

FAITH IN ROMANS

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Most scholars agree that the congregation Paul addresses in his letter to the Romans was composed of a Gentile majority and a Jewish minority, pointing to the letters' internal evidence and the Jews' eviction from Rome in c. 49 CE.¹ Scholars suggest that the Roman congregation was therefore predominantly Gentile.² In Rom 16:17-19, Paul warns the Romans to be wary of false teachers. Campbell argues that Paul wrote Romans in response to these false teachers who Campbell connects to the false gospel teachers described in Galatians.³ Paul's message in Romans is influenced by this other gospel, which appears connected to the question of the Jerusalem Council concerning Gentile circumcision.⁴ Paul's use of faith in Romans, which encompasses the idea of faithfulness, is likewise shaped by the need to respond to and refute a gospel that insisted Gentiles needed to follow the Torah to be saved (e.g. Gal 2; Rom 3:21-23) and the wider conflict of whether Gentiles needed to 'become' Jewish in religious practice (Acts 15). Therefore, Paul uses the term faith and its cognates to emphasize one of the main themes of Romans: the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in the salvation offered by Jesus in his death and resurrection.

To understand why and how Paul uses the idea of faith in Romans, it is necessary to understand Paul's opponents (Rom 16:17-19). Campbell labels the opponents as "hostile counter missionaries," arguing that Paul writes Romans to ward off an attack on his teaching there.⁵ The debates of the Council of Jerusalem and the false teachers mentioned in Galatians are soon to reach Rome, and Paul composes Romans with these discussions in mind.⁶ Paul mentions that his audience is obedient "to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted" (Rom 6:17 NRSV) and says he has written to the Romans to remind them of his instruction on certain topics (15:15).⁷ These verses, along with Rom 16, demonstrate that Paul writes the letter to strengthen the Romans

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 27-28.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

³ Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), 495.

⁴ Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 177-78.

⁵ Campbell, *Deliverance*, 495-96.

⁶ Campbell, *Deliverance*, 504.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 499.

in his teaching and to oppose his opponents' teaching. Martyn describes the false teachers in Galatians as "circumcised, Christian Jews who preach circumcision to Gentiles."⁸ If the false teachers Paul speaks of in Galatians are the same group he references in Romans, this explains Paul's emphasis on the equality of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, without the need for Gentiles to adopt Jewish lifestyle practices. Paul's argument in Romans, then, is intended to counter the idea that the Gospel promise requires Gentiles to fulfill Torah requirements. Paul's use of the concept of faith supports his argument: everyone is saved in Christ, including Gentiles, without works as a prerequisite.

Faith is interconnected with the equal acceptance of Jews and Gentiles in Romans. Paul emphasizes different aspects of this 'faith' in his letter. He speaks of righteousness through or by faith (1:17, 3:22, 4:3, 9:30, 10:4), faith referring to God's faithfulness by fulfilling his promise of justification (3:3), and faith as believing in God's saving power through Jesus, resulting in justification (3:21-26, 4:24-25, 10:9-11).⁹ All of these meanings are at work in the way Paul uses faith in the context of Jewish-Gentile relations: 1:16-17 (all), 3:3 (Jews and the law), 3:22-31 ("no distinction"), Rom 4 (Abraham's faith in God is a model for Jews and Gentiles), 5:18 (implicit, "justification and life for all"), 9:30-33 (why Gentiles believe but many Jews do not), 10:4, 11 (everyone), and 11:11-24 (the Jews' unbelief, Gentiles standing through faith). The theme of universality is the background to most of the occurrences of faith and its cognates in Romans, thus demonstrating its centrality to the letter. This continued focus on the equality of Jews and Gentiles in Christ refutes Paul's opponents who demand that Gentiles follow Torah.

In order to examine in more detail how faith relates to Paul's theology and argument in Romans, I will examine several passages in Romans that have a high density of faith language. Many scholars declare Rom 1:16-17 or 1:17 to be the thesis of Paul's letter, arguing that the verses encompass Paul's main argument.¹⁰ Romans 1:16-17 does, in fact, summarize the main themes that Paul draws on throughout his letter: the gospel, salvation, faith, Jews and Greeks (Gentiles), and

⁸ J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 16. Dunn also describes the false teachers mentioned in Galatians: "Jewish-Christian missionaries ... anxious to ensure that new believers in Messiah Jesus went the whole way in becoming full members of the people of God." James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), xliii.

⁹ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 409, n. 114.

¹⁰ Kruse, *Letter*, 7; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans, NIGTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 137; N.T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Vol. 10* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 397.

righteousness. Romans 1:16-17 is expanded by Paul in Rom 3:21-31.¹¹ Romans 1:16-17 is followed by Paul's declaration that all humanity deserves God's wrath and no person is righteous (1:18-3:20). Romans 3:21 follows this description of humanity's sinfulness. Paul declares that he is unashamed of the gospel and defines that gospel as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (1:16). He then says that in the gospel, God's righteousness "is revealed through faith for faith" and quotes Hab 2:4 to support his point (Rom 1:17). Paul emphasizes the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles in the gospel in Rom 1:16, while also indicating that God has a unique purpose for the Jews.¹² In Rom 3:21-31, Paul discusses God's righteousness "through faith in Christ" that is available to all people who believe. He goes on to assert that there is no distinction because everyone has sinned, and all are justified by God's grace as a gift (3:23-24). Paul describes Jesus as a sacrifice "effective through faith," through whom God displays his righteousness (3:24-25). In Rom 3:27-31, Paul explains that the faith he speaks of eliminates boasting in the law of works; justification does not rest on works but on faith. Paul insists that there is one God of both Jews and Gentiles, and this God justifies "on the ground of faith" (3:30). Paul's emphasis in the passage is clear: the righteousness of God in Christ is for all people without distinction. Whether the 'faith' of Rom 3:22 refers to Jesus' faith, demonstrated in his obedient death, or to the faith of a person, determines Paul's view of salvation and justification. Some scholars note that "for all who believe" (3:22) becomes redundant if the faith refers to human faith.¹³ Others refute this by saying that the "all" adds emphasis and that Paul doesn't focus on Christ's faithfulness elsewhere in Romans.¹⁴ However, Paul says in Rom 5:19 that Jesus' obedience provides righteousness for all and so it may be that Paul is describing Jesus' faithfulness in 3:22. Whichever the correct meaning, Paul makes it clear that this faith is universally accessible; access to this faith is not through works of the Torah, as his opponents claim, but is a gift to be accepted (3:24).

In Rom 4, Paul retells the story of Gen 15-17 to demonstrate that Abraham received righteousness by faith and not by works. Paul describes Abraham's faith as trust in God's promise that Abraham would be the "father of many nations" (Rom 4:18). He asserts that since Abraham's faith was "reckoned to him as righteousness" before circumcision, he can be the father of Jews and Gentiles (4:9-12). Paul writes that "no distrust made [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of

¹¹ Longenecker, *Epistle*, 13.

¹² Kruse, *Letter*, 68.

¹³ Luke Timothy Johnson, "Rom 3:21-26 and the Faith of Jesus," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 79.

¹⁴ Dunn, *Romans*, 166.

God ... being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (4:21–21). Paul defines Abraham’s faith as believing in God’s faithfulness and so implicitly defines gospel faith as believing that God was faithful to his promise in Jesus.¹⁵ Paul says that Abraham “is the father of all of us”(4:16) to demonstrate that God’s promise has always included Jews and Gentiles.¹⁶ Paul’s choice of Abraham as an example may also reflect Paul’s opponents’ use of the Abraham story.¹⁷ First century Judaism saw Abraham as a model of obedience, and it is likely that Paul’s opponents, preaching that law-following led to justification, would have used Abraham as an example of obedience rewarded with righteousness.¹⁸ Abraham’s faith was rewarded, not his obedient acts, in order to support a gospel that is reliant on faith; this faith is for Gentiles, not only for Abraham’s circumcised descendants. Kruse correctly argues that “Paul’s discussion of the case of Abraham is not intended primarily to provide an example of one who was justified by faith, though it does do that. His main purpose is to show that God makes no distinctions between Jews and Gentiles as far as salvation is concerned.”¹⁹

In Romans, Paul uses the concept of faith and its cognates to support his argument that Gentiles, as well as Jews, are saved through Christ. Paul shapes his letter in response to his opponents’ teaching that law-following was necessary for salvation and therefore Gentiles needed to obey Torah for salvation. Paul argues the opposite: everyone shares equally in God’s glory through Christ.

¹⁵ Wright, “Introduction,” 487–88.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Moo, *Epistle*, 160.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kruse, *Letter*, 201.

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