

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – General Introduction
Notes from Tuesday July 6, 2010
Last Revised on July 8, 2010

Songs

Opening Prayer

Lord God,

we thank you for this day.

We thank you for bringing us here tonight.

We ask your blessing and protection for this assembly.

May everything we do here, everything we say, everything we think and feel,

be acceptable in your sight, O God.

In Jesus Name we ask it.

Amen

About This Class

For those of you who are new to it, welcome to the Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church.

For those who are not new, welcome back.

For nearly 10 years this group has been meeting here at TBC, every Tuesday evening, to study the Bible.

The way we have always done this, is to pick a book of the Bible, one which we have never studied before, and read and discuss it together, from the beginning to the end, verse by verse, taking as much time as seems necessary to do that carefully.

Several weeks ago we finished a study of The Letter to the Hebrews, which lasted a little less than one year.

Near the end of that study, I surveyed the class in order to determine whether this class should continue and, if so, which book of the Bible we should study next, as well as some other things about how the class should be conducted.

Based on that survey it was decided that this class would continue to meet and that we would next study the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

It was also decided that this class would, with the permission of the church, continue to meet here at TBC on Tuesdays from 7:30 until 9:00 p.m.

Most people felt rather strongly that the class should begin and end on time, which has not always been the case in the past. So please help me to accomplish that, by arriving as close to 7:30 as possible.

In recent years this class has begun each week with the singing of a few songs, as we did this evening.

When asked, most people said that they wish to continue the singing, but most felt that we should limit ourselves to about three songs. So we will go with that.

Everyone seems to agree that it is good for the class to begin and end in prayer, which we must certainly always do whenever we study the Bible. But nobody seems to wish for this Bible study to become a "prayer meeting."

In all these ways, which I have just described, those of you who have been in this class before are more or less in agreement.

There is only one subject regarding which opinions in this class have been significantly divided, and that is the question of how much free discussion there should be in class.

On the one hand, some people feel that there is not enough discussion in class and would like to have more opportunities to express their opinions and to ask questions.

On the other hand, some people find the discussions that we sometimes have, to be difficult to understand, and would like to limit such discussion as much as possible.

So here is the compromise that I suggest between these two positions:

You are all encouraged to ask questions and make comments in this class ...on three conditions. First, your questions and comments should pertain to whatever text we are studying. Second, your questions and comments should be intended to help yourself and others to better understand this text. Third, please state your questions and comments --- whether in English or Japanese --- slowly and clearly, so as to allow time for translation into the other language.

What we cannot have during class is a lot of rapid, complex discussion, particularly not about things unrelated to the text we are studying. This tends to frustrate and confuse those who cannot follow the discussion, particularly those whose native language is different than the language of those having the discussion.

So, in short, please let's be considerate in this class of one another and make understanding the text before us our main objective during class. If you have other questions or comments or issues or prayer requests or whatever, which cannot be properly addressed during class,

please feel free to stay after class or to send me your questions or comments by email, and I will try to help you find your answers.

Are there any questions, then, so far, about how this class is to be conducted?

About the Bible

Usually whenever we have begun a new study, before getting into the text of the particular book we have chosen to study, we have done a bit of general introduction, concerning the Bible itself, as a whole and in general.

For some of you this may be a bit tedious, and I apologize.

But for those of you who are relatively new to Bible study, such general introduction is really important, I think.

And I think all of us benefit from being reminded of the forest before we begin examining one of the trees in great detail.

Or to use another metaphor, before "zooming in" on The Letter of Paul to the Romans, let's "zoom out" and take a look at the big picture.

I think it will help us all.

So let me begin this general introduction by putting a question to the group:

Q. Why do we study the Bible? (Invite comments and discuss for several minutes)

Our God is the creator and sustainer of all things. He utterly transcends our reality. There is no way that we can ever find God or discover or understand anything about Him, except for what he chooses to reveal.

And God graciously has revealed himself to us. In Hebrews, Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2 we read. ***"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."***

The words which God spoke to our fathers and those he has spoken to us by his Son can be found in only one place: The Bible. It is the record of God's speech to Man.

When the Bible is open, someone has said, God's mouth is open.

When the Bible is closed, God's mouth is closed.

We should study the Bible because we want to hear what God is saying!

Q. OK Fine, but what is this thing called the Bible? Of what does it consist? And how exactly does God speak to us in and through it?

A. These are huge questions, but I think I should say at least a few words in answer, because we can never properly understand one part of the Bible --- say the Letter of Paul to the Romans --- without having at least a good general understanding of how it fits into the whole Bible.

To "just read Romans" while ignoring everything else in the Bible and what the Bible is doing generally, is basically impossible and, in any case, would be misleading, because the Letter of Paul to the Romans refers to and is connected with the Bible as a whole.

So let's talk about that Bible.

The Bible

The word Bible, as most of you know, simply means book, and the book called the Bible consists of 66 smaller documents which are usually also called books.

The 66 books of the Bible are divided into two major groups, called the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Please have a look at the Table of Contents at the beginning of your Bible.

And please, everyone, if you do not have a Bible or did not bring it with you this evening, I would encourage you to get one and to bring it with you to class every week.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament contains 39 books, all of which were written long (centuries) before the birth of Christ.

What we Christians call the Old Testament was, and still is, the Bible of the Jews. Their ordering of the books is different from ours, but the contents are the same.

Jews everywhere (and some godly gentiles too) have been studying this material since long before the time of Christ, and they have derived great benefit from it. Nevertheless for so long as they fail to understand the person and the work of Jesus Christ, they will continue to miss the central message of the Old Testament.

This should already be fairly clear to those of us who have just spent the past year studying the Letter to the Hebrews, and it will become clearer still to all of us as we spend the next year and more reading Paul's letter to the Romans.

The Apostle Paul was himself a serious student of the Old Testament who nevertheless failed to understand its central message until he had an encounter with the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, and was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then he understood! And that changed everything.

Much of what Paul wrote following his conversion, including much of what he wrote in his Letter to the Romans, is intended to help people to read the Old Testament in the light of

Christ and, conversely, to understand Christ and what he has accomplished in the light of the Old Testament.

In the same way the early sermons of Peter that we read in Acts, and his writings of those of the other Apostles and evangelists are very frequently about helping people who were very familiar with the Old Testament to understand how Christ was the one who had finally come to fulfill it. He was the goal and purpose toward which the Old Testament had been working all along. And now he had arrived!

Few Jews would, of course, agree with the statements that I have just made. Nevertheless our Christian view of the Old Testament can only be the view taken by Jesus himself --- he who was and is the King of the Jews, the Messiah, Son of God, and God! The principal author and subject of both Testaments. Jesus is finally the only authority that counts.

And what was Jesus' view of the Old Testament? Jesus said that the Old Testament was about Himself. It looks forward to Him. It is fulfilled in Him. He is in fact the only reason why the Old Testament is of any importance at all, yet because it is ultimately about him, the Old Testament is infinitely important! Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are all about Jesus.

In helping people to understand about Jesus, Paul refers to the Old Testament extensively, and he refers to it extensively in his letter to the Romans. It will therefore be necessary for us to refer to the Old Testament and try to understand it, if we are to understand what Paul is talking about.

That is all I will say about the Old Testament for the moment. But rest assured we will be in and out of the Old Testament many times before our study of Romans is complete.

The New Testament

The New Testament consists of 27 books all of which were written fairly soon after the resurrection of Christ, within say 100 years of that blessed event.

All of the authors and many of the original readers of these documents knew for an absolute fact that this event (that is the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ) had happened.

They knew also of what happened in Jerusalem at the first Pentecost following the ascension of Christ, when the Holy Spirit, which we can also think of as the Spirit of Christ, was poured out into the church.

They knew this not only because they had heard about it, but because they lived in the Spirit filled presence of the Church. God the Holy Spirit lived in them!

Their primary "lens" for viewing the cosmos had become, not the Old Testament, but the risen and glorified Lord. Everything else now needed to be understood in the light of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Whatever else they once believed, whatever their former understanding of the Old Testament, for example, they now needed to see it in the light of Christ.

And this must have been very confusing for many of them, if you think about it. But with the help of the Holy Spirit, several of these these men came to write the 27 books which comprise the New Testament.

And who was it that read these documents initially?

It was men and women who had much of the same knowledge and experience and Spirit as the authors did. The community of believers --- the Apostles of Christ and their disciples--- filled with the Holy Spirit.

These people recognized the truth and the authority of these, and only these, 27 books, the New Testament because they knew from their experience that what these books spoke of had happened and was true.

As New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce has pointed out, these 27 documents were not deemed to be inspired because they had been selected by some committee. Rather these 27 documents simply were, and are, inspired and authoritative and the whole church at that time could simply see that. And so can we see it.

It is astonishing how various parts of the early church, separately and without any consultation, had quickly come to the same conclusion that these 27 books were holy scripture, and that the countless other similar documents circulating at that time were not. But that is what happened. One proof among many of the work of the Spirit within the Church.

The church, the body of believers in Christ, simply recognized that these books had special authority, the authority of Christ.

At about this same time, the Christian Church also formally reaffirmed that the books of the Jewish Bible, our Old Testament were inspired and authoritative.

This probably seemed obvious to most of them, for several reasons, including the fact that Christ, himself, had accepted the authority of the Jewish Bible and understood himself as the purpose and fulfillment of it.

Thus the young Christian church agreed, because it was to them self-evidently true, that Christian Bible consists of the 39 books of the Old Testament plus the 27 books of the New Testament --- 66 books in all. Our Bible. It's been that way for the past 17 centuries, or more.

And this book we call the Bible has endured the greatest imaginable scrutiny by scholars and men of faith and even by those who would wish to suppress and discredit it. And still it stands before us today, because it is the very word of God.

OK then. We have talked a little bit about what the Bible is and how it is organized.

We have glanced at the Old Testament, so that we will all know what it is when we later need to refer to it.

We have talked, so far very generally, about what the New Testament is and how it came together.

Now we will dig down a little deeper into the New Testament.

The Books of the New Testament

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As has been said, the New Testament consists of 27 documents which are generally called "books" --- the 27 books of the New Testament.

But what kind of documents are these "books" anyway? And what do they tell us?

Well the first four books of the Bible are what we call the four "gospels." These are titled respectively the Gospel According to Matthew, The Gospel According to Mark, the Gospel According to Luke, and the Gospel According to John.

The word gospel can best be thought of as meaning good news. In the Bible, and by now in the English Language generally, this is understood to be the gospel of Jesus Christ---that we are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ.

There is only one Gospel --- the Gospel of Jesus Christ ---and not four of them. So we understand that the first four books of the Bible are four different accounts of the one Gospel.

One nevertheless commonly hears people refer to the "four gospels" or to Matthew's or Mark's gospel and etc. There is no harm done by this loose manner of speaking, so long as we are all agreed on what is meant.

It is in the gospels that we receive most of the information that we have about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And it is there also that we receive most of the information that we have regarding the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, while he walked among us.

There is almost no place else to go for information about the "historical Jesus."

Very much more could be said about these books, of course, but we press on...

The 5th book in the NT is titled the Acts of the Apostles, and it is often referred to simply as Acts.

Acts may be thought of as the Gospel According to Luke, Part II.

Both of these books (Luke and Acts) were written by the same person, Luke, who was a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul.

Luke's gospel speaks of things that happened from just before the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus until just after the ascension of Christ (i.e. when the risen Lord ascended to heaven).

Acts basically begins where Luke left off, with the Ascension, and proceeds to tell about some of what the Apostles, particularly Peter and Paul, did thereafter. This is a very important book for our understanding of the rest of the NT, particularly our understanding of the epistles which we shall discuss presently.

It is convenient, at this point, however, for me to jump ahead to the very end of the Bible.

The last book of the New Testament and therefore of the whole Bible is titled the Revelation to John and often referred to as Revelation for short. Revelation is a strange and wonderful piece of writing, unlike anything else in the New Testament. It is an important book which seems mostly to look forward to the return of Christ and the final judgment. I will not stop here now to talk about it. I mention it here, out of order, only because it is one of the 27 NT books and one that constitutes a literary category of its own.

We now zoom in, still more closely, on our current area of study: the epistles.

The Epistles

From the total of 27 New Testament books we have thus far spoken of 6: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts... the first 5 books of the NT and Revelation, the last one.

This leaves a group of 21 books in the middle, which are commonly referred to as Epistles, which is just another word for "letters."

It should be said, from the onset, that just because these 21 documents are commonly referred to as letters, does not mean that they all are all the same type of letter or even that all of them are letters, exactly.

There is good reason, for example, to suggest that what is commonly called The Letter to the Hebrews was not so much a letter as it was the text of a sermon written in the late First Century to be read out in a particular church.

Something similar can be said about the First Letter of John, which seems even less like an ordinary letter than does Hebrews.

In any case these 21 documents commonly referred to as letters may be conveniently divided into two groups.

The first 13 of these as they appear in our Bibles --- From Romans through Philemon --- are commonly referred to as the Pauline Epistles because these are commonly associated with the Apostle Paul. We will return to the Pauline Epistles in a moment.

The remaining eight epistles were almost certainly NOT written by Paul. These are, in order, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude.

These eight letters are no less important than the Pauline Epistles and much could be said about them too, but we must now zoom in on the 13 Pauline Epistles.

Pauline Epistles

The 13 Pauline Epistles are, by the way, arranged in our Bible in order of their **length**, starting with the very large letter to the Romans and ending with the very small letter addressed to a man named Philemon. These are not organized in order of their importance or date or some other factor, but simply by their length.

It has long been customary to refer to three of the Pauline Epistles as the Pastoral Epistles. These are 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. They are called Pastoral Epistles because they are addressed to individuals, Timothy and Titus, who had pastoral responsibility. Among all the Pauline Epistles, the Pastorals were probably written last, in the early 60s, near the end of Paul's life.

Just a year or two earlier than that, in roughly 60 AD, Paul seems to have written four letters from prison, which are sometimes collectively called Prison Epistles. These are Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians.

The remaining six (6) Pauline Epistles seem to have been written several years earlier, between about 48 AD and 55 AD during Paul's years as an active missionary.

Galatians was almost certainly written at the beginning of this interval just after Paul returned from the first missionary journey and before the Council in Jerusalem at which the Church formally agreed that gentile Christians would not be required to observe many Jewish religious or cultural practices. (Pastor Takeshi did a great job of explaining this in his message last Sunday.)

Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians were almost certainly written near the end of this interval, during Paul's third and final missionary journey.

I have sometimes seen these four letters --- i.e. Galatians, Romans, and 1 and 2 Corinthians --- referred to as the Capital Epistles. I think this is mostly because they are lengthy and, therefore, appear first among the Epistles in our Bible, take up the most space, and are relatively well structured and systematic.

1 and 2 Thessalonians were probably written closer to the beginning than to the end of Paul's missionary years, and deal with special issues, such as the expectations of the young church concerning the return of Christ.

Hopefully this general introduction has helped to put the Letter of Paul to the Romans in some kind of overall Biblical perspective. To review: Romans is the largest and the latest of the four Capital Epistles (Major Letters) written by or under the direction of the Apostle Paul probably during his missionary years. There were two smaller letters during those years: 1 and 2 Thessalonians. In later years there were four letters written by or under the direction of Paul from Prison and still later the three pastoral epistles written to young pastors, Timothy

and Titus, just prior to Paul's death. Collectively these are the 13 Pauline Epistles, which are among the total of 21 books in the New Testament which have commonly been classed as letters. To these 21 letters we add the four gospels, Acts, and Revelation to get 27 books of the New Testament. Adding to that the 39 books of the Old Testament (Jewish Bible) we get the 66 books of the Holy Bible which is the sole and sufficient basis for our Christian faith and practice. And every bit of it is ultimately about Christ.

Translation Issues

Now we are almost ready to grab up the text of the Letter of Paul to the Romans and dig in, but there are still a few more purely introductory matters we need to discuss.

First of all, I would like to remind everyone that the original text of the letter of Paul to the Romans and all the other books of the New Testament was written --- not in English, or in Japanese, or in any other modern language.

The documents which make of the New Testament were written in Greek, of a form somewhat different from both modern Greek or the classical Greek of Plato.

Q. Is there anyone here who reads Koine Greek?

I hope to one day, and have begun to study it, but I can't say that I read it now. Therefore having a Bible available to me in my language, which happens to be modern English, is necessary for me. It is as close to the original text of this document as I can presently approach.

But even if could read Koine Greek, I would not be able to read the original letter of Paul to the Romans or the original of any document in the Bible.

Neither can the translators who have given me my English language Bible, and you your Japanese Bible, and so forth, go "all the way back" to the original Greek documents.

None of these original documents (sometimes you will hear them referred to as autographs) have survived until this present day. This is just a matter of physics. There was no technology existing in those days which could have possibly preserved an original document for several centuries or created a facsimile that could be preserved for that length of time. There were no copy machines. No cameras. No microfilm.

What we have instead (and praise God for it!) is a very large number of very old and excellent copies which generally tend to agree with and support one another. There is no other ancient document for which we have anything like the depth of ancient, high quality documentary support that we have for the Bible.

These days we also have a very orderly system for assessing these documents and building from them a kind of consensus Greek text of the New Testament. This consensus Greek text is the starting point for all of the recent translations of the New Testament into modern languages, such as English and Japanese.

So basically we are all just one translation away from a consensus Greek text which seeks to base itself on a broad scholarly consensus regarding the best copies of the original documents presently available.

Nevertheless, even the best and most modern translators beginning from the same consensus Greek text and working toward the same modern language will not produce precisely the same text in the modern language.

Surely you have noticed this by now.

For example, English Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the New American Standard Bible all begin with the same consensus Greek text, they all favor a direct, literal approach to translation and, yet, the English text which each produces is not identical to the others. This is because the best translators are still human translators and not machines!

The less literal modern translations, such as the Revised English Bible and the New International Version show even more variation in exact wording, although the meaning is ordinarily the same as other translations which also begin with the same consensus Greek text.

Older but much loved translations such as the King James (and New King James) version will show still more variation, because they are generally not based on the same consensus Greek text as other modern translations. Some people prefer these translations for this reason.

But even so there is an astonishing degree of correspondence between even the original King James Version and the most modern translations, such that there is hardly any point of faith or practice that hangs on which translation you happen to prefer. This is particularly true if you are in the habit of trying to understand each passage within the context of the whole Bible and not taking fragments out of context here and there..

For this reason, I think it is best for this or any class like this to pick a single English translation to work with in class, just to make it easier for everyone to follow along as we read and discuss the text. The one we will be using is the English Standard Version.

I would encourage you all to buy a copy of the English Standard Version and to bring it with you to class every week, but if you can't, or don't wish to, that's OK. I will provide photocopies of the ESV text of Romans for your use in class.

But please bring at least some good translation of the whole Bible --- OT and NT --- with you every week, because I cannot make photocopies of all the scriptures we will consult outside of Romans.

And if you do bring a translation with you other than the ESV, please remember to use the photocopy of the ESV text which I provide for purposes of classroom reading and discussion of the text of Romans.

I would ask that you Japanese speaking people also get together, today if possible, with Kazuko Nakamura and agree on a single Japanese Version to use, at least for the actual readings in class.

Based on what I can read on the internet, I am thinking maybe this should be the **New Interconfessional Translation Bible** (新共同訳聖書), "Shin Kyōdō Yaku Seisho," but I leave that to you all to decide.

[n.b. In class Kazuko indicated that they would continue using the New Japanese Bible (Shinkaiyaku Seisho)]

Our object is to get back to the Word of God in the mind of Paul and not to quibble over minor differences in the modern language translations, which are after all, amazingly, indeed miraculously, usually very minor.

Concerning the Original Text

Now, I mentioned before that we do not have the original autograph of any of the books of the Bible, including Paul's letter to the Romans

Instead what we have is a large number of very old copies which generally do tend to agree with one another.

Occasionally however there are differences between the best ancient copies that are worth knowing about, which is exactly why the consensus Greek text and accompanying critical apparatus point these things out.

In case of the document before us, one of these differences concerns Chapter 16, verses 25-27, at least that is where most of our modern language versions tend to place that doxology, thereby ending the letter.

However those verses are missing from some of the important ancient copies, and they appear in various different locations within the text of other important ancient copies.

Most likely this suggests that several, at least slightly different, versions of this document were created in the First Century, and perhaps circulated within the church.

Things like this are interesting, to me at least, and should not be surprising or disturbing to anyone.

On the contrary I find this very encouraging, because it lets me know that known textual variations are being handled honestly, rather than being repressed, and it tends to prove that these were real letters.

If you were to look on my computer right now, you would find very many letters that exist there in different drafts and versions and some of those letters were actually sent out to different places and at different times in slightly different versions.

It would be rather surprising, come to think of it, if we did not find evidence of such drafting and "versioning" among the remains of Paul's correspondence!

Anyway, we will begin our study of the so called Letter of Paul to the Romans assuming that simply and only ever consisted of the 16 chapters as they presently appear in our Bible.

A year from now, or whenever we get to a point where this textual variation may be relevant to our understanding, we will return to this question.

For now, I would like to read on into the actual text.

But first does anyone have any questions?

Romans, Chapter 1, Verses 1-15

Will someone please read the first fifteen verses of Romans Chapter 1, in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read these same verses in English (ESV).

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,

3 concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh

4 and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,

6 including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

7 To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you

10 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you---

12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

13 I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Thank you.. We can not, of course, work our way through this text line-by-line today, but let us pick out a few introductory things in the time remaining to us.

Q. First of all, who is the author of this letter?

A. Paul

Q. How do you know?

A. As is customary for letters of that day, the author identifies himself first and, here quite clearly, it is stated that the author is Paul. And he makes it plain that he is not just any Paul, but Paul the apostle.

He seems to emphasize his status as an Apostle, and to explain it at some length.

Q. What does this suggest to you?

A1. It is important. And indeed, as Pastor Takeshi explained on Sunday, the fact that Paul is an Apostle is the most important thing to know about Paul and this letter. Paul is in some sense writing the words of God.

A2. There may also be a suggestion here that Paul may not be well known to these people and/or that he thinks they need to understand what an Apostle is and why this is of paramount importance!

Q. But if it is so important to know that Paul the Apostle wrote this, then what do you make of Chapter 16, verse 22 (Someone please read it) which says that these words were written by a man named Tertius?

A. This is simply the name of scribe who physically wrote the letter.

This was common, particularly for long letters, because it was not physically easy to write a letter in those days with the materials available. In that sense a scribe might sometimes be less like a modern secretary and more like a typewriter or personal computer!

It is very likely that all or most of the letters in the Bible were written by such scribes and not physically by the authors themselves.

But a human being is not a machine, so the question naturally arises as to whether the authors dictated these letters word-for-word, and if so whether the scribes wrote them out long-hand verbatim or used a form of shorthand, and if the latter whether the scribes were sometimes allowed a significant amount of freedom in crafting the language, and how much freedom?

Etc.

It is hard to answer such questions with certainty. But for a highly structured "tractate" form of letter like Romans, it seems unlikely that Paul would have given any final say regarding what was written to a scribe.

Most scholars agree that, however the writing process may have happened, it is safe to assume that the content was determined by Paul himself, and that very little leeway was allowed to Tertius, the scribe.

Q. To whom is Paul writing this letter?

A. Whoever they are, it seems clear that they are in Rome. In the passage we just read, the city of Rome is mentioned twice: first in verse 7 and again in verse 15. This is supported by many other things throughout this letter and elsewhere in the Bible.

A. Those in Rome to whom he is writing certainly appear to include those who are loved by God and called to belong to Jesus Christ (verse 6)

A. And many of these are already Christian at the time of this writing (verse 8)

A. Yet it appears that there may also be those among them, and others who may come later, who are not believers yet (verses 13 and 15)

This presence in any assembly of true believers and unbelievers, and among those unbelievers of those who will later come to believe and those who may not, seems, to me, a constant feature of Christian life, then and now, and this constitutes a real challenge, then and now, for letter-writing.

Paul probably knew that a broad spectrum of people will be reading this letter.

Certainly Paul understood himself to be obligated to preach the gospel to all who are in Rome (verse 16), both Greeks and barbarians (verse 14), and among all the Gentiles (verse 13), all the nations (verse 5).

It seems to me clear from what Paul says elsewhere in this letter and elsewhere in the Bible that Paul does not mean to exclude Jews, yet in the passage which we have just read they do not seem to be singled out anywhere. Are they?

In summary for today, then, I think we understand who is writing this letter, that it is being written to people in Rome, and that these people include those who already are or later will become Christians. There may be no other distinction --- besides Christian and non-Christian --- that still has much hold on Paul's mind at this late stage in his career as a missionary out in the wide world.

One thing further we can notice, is that Paul has seemingly never been to Rome before (Verse 13).

Consequently Rome is not one of the cities in which the local church was established by him.

And because he never mentions, here or elsewhere, Peter or any of the other apostles having evangelized Rome, it is pretty certain that they did not originally establish the church in Rome either.

There is considerable speculation, therefore, about how the gospel of Christ and Christian beliefs first came to Rome.

This is one of the subjects that will occupy us, from time to time, as we continue our study.

Closing Prayer

Lord God,

We are so anxious to begin in earnest our study of Paul's Letter of the Romans.

It is difficult for us Lord, because we know so little, and we so weak and sinful.

We understand that just as we cannot find you in the cosmos, except as you reveal yourself to us,

We also cannot find you in your word, except as you graciously enable us to understand it.

These are spiritual things spiritually discerned, and we need your help to discern them.

Please Lord be with us in the weeks and months ahead as we do this study,

Please lead us into every truth, and please protect us from all error.

Let your voice be the only one we hear.

And help us to hear it rightly,

and to obey it.

In Jesus Name we pray,

Amen