



## The Epistle to the Romans #1

by Ronald L. Dart

Back in the good, old days in the heyday of biblical scholarship (especially those German schools of scholarship) lots and lots of people were doing computer analyses and different things about Paul's epistles and said, "Well, we don't think Paul wrote all of his epistles. We think he may have written Galatians and a couple of others." Actually, there are fewer scholars these days who do that. They're beginning to understand the fallacy of it. In fact, I knew it right from the get-go. When you understand that a man dictated these letters to a scribe, and the scribe was scribbling all this stuff down, it's *easy* to see how his style might vary from letter to letter. Not only that, but when you have been writing as long as I've been writing, and you go back and read some of the *junk* that I wrote in previous years... Somebody, one of these years, if they ever cared enough, would run *mine* through a computer and say, "No, no, no, no. Ron wrote that early stuff, but there was some better writer doing this later stuff."

Now, you should know this about all that: scholars have to publish or perish, and they have to somehow establish their alleged objectivity. That means they can't take the approach of a *believer* and get published in scholarly journals. They not only have to do their master's theses and please a professor, their doctoral dissertations and impress a committee, they have to publish more than that in journals and in books. And they can't just say the same thing over and over again. Remember, scholars are like city buses downtown: if you don't like where this one is going, just wait—there'll be another one along shortly going somewhere else. Fortunately for us, though, that system has worked remarkably well in some aspects, because if a scholar gets way out on a limb somewhere and says, "Oh, no, Paul didn't write Romans or didn't write this or didn't write that", another scholar will come along and hold his feet to the fire, and he can make *his* bones by showing how the other scholar was wrong. And *over time* they have done a credit-worthy job of putting the original documents into our hands in a language we can understand. And we ought to salute and say, "Thank you, guys", but we should not elevate them or put them on a pedestal.

Now, not long ago I was watching a biography of Thomas Jefferson, and the narration of the story was being done by a lineup of historians and scholars—one after another. It was actually seamlessly put together and was a pretty good job. But as I listened, I slowly came to wonder, "Why am I listening to these fellows *tell* me what Jefferson thought when I could have Jefferson tell me *himself*?" So I turned the thing off, got up on the internet, and ordered Jefferson's autobiography. I was kind of shocked when I got it. It is easily the *shortest* autobiography I have ever read, and from a man I really would like to know a lot about—a truly remarkable man. So I could spend a lot of time telling you what scholars have said about Paul. But, hey, we have his letters right here in our hands. Just like we can get a hold of Jefferson's letters, maybe we should go right to the source. At the Feast [in the sermon *Romans 9–11*], I thought I recalled that Paul had written Romans from Ephesus. As it happens, the best information we have suggests it was written from Corinth. Although I don't think that's certain at all. He may have written it on the boat, going from one place to another. I tend to be a little impatient with lectures on the background of New Testament books, but let's take just a moment to acquaint ourselves with the likely time and place. Acts 18, verse 1:

**Acts 18**

KJ2000

- <sup>1</sup> After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;
- <sup>2</sup> And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.
- <sup>3</sup> And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and worked: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Some see this as reason to think that these events were in the mid-to-late 50s. Not much hangs on this possibility except maybe some term papers by graduate students.

**Acts 18**

NIV

- <sup>4</sup> Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Using the word “Greek” in this sense...what he’s talking about are “God-fearers”, I think, or, actually, Greek-speaking Jews. There’s some doubt about which is which.

**Acts 18**

NIV

- <sup>5</sup> When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.
- <sup>6</sup> But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it [*clear of my responsibility*]. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

Well, if indeed Romans was written not that long after this, it goes to explain Paul’s state of mind when we come to the later chapters in the Book of Romans. But later, in Acts 18, verse 8:

**Acts 18**

NIV

- <sup>8</sup> Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.
- <sup>9</sup> One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.
- <sup>10</sup> For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”

Now, I have often read and I’ve been absolutely fascinated—what in the world does that mean? What I *think* it means is that there were lots and lots of people in the city of Corinth who weren’t even Jews, but who were God-fearers. They knew that the Bible was there, they had read the Bible (the existing Bible, which was the Old Testament), and they were ordering their lives according to that God—the real God—as opposed to some pagan god. And he said, “Stay right in this town. I’m going to protect you. Nobody’s going to harm you.” And poor Paul, he had every reason to be concerned about being harmed because he *had been*—more than once.

**Acts 18**

NIV

- <sup>11</sup> So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

Now, Paul had his sights set on going to Rome but he still had some business to take care of before he went. Well, things kind of came to a climax in Corinth—Acts 18, verse 12:

### **Acts 18**

*NIV*

<sup>12</sup> While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, [...]

Which helps the scholars date this particular item.

### **Acts 18**

*NIV*

<sup>12</sup> [...] the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment.

<sup>13</sup> “This man,” they charged, “is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.”

Now, just as Paul’s about to open his mouth—he’s going to defend himself—Gallio said, “Wait.”

### **Acts 18**

*NIV*

<sup>14</sup> [...] “If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you.

<sup>15</sup> But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law—settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.”

<sup>16</sup> So he drove them off.

<sup>17</sup> Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.

He didn’t care. Now, all this storm forms a little bit of the backdrop to the letter to the Romans. Later, in Acts 20, verse one. He’s in Ephesus at this point. There had been a new uproar there.

### **Acts 20**

*KJ2000*

<sup>1</sup> And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed to go into Macedonia.

Macedonia being northern Greece.

### **Acts 20**

*KJ2000*

<sup>2</sup> And when he had gone through those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece[.]

Southern Greece, where Athens and Corinth were. He stayed there about three months in Corinth. And when he learned that the Jews laying in wait for him as he was about to sail into Syria he said, “No, no. We’re not going on that boat; they’re down there.” He went back through Macedonia. Now, some sources I read postulate that it is in this three-month period he decided he had to go to Rome. He was going to be delayed, would have to go to Jerusalem first, but he wrote the Epistle to the Romans to, kind of, cover the delay. If that helps us understand Romans a little better then, well, we’ll find out as we read through the book. But in the end, the letter stands alone, well enough. And as we read it, as we think

about it, we can look for hints as to the surrounding history of the book. One source I read suggested that a letter was addressed to the church in Rome. Well, no, it really wasn't. Romans 1, verse seven, the letter is addressed:

### Romans 1

ESV

<sup>7</sup> To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: [...]

Got it? Not just to *a* church in Rome, not just to *the* church in Rome, but to *everyone* in Rome loved by God, called to be saints. There was not *one* church in Rome, but several. Now, I'm going to jump ahead of the last chapter of Romans because it's really interesting in this point. Rome was really a large city even by this time. It's huge, important, scattered all over the seven hills, as it were. In Romans 16, verse three, Paul says:

### Romans 16

AKJV

<sup>3</sup> Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

So when this letter was written, as far as Paul knew, Priscilla and Aquila were still in Rome (or in Rome *again*, as the case may be).

### Romans 16

AKJV

<sup>4</sup> Who have for my life laid down their own necks: to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

<sup>5</sup> Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaphroditus, who is the first fruits of Achaia to Christ.

Now, we really need a mental adjustment from our day, going back to the church in that time. For example, we went out to the Feast this year and registered 1,039 people to keep the Feast. Our high attendance was, I think, 889. You've got to understand: you couldn't go out and rent a room in Rome, Jerusalem, or anywhere else that would house 900 people. So consequently, the churches tended to meet *in people's houses*. One of the striking things to me about the archaeology of Palestine during the period of time when the church was beginning to develop—those houses were *small*; they were tight. A house church? What, maybe a dozen, maybe 16, maybe 20 people? And even then they'd be sitting awfully close together. Okay. Romans 16, verse 10:

### Romans 16

AKJV

<sup>10</sup> Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household.

Now, at least one more church is mentioned here—Aristobulus' household. That's what he's talking about when he says, "Salute them" of that household. Also, chances are pretty good that when he says, "Salute Apelles approved in Christ", that's because Apelles was leading a group that Paul wanted to say he was approving.

### Romans 16

AKJV

<sup>11</sup> Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.

There's *another* house church, led by Narcissus. Romans 16, verse 14:

## Romans 16

AKJV

<sup>14</sup> Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brothers which are with them.

Now, I don't know, that may have been one church with those guys—one, two, three, four, five of them—as leaders, or it could be five churches that he's greeting here.

## Romans 16

AKJV

<sup>15</sup> Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.

So we've got *at least* five house churches in Rome at this time and maybe as many as a dozen. Okay, that gives you a feeling for the backdrop. Paul's letter, when it went to Rome, obviously is going to make the rounds of every single one of these house churches.

We have a new study guide for the Book of Acts published just before the Feast. It's not in color; it's in black and white. We had hoped to make it available free. (We did at the Feast, and they all went.) But I'm afraid, coming back and looking things over, we can't really afford that. It's going to have a modest price—a lot cheaper than the color versions of it were. But one of the things we plan to do is to make it available free to prisoners. So you can consider that, if you buy them, you're making a little bit of a contribution to help a guys in jail, waiting for a long time to get out, to be able to do some serious study of the Bible.

If you're going to be studying Acts, I have a suggestion: Rather than just look at the maps of Paul's missionary journeys in the back of your Bible, create your own travel diary for Paul. You will remember it a lot longer; you will understand it better. Look up all locations on a map so you know where they are and have a feeling for it. If any of you find a good link on the internet to help people do that, send it to me; I'll share it with the others. I haven't had time since the Feast to update [rondart.com](http://rondart.com), but I will.

Okay, there's a name to add to your list of biblical names—a guy named Tertius. He is the man that Paul dictated all the stuff to, and at the end of the letter he says:

## Romans 16

AKJV

<sup>22</sup> I Tertius, who wrote this letter, salute you in the Lord.

Some person—some pretty careless reader—said, “Oh, no. Paul didn't write this letter, Tertius did.” Well, understand this: Paul *did* write the letter; Tertius just took dictation. So put yourself in the position of Tertius, Paul's scribe, trying to get all the stuff down as Paul paces the floor and dictates. I can visualize him walking back and forth, waving his arms, raising his voice, pausing and stroking his chin for a minute to think. You've got to get it all down on that scroll, using a quill pen and a bottle of ink.

## Romans 1

BSB

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, and set apart for the gospel of God,

Note that expression, “set apart”. It's an interesting construct, especially in the light of what happened in Antioch. Just as I read that this morning, I looked at it and went, “Wait a minute.” In Acts 13, verse one we read this:

## Acts 13

NIV

<sup>1</sup> Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.

Now, what you've got here is a kind of, I don't know what, kind of a school of preachers or something—but a group of prophets and teachers who just are together in common.

## Acts 13

NIV

<sup>2</sup> While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart [...]”

There's that expression again.

## Acts 13

NIV

<sup>2</sup> [...] “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

<sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

I think that's fascinating. It's like God cuts somebody out; he takes them and sets him apart from the herd and says, “I want *these* guys to do *this*.” So that's what Paul was driving at when he says, “I'm set apart for the gospel of Christ.” The Greek word is the same. Also note the word “gospel”. The Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον* [Strong's G2098 basically means “good message”. It's a combined form—*ἀγγελία* [Strong's G31], which means “message”, and the prefix *εὖ* [Strong's G2095], which we have in our own language today in “eulogy” and other things. It means “good”—so “good message”. Very early on, the New Testament writers seem to have coined the word *εὐαγγέλιον*—*evangel*, as it were, or “good news”—to denote the full message that they preached. “Gospel”...I don't know. In our language, it comes from the Old English word *gōd-spell* and I don't think it's a *really* good word, except that everybody now understands, mostly, what it means. I would have chosen something perhaps a little different. They chose “good message”, and they made it into one word, and that's how they went with it from there. Romans 1:

## Romans 1

BSB

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, and set apart for the gospel of God,

And I always like to remind people: Paul was called to be an apostle *completely independently* of the Jerusalem church. You remember the story, don't you? He was persecuting the church around Jerusalem. He went to the High Priest, he got letters, and went taking off for Damascus to go up there and arrest anybody he could find up there. And on the road to Damascus, he got *knocked down* by Christ. So that's where his calling came in, and he was blind for three days, lying there fasting, then was baptized and had hands laid on him. And from that time forward, he was *commissioned* by God. God told Ananias:

## Acts 9

NIV

<sup>15</sup> [...] “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

<sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

So Paul is called an apostle and he hadn't even *met* anyone from the Jerusalem church at that time. Not any of the Apostles, that's it. So, anyhow, he's called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

He has a job.

### Romans 1

BSB

- <sup>1</sup> [...] the gospel of God,
- <sup>2</sup> which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,
- <sup>3</sup> regarding His Son, who was a descendant of David according to flesh,
- <sup>4</sup> and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, this is so *packed* with things that you really have to stop occasionally and ask yourself questions about what he's driving at here. There's *so many* things. For example, he speaks of the good message that was "promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures". They didn't speak of it as "a gospel"; they just prophesied concerning the coming of the son who, in his human nature, was a descendant of David. And Paul, thereby, tacitly acknowledges that Jesus had *two natures*—one human and one divine. I don't know how many trees have had to die to provide the paper for all the books that have been written just about this *one aspect* of Christ—the fact that he was fully human and fully divine. Have fun with it. I'm not going to worry my head over it very much, because it just simply is that he *was* human *and* divine at the same time.

### Romans 1

BSB

- <sup>5</sup> Through Him and on behalf of His name, we received grace and apostleship [...]

"Apostleship" meaning the right to go as an ambassador.

### Romans 1

BSB

- <sup>5</sup> [...] to call all those among the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

Now, it's hard to overstate the importance of this issue, especially to Paul—this question of "to call people from *all the Gentiles*". If you recall, after his first missionary journey, whenever he went to the synagogue, the Jews rejected him, chucked him out, nearly killed him. He'd then go preach to the Gentiles; the Gentiles accepted the gospel *wholesale*—in their droves. I guess they were baptizing them everywhere they went. And they got back to Antioch and told everybody, and all the people in Antioch were happy. But then some guys showed up from Jerusalem and said, "No, you can't do that. You can't accept these people into the body of the church unless they're circumcised."

### Acts 15

NIV

- <sup>1</sup> [...] "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

Well, they all went down to Jerusalem and had a big argument about that. The bottom line of it: the Church at that time made a firm break—a hard break—from Judaism *per se*. I discussed this at great length in the book *Law and Covenant*, so I won't go running down that alleyway right now. But it's really important that Paul is telling the Romans (Most of whom who got his letter were probably Jews) to say that "*my apostleship, my ministry, my job is*":

## Romans 1

BSB

<sup>5</sup> [...] to call all those among the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

<sup>6</sup> And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

My, that's strong wording. You know, we are called to *follow* Christ, we are to *study* Christ, we're going to be *disciples* of Christ. No, no. We are called to *belong* to him—whatever that means.

All of that is just who this is *from*. Now, he says:

## Romans 1

BSB

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

<sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being proclaimed all over the world.

Now, he said something similar concerning the Philippians and also about the Corinthians at one time or another—that people everywhere were hearing what they were doing. One of the reasons for this—the way in which the word spreads on these things—is because the people were *suffering*. If you were going to be a Christian in Rome, in this era, in that city in particular, you were going to have to have a backbone. He says:

## Romans 1

BSB

<sup>9</sup> God, whom I serve with my spirit in preaching the gospel of His Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you

<sup>10</sup> in my prayers at all times, asking that now at last by God's will I may succeed in coming to you.

He had one thing he had to do before he was going to go, and that was to carry an offering to Jerusalem of all that food [**1 Corinthians 16**]. But now he wants to come to Rome.

## Romans 1

BSB

<sup>11</sup> For I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you,

<sup>12</sup> that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Now, the way he words this...if Peter was in Rome at this time, Paul didn't know it. I kind of think he would have. There's a strong indication here that *no apostle* had gone to Rome. Well, how did the church go there? Well, that's easy: with all the travel (and there was a lot more travel back and forth in that ancient world than, sometimes, I think we give credit for), but the Jews in particular went back to Jerusalem every year, nearly, for one or the other of the great festivals. And so, consequently, these people had come to be converted in Jerusalem, gone back home to Rome, and formed the nucleus of churches in Rome. Now, I think this is interesting because this is the *one section* that suggests he intended his visit to Rome to be quite soon, and that's one of the reasons why so many of the people who study this conclude, "No, from the time of Corinth going back to Jerusalem there wasn't much time for anything like this letter to be written." At least, that's the assumption. Verse 13:



**Romans 1**

BSB

<sup>13</sup> I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, how often I planned to come to you (but have been prevented from visiting until now), in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

So, among the Jews who were leading the church in Rome, there were any number of other Gentiles and, of course, there was the *whole city* of Rome that Paul wanted a harvest from. It's interesting: because most of the Christians in Rome were Jews, many of them were known to Paul. But it is *plain*, due to the ongoing issue that Paul was having with Jewish synagogues, this is *very much* on his mind at this time.

**Romans 1**

NIV

<sup>14</sup> I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

<sup>15</sup> That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: [...]

Believes what? The gospel, the message.

**Romans 1**

NIV

<sup>16</sup> [...] first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

<sup>17</sup> For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Now, another thing I want you to make a note of as you go through here (you may want to have a separate page for this): make a note as we go through each incident where Paul directly cites or makes reference to the Old Testament. In this case, it's Habakkuk 2, verse four, and it is a direct citation.

**Habakkuk 2**

AKJV

<sup>4</sup> Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Now, remember, the written law—as opposed to the oral law—was *the Holy Scriptures* to Paul and every other member of God's church of that era. Now, what follows in verse 18 kind of stands apart. I don't know if it was an aside, I don't know how it relates exactly, but it's *extremely* important. He says:

**Romans 1**

BSB

<sup>18</sup> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Oh, say it isn't so! Surely there is no one who would *deliberately suppress* the truth with malice aforethought. I'm sorry. Yes, there are. He goes on to say:

**Romans 1**

NIV

<sup>19</sup> since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine

nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

I'll tell you, this is one of the most fascinating and most profound statements in all of Paul's work: that people who have every reason in the world to know about God, who have all kinds of information that they might share about God, suppress that truth by their wickedness—and that they can see from the world not merely that God *is*, but what he *is like*. It suggests, in a way, that the creation—the whole creation out here—is not only a *proof* of God's ability to create, it's also an *analogy* of sorts that reveals not only the power but the *nature* of God.

Now, what do I mean by that? Well, because I had to slap on my arm this morning: Why are mosquitoes here? Or dangerous animals? Why are there sharks they can eat people when they're out in the surf? Because God could've made a world without them, couldn't he? Well, yes he could have. In some cases, these critters create a balance of nature—a food chain—but they also reveal things about the way the world is made. The lowly mosquito—just take him as an example (or *her* as an example; the males are no problem). The lowly mosquito is insidious, annoying, and even dangerous. So are the insects in the spirit world. They worm their way in. (How has that gotten into our language: they “wormed their way” in?) They nibble on us, they suck our blood, they weaken us, they make us sick sometimes. I think, really, when you look around nature and you look at the things you wish *weren't* here, you may very well be seeing an analogue to what the spirit world is like—that God wants us to understand—and the simplest way to show it to us is by what he made. Maybe not. But, at least, that's what I think.

#### Romans 1

NIV

<sup>21</sup> For although they [*these people who suppress the truth*] knew God, [...]

Now, that's interesting, isn't it? Who were they?

#### Romans 1

NIV

<sup>21</sup> [...] they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Now, I don't know about Paul's age, but I come down to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and here we've got a category of people in public life—people in positions of authority—who may *know* God, but they don't glorify him as God, they don't give thanks to him. Oh, maybe in the formality of Thanksgiving Day, but it doesn't come from the heart. The result of it is: their thinking becomes pointless; their foolish hearts are darkened.

#### Romans 1

NIV

<sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

And, you know, you can see this coming out of Harvard Law; you can see it coming out of Yale; you can see coming out of Georgetown; you see it *all over the place*. These people are being taught by some of the *best minds in the country* but they are minds that have already become fools and are making fools out of their students. I'm sorry, hope I don't offend anybody; it's just the way it is.

#### Romans 1

NIV

<sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human

being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Now, we tend to think of this in terms of graven images—you know, a big statue of Jupiter Olympus or something like that—but, you know, it is even true of those who would never imagine to create a statue to God. We're too smart for that. I think of it in a totally different way. I think that men always seem to try to remake God into their *own image*. You know, in other words, what I'm trying to say is that we will have some people who are black, who will want a black Jesus. There are gays who will postulate a homosexual Jesus. And you can just start ticking them off as you go down the line as men who—whatever problem they have, or whatever circumstance, whatever describes them and who they are—they recreate Jesus in their own image. He said in verse 24:

**Romans 1**

*NIV*

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.

<sup>25</sup> They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Idolatry of what? Homes, cars, yachts, whatever it is we give ourselves over to. He said:

**Romans 1**

*NIV*

<sup>26</sup> Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.

<sup>27</sup> In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error [*perversion*].

What are we supposed to do with that, ignore it? Explain it away? Remake Jesus into our own image? Even Camille Paglia, who herself is a lesbian, at least has the dignity to be atheist. She doesn't try to *remake* God into *her* image, but an awful lot of people do precisely that. I have a question: Will it become hate speech to read what Paul says aloud, on the air? Well, I've done it and I may well do it again, so I hope if it comes to that you will come see me in prison. Verse 28:

**Romans 1**

*NIV*

<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

I wish I didn't feel this way, but I look at the leadership of this country—all the way from Congress to the White House, to the Supreme Court, to the colleges, to the universities, to the grade schools, and to the kindergartens—and I ask myself, you know, how far down this road are we going to go before we can't *make our way back*? Have we already gotten there? Where in the world would you start to turn this around?

**Romans 1**

*BSB*

<sup>29</sup> They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and hatred. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. They are gossips,

<sup>30</sup> slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant, and boastful. They invent new forms of evil; they

disobey their parents.

<sup>31</sup> They are senseless, faithless, heartless, merciless [*ruthless*].

Uh, yes. And after Congress, then what? I mean, this description here fits is our society to a T and it is *scary*. However, I am hearkened back to when God was talking to Abraham and said:

**Genesis 18**

*KJ2000*

<sup>21</sup> I will go down now [*to Sodom*], and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry, which has come unto me; and if not, I will know.

He's going to find out if what he's heard about is true. And Abraham says:

**Genesis 18**

*KJ2000*

<sup>24</sup> Suppose there be fifty righteous within the city: will you also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are there?

And God said—all the way down to ten—he said:

**Genesis 18**

*KJ2000*

<sup>26</sup> [...] If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

[...]

<sup>32</sup> [...] I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: We need to get down on our knees every day and thank ourselves, and thank our God, for the ten people that are keeping the rest of us alive. I don't know how long they're going to be here. And here we are. Could you find a more accurate description of society as it is here and now? And we are going to suffer from the stuff. The sin (this is something you've got to understand) the sin brings its *own fruit* with it. You don't have to visualize God at a console ready to press a "SMITE" button. He doesn't have to lift a finger; the sin does the work *all by itself*.

Now, you have to wonder a little, who Paul is aiming at in each chapter of Romans. The second chapter will *really* make you wonder who he expects to be reading this book. But we're going to let chapter two wait until next week, and I'll be looking forward to getting your questions. Write to me at [ron@borntowin.net](mailto:ron@borntowin.net) with all questions and all comments, and we'll see where we go from here in Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

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