

BASIC NEW TESTAMENT

## LESSON 13--ROMANS AND PHILIPPIANS

## PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

For about 20 years, Paul had been preaching the gospel and Organizing churches in Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. He was now eager not only to break new ground in Spain, but also to visit Rome where Christian groups were already forming. He wanted to help develop the church there, noting Rome's key importance as the capital of the Empire. He still had opposition, however, among certain Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and other places. It had been suggested to Paul that an offering to the Jerusalem church, which would help to take care of their needy members, might go far toward allaying their suspicions. This offering had been collected from the Gentile churches in Asia Minor and Greece. Paul felt that he should present this collection in person. Therefore, he postponed his visit to Rome and Spain, and wrote his Letter to the Romans to inform them of his plans and interest, and to prepare the way for a future visit.

J. B. Lightfoot, a leading New Testament scholar of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, inferred a connection between Galatians and Romans. He wrote in part: "The Epistle to the Galatians stands in relation to the Roman letter, as the rough model to the finished statue." As part of his argument, he lists various parallels, some in actual wording and others in thought, between Galatians and Romans. These, taken in combination, make a relatively short interval--no longer than a few months--between the two letters likely. Now that we have greater understanding of the creative process, Lightfoot's observations in this respect merit stronger consideration than they were given in his own time.

Paul wrote Romans, then, because he planned to visit Rome while on his way to Spain. This letter can be plausibly dated in or very close to 57 A.D., before his final trip to Judea. We can point, in brief, to a threefold pattern that is apparent in Paul's letters. This pattern consists basically of (1) an initial draft [example, Galatians], (2) a period of literary incubation, and (3) the finished product [example, Romans]. It is noteworthy that Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 both in Galatians 3:11 and in Romans 1:17, to the effect that the righteous shall live by faith.

The Letter to the Romans also reflects a growing conflict within Paul himself. He is trying to maintain one paradigm or mind-set regarding the Indwelling Christ, while a more complete realization is breaking into his consciousness, implanting the basis for a new paradigm. This becomes especially apparent in the Eighth Chapter.

The old paradigm, at its core, was spiritistic: The Christ Spirit, through the rite of baptism, indwelt the believer from the outside--leading to spiritual renewal it is true, but still an extraneous imposition. The individual believer was the medium, and the Christ, in a collective sense, was the control. For Paul, this view had evolved into a comprehensive theology.

The new paradigm, in contrast to the old, recognized that God is omnipresent, and that the Christ is inherent within us as the reality of our being. That is to say, in spite of his own reluctance to acknowledge it, Paul was experiencing Christ as his own eternal Identity, intrinsic to himself and to all humanity as God's Idea. Thus, while Romans carries the ancient spiritistic paradigm to its highest theological development, at the same time we find that paradigm beginning to disintegrate, due to Paul's dawning realization of the Omnipresence of God.

In Romans 11:33-36, Paul alludes to the books of Isaiah and Job while stating, in effect, that his previous words (in 1:1-11:32) are tentative only:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!  
 How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!  
 "For who has known the mind of the Lord?  
 Or who has been his counselor?"  
 "Or who has given a gift to him,  
 to receive a gift in return."  
 For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
 To him be the glory forever. Amen.

#### BRIEF OUTLINE OF MATERIAL IN ROMANS

- 1:1-7 - Opening. As in Galatians, he announces his apostolic calling from the beginning.
- 1:8-15 - Statement of thanksgiving. He expresses his heartfelt desire to visit his readers.
- 1:16-17- The power of the God for salvation and healing to those who have faith.
- 1:18-32- Humanity has gone astray, despite the fact that "Ever since the creation of the world his [God's] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made." (1:20)
- 2:1-16 - When you pass judgment on others, you condemn yourself. We reap as we sow, for good or for evil. Those who have not been taught nevertheless have a conscience. God is impartial and God is judge.
- 2:17-3:8- The Jews in relation to the Law of Moses. Jewish teachers must practice what they preach. Circumcision is spiritual, not literal.
- 3:9-31 - All have fallen short, but we are made righteous through faith.
- 4:1-25 - We are spiritual ancestors of Abraham, who was declared righteous through faith.
- 5:1-11 - We are justified through faith, and thus have access to God's grace. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." (5:5)
- 5:12-21- The First Adam and the Second Adam--two paradigms of humanity contrasted, the Christ Man and the negative counterfeit.
- 6:1:14 - Dying and rising with Christ, through baptism and what it represents. "As Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." (6:5)
- 6:15-23- Paul's doctrine is not to be used as a rationale for libertinism. "What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means." (6:15)
- 7:1-13 - Paul's early religious training was destructive to his sense of well-being. But those who are in Christ are discharged from the law and are "in the new life of the Spirit." (7:6)
- 7:14-25- Paul expresses his melancholy side. He still is struggling with inner conflicts. "Wretched man that I am!" (7:24)
- 8:1-11 - After a probable interval, Paul resumes writing, now in a more metaphoric mode. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." (8:2)
- 8:12-17- We are God's children and heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ. Paul uses Jesus' familiar Aramaic term for God: "Abba! Father!" (8:15)

- 8:18-27- A cosmic vision of universal renewal: "The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." (8:19) Also, Spirit initiates our own prayers, "interceding" for us.
- 8:28-30- For they who love God, all things work together for good. Continuing the cosmic vision: We are eternal in the Mind of God. "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." (8:29)
- 8:31-39- The transforming power of God's Love. Neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God in Christ.
- 9:1-10:4- After another apparent pause, Paul's mood shifts to anguish over the refusal of his fellow Jews to accept the truth of Christ. "I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened." (10:2)
- 10:5-21- Salvation is available to Gentile and Jew on the same terms, of belief in one's heart that Jesus is Lord and has been resurrected.
- 11:1-10- A faithful remnant of Israelites remains, as it always has.
- 11:11-24- Salvation among the Gentiles.
- 11:25-32- The Jews will all be saved when all the Gentiles have been converted.
- 11:33-36- The cosmic vision returns. From, through, and unto the One Mind are all things God is the Source, the sustaining Presence, and the final goal of all creation.
- 12:1-2 - Understand that your body is holy and acceptable to God. Do not be conformed to worldly beliefs, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind from within. Then you can discern God's perfect will.
- 12:3-21- Specific advice on how to live the Christ life. A basic point: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (12:21)
- 13:1-7 - A dangerous concept: The governmental authorities have been authorized by God. Contrast Thomas Jefferson's view: "Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."
- 13:8-10- Love fulfills the law. Love you neighbor as yourself.
- 13:11-13- Put on Christ, and live accordingly. "The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." (13:12)
- 14:1-12- Judging one another is not our function. Leave judgment to God.
- 14:13-15:6- Do not let what you eat and drink cause a weaker Christian to lose his faith. "Nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean." (14:14)
- 15:7-13- The Gospel is for Jews and Gentiles alike.
- 15:14-33- Paul's plans to visit Rome on the way to Spain, where the Gospel has not yet been proclaimed. But first, he will deliver the collection to the church in Jerusalem. He asks for his readers' prayers.
- 16:1-24- This was once a separate letter, apparently sent from Paul to the church in Ephesus. It gives personal greetings to many specific men and women.
- 16:25-27- Probably the original benediction of the Letter to the Romans.

## PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

The Letter to the Philippians, as compared to Galatians and Romans, shows a major advance in Paul's understanding. In Romans 7:24, still beset by a negative self-image, he had lamented: "wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Now, however, Paul's self-deprecation is at an end. He does not explicitly repudiate his former feelings. What he does, however, is quietly advance beyond his previous limits of thought. In so doing, he has found his authentic voice as a Christian metaphysician. As such, he radiates a deep sense of joy and peace, a quiet serenity that is notably lacking in his earlier letters.

We previously noted the importance, for Paul, of the archetypal image of the spiritual warrior. This image, which emerged in various cultures and religions at different times, can be appropriated on several levels. A Buddhist, Chogyam Trungpa, commenting on the Tibetan tradition, noted:

"The key to warriorship and the first principle of Shambhala vision is not being afraid of who you are. Ultimately, that is the definition of bravery: not being afraid of yourself." <sup>1</sup>

There is virtually no chance of any historical influence between Paul and the Tibetans. Nevertheless, Trungpa's comments are surprising relevant to Paul. He continued:

"The goal of warriorship is to express basic goodness in its most complete, fresh, and brilliant form. This is possible when you realize that you do not possess basic goodness but that you are the basic goodness itself... You have to completely conquer the feeling that there is something fundamentally wrong with your human nature and that therefore you need discipline to correct your behavior... You have to relax with yourself in order to fully realize that discipline is simply the expression of your basic goodness. You have to appreciate yourself, respect yourself, and let go of your doubt and embarrassment so that you can proclaim your goodness and basic sanity for the benefit of others."<sup>2</sup>

Formerly, Paul had believed that he possessed basic goodness, as a result of being possessed by the Christ Spirit. Now, he knew that he was innately that basic goodness, as a result of being in continuity with the Cosmic Christ. His earlier view had developed from the spiritistic sense of being possessed from the outside, however benign. His new inner vision saw the spiritual universe as one, and as dwelling within one Universal Mind.

On the surface, two theories--debated at length by scholars--carry about equal weight: (1) Paul wrote Philippians while jailed in Ephesus, roughly the same time as I-II Corinthians (54-55 A.D); or (3) Paul wrote it in Rome, while awaiting his trial at the imperial court (60-62 A.D.)

When we consider the advanced nature of Philippians, we have tipped the scales in favor of the traditional view that Paul wrote this letter in Rome, late in his career. For if we take Philippians to have been written about the same time as the Corinthian letters, we have a most unlikely scenario: Paul, while struggling to define his own doctrines in reaction to those of his Corinthian critics (in 54-55), at the same time wrote the Letter to the Philippians showing a serenity of soul unmatched in any previous letter. Yet about two years later, his spiritual vision had become dimmed and replaced by the more limited theology of Romans. This is too much to expect, even from so versatile a fellow as Paul. If we accept the view that he wrote Philippians

later in Rome, however, the sequence makes complete sense. For Philippians is more akin in spirit to Paul's late works--Colossians and Ephesians--than to I-II Corinthians and Romans.

Philippians is also Paul's most intimate and affectionate letter. The first church founded by Paul in Europe was in the Macedonian city of Philippi. The Philippians had never misunderstood Paul, and they were among his most loyal and generous supporters. Indeed, this center had been the first to feel the responsibility of sending aid to Paul in Rome.

Three important themes in Philippians are:

(1) Unity in the Spirit, which includes conscious oneness with God, other people, and the universe. This unity also means that Spirit, soul, and body are to be harmonized and integrated into the Cosmic Christ, bringing total wholeness into individual expression.

(2) Sustained attention to positive ways of thought to the complete exclusion of negative ways of thought. This is emphasized by Paul's frequent use of the verb *phroneo*, which means "To think in mind; to set my attention upon; to cherish a habit of thought; to be mentally disposed in a given direction." Paul calls for one-pointed, unwavering attention toward the consummation of the Christ Consciousness in ourselves and others.

(3) Spiritual joy and Praise of the universal good, which are central to healthy-minded religion.

#### BRIEF OUTLINE OF MATERIAL IN PHILIPPIANS

- 4:10-20- In all likelihood, this section was originally a separate letter, which Paul wrote and sent prior to his writing 1:1-14:9, 14:21-23. Its purpose was to thank the Philippian Christians for a generous gift of money. It is a message complete in itself, plainly but not hastily written, tactful but strong, short but insightful. It says much in few words, and is fully appropriate to the occasion. Paul affirms that he is complete within himself (4:11), that he can do all things through the Indwelling One (4:13), and that God will supply all their needs out of His abundance in Christ. (4:19)
- 1:1-2 - Words of greeting.
- 1:3-11 - Prayer and Thanksgiving. Paul give personal thanks for the Philippians' help. He mentions his imprisonment, stating, "I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus." (1:8)
- 1:12-26- Paul's current situation, and the spread of the Good News. Some of the local Christians had not been honest and sincere, but he adds: "What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice." (1:18)
- 1:27-30- Let your manner of thought and life reflect citizenship in the kingdom of God. Stand firm in one Spirit, one Mind. In effect, Paul exhorts his readers to act upon themselves, to work within their own consciousness.
- 2:1-5 - An appeal for unity among the members. Be of one Mind and fully in accord with one another. "Let the same mind be in you that was [footnote, "that you have"] in Christ Jesus." (2:5)

- 2:6-11 - An ancient Christian hymn. Jesus humbled himself, even to death on a cross. "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name [I AM, Logos, Christ]." (2:9)
- 2:12-18- A paradox: Work out your own salvation--but God is at work in you both to will and to do.
- 2:19-3:1a- For the time being, I cannot spare Timothy. Therefore, I must send Epaphroditus back to you. He has served me with complete fidelity. Welcome him home with all joy and honor.
- 3:1b-11- This may have originally been the beginning of a separate letter. More likely, however, it was written after an interval in which Paul had to give attention to other matters. The religion of the Judaizers is contrasted with the righteousness found in Christ.
- 3:12-16- Paul, forgetting what lies behind, aspires to become perfect.
- 3:17-21- Amoral Christians vs. Christians who are citizens of heaven.
- 4:1 - Stand firm in the Lord!
- 4:2-3 - Two women, Eudoia and Syntyche, are told to "be of the same mind in the Lord." (4:2)
- 4:4-9 - Summary Statement: Rejoice in the Lord always. In everything give thanks. The peace of God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Think meticulously about all that is good, true, and honorable. Put what I have taught you into practice, and you will know God's peace.
- 4:21-23- Closing and benediction.

### NOTES

1. Trungpa, Chogyam; Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior; Boulder, CO., Shambhala Publications, 1984, p. 28
2. Ibid, pp. 70, 78

### REQUIRED BIBLE READINGS

Read Romans and Philippians.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why did Paul write his Letter to the Romans?
2. What is the basic difference between the old and new paradigms, regarding the Indwelling Christ, as reflected in Paul's letters?
3. How did Paul's self-image change? Compare Romans and Philippians.
4. Discuss three important themes found in the Philippian letter.