precise verse, at which point the Apostle wrote the epistle to the Romans. Look at Acts Ch 19, we've left Antioch, we've gone through Galatia, through Phrygia, we are up to #4 on the map, and in Acts 19:1 it says that "it came to pass that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coast came to Ephesus, and he found there certain disciples," so we are at #4 on our map, in Ephesus. Well, the rest of Acts Ch 19 talks about the silver-smith's riot which caused Paul to have to evacuate the city of Ephesus, it was unsafe for him to remain there.

The Jews return to Rome after Claudius edict lapses

Now come to Acts 20, "Having left Ephesus, it tells us, "after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples and embraced them and now departed to go to Macedonia," so we are now going to go from #4 to #5, on our map. He is going to go into northern Greece, He'd been at Ephesus for three years between approximately AD 53 and AD 56. In that time Caesar, Emperor Claudius had died, AD 54. The edict had lapsed, that is the edict that all Jews had to leave Rome, that edict had lapsed, and now Jews were flooding back to Rome, so by the time Paul was at #5 the Jews are flooding back into Rome. Jewish brethren who had previously been in the ecclesia were coming back to the ecclesia, and Rome was once more becoming Jew and Gentile ecclesia. When you come to Rom Ch 16 as we will do shortly, we find that Priscilla and Aquila are there in Rome. Paul is writing from Corinth and he greets them in Rome. They have left Corinth where we met them in Acts Ch 18 and gone back to Rome. The point was, they left Italy, lately come from Italy, and they found themselves in Corinth in Acts Ch 18. After AD 54 when Claudius died, they left Corinth and went back to Rome and Paul writes to them in Rome in Rom Ch 16 in AD 57.

The ecclesia in Rome has changed

When the Jews left, after Claudius' decree in AD 49, they were no doubt the strength of the ecclesia, I mean, they knew a lot more about their bibles than the gentiles did, the gentiles were relatively young. The Jews had been gone for 5 or 6 years, between approximately AD 49 and AD 54, 55 when people started to come back. So you had a 5 or 6 year period therefore in the ecclesia in Rome when there were no Jewish brethren there, and in that time, the ecclesia changed, you will appreciate. The gentiles had become more independent; they had to run the ecclesia themselves. The ecclesia, what's more had grown, in that time, more gentiles had come to the truth, so when the Jews came back, they well might have thought they could simply pick up where they left off, occupy the same positions in the ecclesia that they had occupied 5 or 6 years earlier. It wasn't going to be like that, their positions had been filled, people had matured for 5 or 6 years in the truth. Inevitably, there was going to be some friction when the Jews migrated back to the ecclesia in Rome. Meanwhile, Paul has left Ephesus, #4, he's gone to Macedonia #5 and now he's about to leave Macedonia. Verse 2 of Acts 20, you've got to Macedonia in the end of v 1, "and when he had gone over those parts and given them much exhortation, he came into Greece.

Paul comes to Corinth

Now Greece, here, by comparison with Rom Ch 16, is in fact a reference to Corinth, now Corinth of course is in Greece, but he doesn't just come to the province of Greece, he comes to the city of Corinth, in Acts 20:2. And v 3 says that he abode there three months, but when the Jews laid wait for him when he was about to Syria, he goes back up to Macedonia. What's the point? the point is in the three months that Paul was in Corinth, in Acts 20:3, he wrote the epistle to the Romans, that's the point. We can nail it down to one verse in Acts, where the book of Romans is written.

Paul winters in Corinth prior to sailing into Syria

It seems that he stayed there, by the way, for three months because he intended the sail into Syria. Now there could be no sailing in winter because the Mediterranean was treacherous at certain times in the winter, and therefore he's going to have to winter over in Greece, in Corinth, waiting for an opportunity to go. Well, it gets too tough and he doesn't make that voyage at that time, he doesn't leave and go north again. However, there was a reason he wanted to sail into Syria. If you turn the page you find that reason in v 16 of Acts 20. He wants to get on a ship because it is faster by ship, faster to where? v 16, for "Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus because he would not spend the time in Asia, for he hastened, if it were possible, for him to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost."

Paul hopes to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost

So in fact he was waiting at Corinth to catch a ship to go to Jerusalem to be at the feast of Pentecost. And in that three-month period while he was waiting for the winter to pass, and the wind to die down, and a ship to come, he writes the epistle to the Romans. Now how can we be sure of all of that? Come to Romans Ch 15, because all of the key pieces of history we have just considered from the Acts of the Apostles, appear, in one way or another, in Romans 15 and 16. And this now helps us get our bearings in relation to the book of Acts from the book of Romans. Rom 15:25, look what he says, "But now," he says, this is the three months of Acts 20:3, waiting for that ship, "now I go to Jerusalem to minister unto the saints." You know from Acts 20 that he was planning to go to Jerusalem to be at Pentecost, well he tells you in Rom 15:25 that he's waiting to catch a ship to go to Jerusalem. "For it has pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution to the poor saints which are at Jerusalem, now this is a reference to the Jerusalem "Poor Fund." Paul has been taking up a collection around the gentile world to assist the welfare of Jewish believers in Jerusalem. We read of it, of course in 1 Cor 16:1-3. In 1 Cor 16 he says, "I'm going to take up the collection." In Rom 15 he says "I have taken up the collection," If you look at the table at the bottom of the screen, he's written Corinthians in the last few years, both of the two epistles we have, you see, they both precede the epistle to the Romans, as you can see from Ch 15.

Paul stays at the house of Gaius

Look at Ch 16:23, "Gaius, mine host, and of the whole ecclesia saluteth you," he says. It tells you in Rom 16:23 that Paul is staying at the house of Brother Gaius as he writes the epistle to the Romans. Where did Gaius live? turn one page and I will show you, 1 Cor 1:14, "I thank God that I baptised none of you but Crispus and Gaius, you see that? In Rom 16:23 he is staying at the house of Bro Gaius and Gaius lives in Corinth, that's why I told you, back in Acts 20:2 that Greece, Paul went from Macedonia to Greece, Greece is Corinth. He is writing the epistle to the Romans from Corinth and he is living with Bro Gaius in his house as he does so. "Gaius, my host," he says. So that clearly identifies Corinth as the place from where Paul wrote the letter to Romans. That's not the only identification, look at v 1 of Ch 16, "I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, she is a servant of the ecclesia which is at Cenchrea that you receive her in the Lord. Why is he commending Phoebe? Well because Phoebe is the sister who is going to deliver this epistle to the ecclesia at Rome, and where did she live? Well she lives in Cenchrea, where is Cenchrea? Cenchrea is 13 k from Corinth. Here's Greece, here's Cenchrea here, there is a little isthmus between the Peloponnese, this big island, you can see where it is, that big island there where the #6 is, it is joined to the mainland by a little narrow stretch of land. On the northern side of that land is Corinth. On the Southern side of that land is Cenchrea. Paul is living with Bro Gaius in Corinth, the sister who took the letter across to Italy was Phoebe and she was from Cenchrea, 13 k from Corinth. My point is simply this, he's writing the epistle to the Romans from Corinth in the three month period that we find in Acts 20 and v 3, that's the simple point.

Considerable detail has been recorded about this section of the apostle's ministry

Enormous detail you see about this particular section of the apostle's ministry which now allows us to date very precisely this epistle. The interesting thing of course is, is that this is the first time the apostle has ever made contact with this ecclesia. He's never been to a meeting there, he obviously never started the ecclesia as we see it, but when you start reading through Romans Ch 16 you find that he knows an enormous number of people in this ecclesia. Here's the "roll" of the ecclesia at Rome, it's the ecclesial roll, 26 people are greeted by Paul, 17 of them gentile names, 9 of them Jewish names, if that's representative, then the ecclesia at Rome was 2/3 gentile. There are also five household groups in this ecclesia, three of them are household ecclesias. So look at Rom 16:5, "likewise greet the ecclesia that is in their house." Whose house? the house of Priscilla and Aquila in 16: 3. So Priscilla and Aquila are living in Rome, they've got a little house ecclesia, so there is more than one ecclesia in Rome, it appears. You find the same thing in 16: 14, "Asyneritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the other brothers and sisters with them," he says. 16: 15, "greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympus and all the Lord's people who are with them," he says. It appears between 16: 5, 14 and 15, you've got at least three household ecclesias, perhaps in different points of the city, in Rome. Rome was a very, very large city, with hundreds of thousands of people. So at least three household ecclesias it appears, don't meet with the main group, all the rest of the names that are in this chapter of Romans.

At least four ecclesias in the city of Rome

So at least four ecclesias it appears, in the city of Rome. But there are some other observations we might make about this chapter which make it extremely interesting. There is one name in Romans Ch 16, very, very conspicuous by its absence. If Peter really was the "Bishop of Rome," that is the recording brother of the Roman ecclesia, at least in AD 57, you'd obviously expect him to have been here, because Paul would have greeted him in person. Not mentioned! So if Peter ever did go to Rome, I mean, he clearly went there to be executed, if he ever went there before that time of his own volition, it was after AD 57 because he is not in Rome, and not in the ecclesia at Rome, at least, when this letter was written. 16: 22, "I Tertius who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord." Now here is the brother who was actually the "amanuensis," he wrote with the pen what it appears the apostle dictated to him. So here is the apostle Paul dictating the epistle to the Romans, Tertius is writing it, and Phoebe is going to deliver it, so this is what you find about this young man Tertius.

Priscilla and Aquila back in Rome

Priscilla and Aquila, 16:3, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, so they've left Corinth where we met them back in Acts 18, after having previously been in Rome, and they have returned back to Rome and the apostle greets them whilst they are in Rome. Priscilla and Aquila, I might add in v 4, "who have for my life laid down their own necks unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the ecclesias of the gentiles." They've endangered their lives, he says, probably, I mean, presumably, we don't know, presumably in Ephesus, back in Acts 19:30, at the Silversmith's riot, you remember the occasion. Paul would have gone into the theatre to defend Gaius and Aristarchus but, it says, "the disciples suffered him not." Well, those disciples might well have been Priscilla and Aquila and maybe they risked their lives to do so, we can only speculate, but clearly they put themselves in harm's way in order to save the Apostle Paul.

Fellow labourers in the Lord

Look at v 12, "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa who labor in the Lord, salute the beloved Persis which labored much in the Lord." Now here is an interesting point, he says, "salute the beloved Persis," now there is a contrast being made here, because if you look at v 8, it says, "greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord, in v 8. V 9, "Salute Urbane our co-worker in Christ and Stachys my beloved. V 5, "likewise greet the ecclesia in the house of Priscilla and Aquila, salute my well-beloved Epenetus." Why is Epenetus a "well-beloved," Stachys is a "my beloved," Ampliatus is "my beloved," Persis is only "beloved?" You see the difference, Persis is beloved, Stachys is my beloved, Ampliatus is "my beloved," Epenetus is "my well-beloved." Well the answer to the riddle is that Persis is a sister, and the other three are male names, the other three are men. He calls the sisters "the beloved," and he calls the brethren, "my beloved," this is a discretion, you see, on the part of the Apostle. The sisters are as beloved as the brethren but they are "the beloved," whereas the brethren are "my beloved." Rufus, v 13, "salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord and his mother and mine, now Rufus appears to have been the son of Simon of Syrene, the man who carried the cross for the Lord Jesus Christ on the way to the crucifixion, because, well, it says in Mark Ch 15:21, that Simon was the father of Rufus and Alexander, and in the gospel record you would wonder why we are told who his children were, that is, who the children of Simon of Syrene were, if they weren't otherwise

known to us. Well this is the only other Rufus in the New Testament, most probably therefore, the son of Simon of Cyrene of Mark 15:21.

In the bonds of the Truth

And how about V 7? Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners who are of note among the Apostles, who also were in Christ before me, he says. Now this is very significant, this is a husband and wife team, Andronicus and Junia. They are my kinsmen he says, that means that they were Jews, much like Aquila and Priscilla, husband and wife team who were Jews, Andronicus and Junia the same. Of note, it says among the Apostles, now he is not talking about the twelve Apostles here. The word "Apostle" means "one sent," most probably therefore, Andronicus and Junia were sent by the Ecclesia in Rome that they were missionaries. The New International Version says they were "outstanding," among the apostles. Their names were known in the ecclesial world, this couple, in the truth before Paul, and where might that be? I'm going to suggest Acts Ch 2 as a consequence of the feast of Pentecost, this may be one couple that was baptised among the three thousand. But the point is, look at the kind of people he is speaking of when you come to Romans Ch 16, this is the calibre of this Ecclesia, or cluster of ecclesias. These are very, very strong ecclesias. They've got some extremely capable brothers and sisters in these ecclesias, and they were known for it among the apostles, they had a world-wide reputation for their faith. This was an extremely solid collection of ecclesias in Rome, extremely solid. Look at V 19 of Ch 16, "Your obedience has come abroad unto all men," he says, all men. Come back to Ch 1. The apostle in fact starts the epistle in the very same way he finishes it, he lauds the Ecclesia for their obedience and their impeccable ecclesial reputation in Ch 16:19. What about this in Chapter 1:8, "First," he says, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." Ch 16 "your obedience is come abroad unto all men." Ch 1:8, "Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." Can you see the kind of Ecclesia we are talking about here? This is nothing like Corinth, who couldn't be fed meat because they have never weaned themselves off of milk, this is an extremely capable Ecclesia, a far cry from the infancy that you had just across the water in Corinth. This is a very, very capable Ecclesia, so capable that this, V 11 of Ch 1, "I long to see you," the apostle says, that I might impart unto you some spiritual gift to the end that you may be established." This is referring here to the Holy Spirit gifts that he is going to bestow on them when he comes, "that is," he says, "that I may be comforted with you by the mutual faith of you and me." Well, what do you think of that? I long that I may come and see you that I may give you the Spirit gifts and that I might be comforted by you, with you, by the mutual faith of you and me. How could this be possible? What could they possibly offer the Apostle Paul when he is a spiritual giant? And he longs to be with them that they might comfort him, what's the answer? 1 John 5:1, "If we love him that begat, then we love them that are begotten of him. We love serious people in the truth, that is what the Apostle is saying, we love people who are serious about the truth, he's never been to this Ecclesia, but their reputation is international, and whilst I say he's never been there, he knows at least 26 people in the meeting, because why? Because they are travelling around the world, many of them, as missionaries, risking their lives and in some cases risking their lives for him. There is an enormous bond between this Apostle and this Ecclesia, an Ecclesia that he has never visited, and obviously, never ever began.

Think about that. Has that ever happened to you? It may have happened to you. You go somewhere and there are Christadelphians there that you have never met, who love the truth, like you love the truth. It happened to me once. I had been travelling in South Korea of all places, many, many years ago, and I caught the train from a brother's place to the ecclesial hall, couldn't read a word of Korean, nothing in English, looking at a map on the side of the train. A brother had written down the name of the station I am supposed to get off, I'm looking down these characters and I ask this girl on the train, she can't speak English, hand signals work and I have to get off in three stops time. I got off and this sister meets me, from the Ecclesia, meets me - I'm carrying my bible, I didn't know what she looks like but she finds me, we go to the hall. I give and exhortation, it's not simultaneous translation, I say a sentence, another sentence comes down in Korean, I say another sentence. We sing a hymn. I've got my green hymn book and I'm singing in English, they are singing the same hymn in Korean. You know, I can't understand a word, we are all singing the same hymn in different languages to the same music, unbelievable! I get out of the meeting and this brother comes up and he speaks to me in Korean. I said to this sister, "what did he say," she says, "I will see you in the Kingdom of God." I couldn't even tell you his name, and he speaks to me in Korean, "I'll see you in the kingdom of God." Then off I go on another train and I never see him again in my life, unbelievable! I walk into that Ecclesia and before the meeting they were doing Sunday School, and I see a tree on the whiteboard and a snake on it and two people and straight away I knew what the lesson was for the Sunday School, and I have never been there before, and have never been there again, and I can't speak a single word of Korean. The Apostle is in exactly the same position, this is an Ecclesia he has never been to, never began, never visited and he loves these brethren as though he has grown up with them. This is the truth, you see, this is the truth, seriously, this is what the truth is all about.

So many wonderful sisters

You might notice, by the way, that amongst all those names, those 26 names in Ch 16, you might have noticed how many sisters there are there. Of the 26 names, 10 are sisters, and look how they are described, look at the list at the bottom. Phoebe, Phoebe is mentioned in v 1 and V2 it tells us that she "succoured many," Aquila and Priscilla, or Priscilla and Aquila in this case, her name comes first, "my helpers who laid down their necks for my life," v 6, Mary, "bestowed much labor," v 7, Junia, notable among the Apostles, v 12 Triphena and Tryphosa, "laboured in the Lord," v 12 again, Persis, "laboured much in the Lord," v 13, Rufus' mother, "his mother and mine," now Paul hadn't been to Rome, so this event must have happened somewhere else and she obviously went to considerable lengths to make sure that he had what he needed and he never forgot I and he writes to here and commends her on that memory when he writes to Rome, whenever that could have been. Think about what that means, of the six times that Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned, four times Priscilla is mentioned first, she risked her life with her husband for the Apostle Paul. There never could have been an Adronicus without a Junia. Junia also, it says in v 7, had "a reputation among the Apostles," amongst the preaching world, she had a reputation too. Mary "laboured," Triphena and Tryphosa "laboured," Rufus' mother "laboured," Persis "laboured much," what would you conclude from that? that Paul could not have done what he did without them, that they did for Paul what the women did who followed the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 15: 58. "Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord forasmuch as you know that your labor is nor in vain in the Lord.

The silent contributors

These are the silent contributors to the truth aren't they, these sisters. It was a major component of the Roman ecclesial situation, one of the major reasons that the Apostle Paul wanted to go there, to see these sisters, whom he loved, who had done so much for him in his preaching life, who obviously helped him, not just perhaps dropping him meals, they were prepared to go to jail for him, they were prepared to lay down their necks for him for the things of the truth. Can you see the tenacity of this Ecclesia, can you see the competency of this Ecclesia, the vibrancy, the determination, the resolve of this Ecclesia, or group of ecclesias in Rome.

An underlying problem

Even though there was this enormous catalog of service in Rom Ch 16, there is a hint through the chapter of an underlying problem. Three times in this chapter, the apostle refers to people as his kinsmen, you read of it in v 7, Adronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, v 11, Herodian my kinsman, v 21, Sosipater my kinsman, that means they were Jews. Three times he refers to people as Jews, 6 times he refers to people as being "in the Lord," so twice as much as he refers to people as being "Jews," he refers to them as being "in the Lord," what's the point? The point is, being a literal descendant of Abraham. is far, far less significant than being a spiritual descendant of Abraham in the truth. If we are Christ's then we are all Abraham's seed. So twice as frequently as he speaks of people being "Jews," he speaks of them being "in the Lord," in the truth.

What was the problem?

Now is this just an observation or is there something more to it than that? Think about it, in AD 49, all Jews were expelled from Rome. By AD 54, Claudius dies and they come flooding back so for five or six years in between that period of time, there were no Jews in the Roman Ecclesia and it appears as though certain tensions had arisen because of that. Here's what the Ecclesia looks like by the time the Apostle writes that letter, there was a Gentile majority, there was a Jewish minority. If the names of Ch 16 are anything to go by, 2/3 Gentile, 1/3 Jew, by AD 56, and look what he says to the Gentiles. "Of times," he says, "I purposes to come to you even as a mother among other Gentiles," Ch 1:13. "I speak to you Gentiles in as much as I am the Apostle to the Gentiles," so there are certain parts of the epistle directed directly to the gentile portion of the Ecclesia, but there are other parts directed directly to Jews. Chapter 4:1, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father as pertaining to the flesh has found," so Abraham's "our father," that's not true of the Gentiles, not really, "Know you not brethren," Ch 7:1, "for I speak to them that know the Law," so that clearly is not the Gentiles, so you see he's addressing this verse or that verse to Jew or Gentile throughout this epistle, why? because there was tension between Jews and Gentiles. Think of the Jewish tensions. "For the Jew," he says in Ch 2:17, "makes thy boast in the Law," so the Jews would say that they had the Law and there was something special about them, "but he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, he is a Jew who is one inwardly" says the Apostle, "is God the God of the Jews only?" So he's got to deal with certain Jewish prejudice in this Ecclesia, but there are also Gentiles in this Ecclesia, Ch 11:20, "be not high-

minded you Gentiles, but fear, if God took out the true branches of the olive tree and grafted in you wild gentile branches, how much easier is it that he rips out the gentile branches and re-grafts back in the Jewish branches."

Eating and not eating

So you can see the problem in the Ecclesia, the Jews boasted in the Law that Yahweh was the God of the Jews, the Gentiles meanwhile had become high-minded because the Jews had been cast off. I mean, even the Caesars can't handle the new people, can you see the problem in this Ecclesia that has developed between Jew and Gentile? "Be careful," says Paul, "it is easy to pluck out the wild branches than to pluck out natural branches," just understand Gentiles that it is the Jewish truth that you now believe, there's no reason to laud it over the Jews, but to thank God. These tensions boiled up into real issues, just come back one page, Ch 14, just to highlight a couple of verses, v 1-2. "Him that is weak in faith," Paul says, "receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations for one believes that he may eat all things, another who is weak eats only herbs," he says. There were disputes over food laws in this Ecclesia, and you have got a similar situation in relation to meat offered to idols, except Idolatry was going to have a problem that food laws wouldn't have. We've got people who won't eat some foods, and of course, the Jews would not eat unclean things, as a consequence of that, people were either eating to the Lord, v 6, or abstaining from eating to the Lord. If you ate it or didn't eat it, it was equally acceptable to God.

Do not judge one another

The problem was, in v3, that the Jews judged the Gentiles and the Gentiles despised the Jew. The tensions are rising in his Ecclesia and they could not be allowed to get out of hand, is the apostle's point. And all of this is whirling around in the Apostle's mind as he writes this letter, but of course, that is not all he is thinking about. Think about again, the situation the Apostle is in as he wrote this epistle. Come back to Acts 20 again, what was the Apostle doing in Acts 20? He's waiting for three months for that ship to sail to go to the feast of Pentecost, and what was he doing down in Corinth? Oh, yes, he is staying at Bro Gaius' place.

The Jerusalem Poor Fund

What else was he doing in Corinth? Well, it tells you in v 3 of Acts 20, that "he abode there for three months and the Jews laid wait for him as he was about to sail for Assyria, he purposes to return through Macedonia, and there accompanied him into Asia, Sopater of Berea, and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus and Gaius of Derbe and Timotheus out of Asia, and Tychicus and Trophimus. "These going before tarried for us at Troas" and the mention of the word "us" in v 5 tells you that Luke was there as well, of course Luke is the author of Acts. V6, "and we sailed from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, we came to them to Troas, 5 days, we abode there 7 days. What's he doing at Troas, Brothers and Sisters? Well, he's got a CBM meeting in Troas, hasn't he? He's got all these brethren from all over the world who have converged on Troas with the Apostle Paul and they are going to stay there for a week and then they're going to leave Troas bound for Jerusalem, why? Because he is collecting for the Jerusalem poor fund, and the delegates from the ecclesias, who have contributed a large sum of money into the poor fund have accompanied their funds with the apostle, they've all met in Troas, and they are going to take that fund to Jerusalem to the poor saints. You've got Gentile representatives from the entire Ecclesial world converging on Troas here with the Apostle, to go to Jerusalem, and he has just written the epistle to the Romans to an Ecclesia, which has got tension between Jew and Gentile.

Come back to Romans 15, and look at what he says, look at what's on the Apostle's mind as he assembles these brethren to go to Jerusalem. He collects this large sum of money and writes this epistle to Rome, Rom 15:25, "but now," he says, "I go to Jerusalem, to minister to the saints for it has pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem." They didn't just contribute money, they sent brethren to accompany that donation. "It had pleased them, verily, and their debtors they are." What does that mean? They are debtors to the Jews, Jews debtors they are. Why? For the Gentiles have been made partakers of the Jews spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to the Jews in carnal things. It is the least the Gentiles can do to contribute money for the Jewish poverty, when they have inherited the Truth from the Jews. So you see, the point of the Jerusalem poor fund wasn't just to ease the material discomfort of the Jews of Jerusalem, it was to unite Jew and Gentile by a Gentile recognition that the Truth they had had come from the Jews. You've got this collection of Jewish brethren accompanying the apostle Paul with the poor fund to Jerusalem for this express purpose, and here he is,

writing an Epistle to the Roman Ecclesia, where there are clear and evident Jewish and Gentile tensions, and he is in the process of an enormous world-wide collection, to heal that very problem.

The reason for the Epistle

That brings us then in conclusion to the reason for the epistle. Why was the epistle to the Romans written? Firstly, he intended, the Apostle intended to go to Jerusalem for Pentecost and then to Spain, so it was to prepare the Ecclesia for, once he had gone to Jerusalem, he was going to come back to Rome on the way to going to Spain, if you like on a fourth missionary journey. Now of course, he never got that journey because when he got to Jerusalem he was arrested, finds himself on a ship, shipwrecked, goes to Rome and is in jail for a few years. But nevertheless, at this point, that was his plan. Secondly, he wants to abolish all human distinctions, he wants to elevate the Gentiles to the Jews, because the Gentiles found righteousness and the Jews didn't. And the Gentiles heard the things of the Truth, and it made immediate sense, and they came to the Truth, the Jews meanwhile had had the Law of Moses for 1500 years and had never understood it, for all that time. But in doing that he's also got to elevate the Jews in the eyes of the Gentiles. Despite the fact that Israel has been disobedient they are still the "apple of God's eye," they are still at the very centre of God's purpose. He has got to also eliminate any self-righteousness of either Jew or Gentile before God, "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Frankly the distinction between Jew and Gentile is a distinction of graduation, it is daylight between that and the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't boast against the Jews, don't boast against the Gentiles, then, of course, to promote ecclesial unity, the very purpose of the poor fund collection.

Paul wants to educate the ecclesia about the righteousness of God

Finally, Paul desires to educate the Ecclesia, in doctrine and in conduct, to explain how a man can be righteous before God. How a righteous God can take an unrighteous man and make him righteous without compromising his own righteousness. He's got to explain how that can be done, and in the midst of that, to promote spirituality, repentance, thankfulness and mercy and love, the finer qualities of the principles of the Truth. That's why Paul wrote this epistle.

The Structure of the book of Romans

This is the structure of the Epistle to the Romans, we have an introduction, we have a conclusion which we have largely dealt with this evening, and in between, half a dozen sections, all about righteousness. We've got the righteousness of God in the Gospel; how man has failed in his six thousand or four thousand years of existence to attain any form of righteousness; how God revealed that righteousness in the person of his son; how believers who come to the truth have got to copy that righteousness, it is not as if Christ has done all the work and we can put our feet up and let him take care of it. We've got to follow in his steps, and the fact that even though Israel left the faith of their fathers in unbelief, God still has a purpose with that nation. Finally, what that means in practical life, both in personal responsibility before God in civil responsibility in society and in ecclesial responsibility in the Truth.

So that's how Romans looks, and that's why Romans was written, that's when Romans was written, and that's the goal of the Apostle and ours too, in the weeks to come.