

Introduction to the New Testament History and Literature

Lecture 16: Paul as Jewish Theologian

Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rfst-152/lecture-16>

Overview

The Apostle Paul's description of the Jewish Law in his letter to the Galatians demotes from being an expression of Jewish faith to an object of idolatry and one that imprisons those who follow it. Paul is careful to nuance this position, however, in his letter to the Romans. In Romans, it seems that Paul is defending himself against charges of being antinomian. Perhaps Paul treads carefully in order to ensure that his deliverance of a donation to the Jerusalem church from the gentile churches is received in a spirit of church unity.

1. Paul's Demotion of the Jewish Law in Galatians

- [1] *Professor Dale Martin:* Paul founded several, probably small, house churches in the area of Galatia. There's some debate about exactly what part of Asia Minor he's referring to because there are different parts that were called Galatia. Of course the word "Galatia" you recognize probably just comes from the word for "Gaul", that is the people who occupied France, later the Gauls were tribes that tended to be in different parts of Europe at different times, so there's part of Asia Minor, that is, modern day Turkey, the central part of it that was called Galatia after the Gauls. Paul was there at some point, we don't know exactly when, he founded some churches there. These were all Gentile churches, there's no record at all that he had any contact in the area with Jews themselves, and there is no record in the letter to the Galatians that he's addressing Jews at all in the letter. If you notice from the letter, also, it's not directed simply to one house church or even one town. Galatia refers to an area that included different towns, and so this is something like a circular letter that would have gone around to different parts.
- [2] Other traveling teachers obviously have come along at some point, and quite reasonable enough, they may themselves be Jewish followers of Jesus or they may be Gentiles themselves but who became law observant when they started following Jesus. This would

be natural. I mean if you come along and say, well you're now worshipping the God of Israel, now you're sort of claiming to be followers of Abraham, you're claiming to be children of Abraham, you're claiming to be followers of a Jewish Messiah. Well, it's okay that you're followers and it's okay that you were baptized, but if you really want to be a full citizen in this group you need to get circumcised like other Jews do, you need to keep kosher; you need to follow the Jewish law. The Jewish ethnic laws are written for Jews; they're still enforced, and if you want to be a part of the people of Israel and follow the God of Israel, then keep the Jewish law. A perfectly natural idea, but it sends Paul way over the edge. He writes Galatians to this group trying to convince them not to accept this, what he calls a new teaching or a different Gospel, and this is where Paul is in his most angry and most vituperative of just about all of his letters.

- [3] We're going to go through several parts of it because what I'm going to point out right now is, how did Paul try to convince them? Look at Galatians with me, we're going to skip around in several parts. Galatians 2:15, the first two chapters you've already read because we read it at the very beginning of the semester, this is when Paul tells the story of where he was in Jerusalem, where he was in Damascus, how he got his own Gospel. He emphasizes his independence from the leadership of the churches in Judea, Peter, James, John,

precisely because it may well have been that the people who came to Galatia after he did and were teaching these people otherwise, they might have said, well Paul, sure, he told you some of the Gospel, but Paul's not really one of the original Apostles. The original Apostles are Peter, and James, and John, and we represent their point of view. Paul initially separates himself from that at all and says, I didn't get my Gospel from Peter, James, and John, they are not the core Apostles, I am just as much an Apostle as they are, I got my Gospel straight from Jesus.

- [4] Then he goes on to talk about the law 2:15, "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners." "Gentile sinners" was just like two words that almost automatically went together in some Jewish rhetoric and propaganda in this period. Being outside of Israel, being outside of the people of God made you a sinner practically in itself, at least according to some points of view, and Paul tends to share that point of view because he uses "Gentile sinners" himself more than once.

Yet we know that a person is justified not by works of law but through faith in Jesus Christ. We have come to believe in Jesus Christ so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by doing the works of the law because no one will be justified by the works of the law. But if in our effort to be justified in Christ we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I'm a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God. For if justification comes through the law then Christ died for nothing.

- [5] That's a pretty big statement. If the law gets you anywhere, then Christ didn't need to die at all. Notice what he says in 3:12, he gets even worse with what he says—3:12:

The law does not rest on faith, on the contrary, whoever does the works of the law will live by them.

- [6] Notice he's separating out faith and law, that's not something that almost any Jew would do. The idea that somehow you don't have faith in God because you keep kosher is ridiculous to a lot of Jews. In fact you're keeping kosher, you're keeping the law is an expression of your faith in God. And so Paul's saying this, it might sound almost commonsensical if you've been raised in a Christian church. But if you put yourself in the mind of a Jew of the first century, hearing this, that somehow the law and faith are opposed to one another, is just very shocking.

- [7] Look at 3:15:

Brothers I give an example from daily life, once a person's will has been ratified no one adds to it or annuls it. The promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say "and to offsprings."

- [8] And what he's doing is he's playing on the Greek word "seed" is what is translated here as "offspring." He's saying this was given to Abraham's seed and the Greek word is singular, "seed," it doesn't say "seeds," so that means that it has to refer to Christ. Christ is the seed of Abraham not all the people of Israel.

My point is this, the law which came four hundred thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance comes from the law it no longer is from promise, but God granted to Abraham through promise.

- [9] Notice what he's doing here, he differentiates the law from promise, which would be very odd coming for a Jew at the time. Separating off the law from faith, separating off the law from promise is counter intuitive in Jewish theology at the time. Then what he also says is the law came 430 years after God made his first covenant with Abraham. Abraham just—God justified Abraham by faith, although he was circumcised later, but the circumcision was not what justified him; it was his faith that justified him, even Abraham. He takes all the way back to the father of the Jews and says, God made a commitment with Abraham, the law came 430 years later, so the law is a late comer in the whole system of how God was dealing with people.

[10] Then look at what he says in 3:19 right after that, “Why then the law?” In other words if you had the covenant with Abraham why did the law come about anyway? You didn’t need the law to have the covenant according to his theology. He says,

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made, and it was ordained through angels by a mediator.

[11] Now this is really weird. “The law came about for transgressions.” Now there’s a way to—there’s a couple ways you could understand this, and the way most modern Christians read it is the law came about to keep people from sinning. You know what you’re not supposed to do by reading the law, so the law comes back to keep you from transgressing, but I don’t think that’s what Paul’s doing because precisely in Romans 5:20 when he makes a similar statement, it’s very clear there that the law came in to increase transgressions. What he’s saying here is somehow the law came in after the covenant was already established and it was precisely brought in through—much later and it was added to increase sin in the world. It’s a very odd thing to say.

[12] Notice what he also says, “It was ordained by angels.” I’ve talked about this before when we talked about the speech of Stephen. Paul’s saying that God wasn’t even the one who gave the law to Moses, it was given by angels. He says, “It was ordained through angels by a mediator.” Well who was the mediator? Moses right? “Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one.” That’s odd, but it seems to express what would have been sort of a legal theory in the ancient world. For example, if I want to sign a contract with all of you we don’t have to have a mediator, you just basically choose one of you or a committee of you to represent you, and I represent myself. If I want to sign a contract just with Jude, then we don’t need a mediator, we just sign the contract together. But if you have two groups of people wanting to come to some kind of agreement to have a contract, a covenant, you need a mediator who can be in the middle and not represent either of their interests but be neutral. What he’s saying is that there’s a mediator here, all the Jews know that Moses

was the mediator, but if the contract was between God—if the law was between God and the Israelites you didn’t have to have a mediator, and he says that’s precisely why they had to have mediator, it wasn’t between God and the Israelites, it was between the angels and the Israelites. Notice how demoting this is, how a certain piety of the law, you believe the law came 430 years after the covenant, it was given by angels to Moses, not even directly from God, and it was given in order to make sin worse not to get rid of sin.

[13] Look what he says in 3:23, he’s digging himself deeper though. He’s saying more and more negative things about the Jewish law. 3:23: “Before faith came we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.” Now the law becomes a prison guard that keeps humanity, and he seems to be talking about all of humanity not just Jews, somehow the law, the Jewish law put all of humanity in prison and kept it there all those years. Look what he says in 3:24, “Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came so that we might be justified by faith.” Well the word “disciplinarian” there is the Greek word “pedagogue.” Does anybody have pedagogue in your Greek translation there at 3:24? Does anybody have a different translation at 3:24 then disciplinarian? Yes sir in the back.

[14] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[15] *Professor Dale Martin:* What is 3:24, “Therefore the law was our—

[16] *Student:* The law was [Inaudible]

[17] *Professor Dale Martin:* Okay, it was put in charge, so it’s someone charge. It refers to the slave, because these were almost always slaves, who took care of young boys when they were going to school. A child would, up to a certain age, would be under the care—obviously they were talking about upper class people who had slaves and could—and would put their children into the care of nurses and slaves. The child at a very young age would be under the care of a nurse, but at a certain age, maybe five or six, the child, the boy especially, would be put in the charge of a slave who basically was assigned to watch over the kid. The “pedagogue,” contrary to the way this has come into English as pedagogue, didn’t refer

primarily to the teacher of the child. That was a different term. The pedagogue was a slave who just basically took care of the boy, made sure the boy—carried the kid’s books to school, had the tablets, the wax tablets they wrote on and the blocks they wrote on, kept the kid’s stuff in a little satchel, and watched the kid, took the kid to school to make sure the kid got there safely, make sure no older boys were bullies or make sure the kid didn’t get into any trouble, and then stayed in school and sat—maybe sat in the classroom or sat outside the classroom until school was over, then took the kid back home, made sure the kid did his homework. And according to a lot of Greek literature, pedagogues are—not only are they slaves, they’re ugly, we have lots and lots of artistic representations of pedagogues in ancient terra cotta and that sort of thing, and they’re usually depicted as this ugly, stumped slaves, and they’re often depicted as mean and cruel, and they beat the kids all the time. By calling the law a pedagogue here, I don’t think Paul’s saying that the law was our teacher, I think what he’s saying is the law is that slave, a serviling who kept us basically enslaved; remember he just said we’re prisoners.

[18] Look what he says in 4:3, “So with us when we were minors we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the cosmos.” The term “elemental spirits” goes back to something I talked about previously; I think it was in my lecture when I talked about Stephen’s speech in Acts. This is that Greek word *stoichea*, *stoichea* is a very, very big major Greek word, it can be used in all kinds of ways. For one thing it just referred to ranks of soldiers. If soldiers were lined up in different ranks those ranks were *stoichea*, rows. It could refer to all kinds of other rows, it could refer to letters of an alphabet that could be talked about as *stoichea* because what do you do, you put them—you put all the letters of the alphabet in a row and you—and there are different elements. *Stoichea* also could refer to what we would call chemical elements, the table of elements; those would be called *stoichea* in Greek.

[19] For example, they took wind, fire, water, and air, and sometimes there were other four—earth sometimes, you’ve heard this theory right, that the Greeks believed and the ancient people believed there were four fundamental elements of all matter, and those—or sometimes they said six, sometimes eight, sometimes others, but

quite often they’d settle on four classical elements—and they believed that everything was made up of some combination of earth, fire, water, and air, and everything is some matter though. The thicker stuff has more earth in it and less air, the lighter stuff has more air in it and less earth, but all matter is made up of these four elements. These elements constitute the whole cosmos but what’s really interesting is, at least a lot of people in the ancient world believed that these—this term also referred to the sort of angelic or demonic, or godlike beings who constitute the universe also. In other words, they didn’t believe necessarily that air was simply an inert material.

[20] It also was a god or some kind of demonic being. Or some people would say that each of these different layers of the universe, say the layer that is earth or the layer that is water, or the layer that is air, or the top layer that is fire or ether, that those are all divine beings themselves, or they could talk about them as being not divine beings themselves but being ruled by divine beings. Even Jews, for example, would think that there were certain angels who were in charge of different rows of the universe. For example, if you—this is what we talked about in Gnosticism, if you wanted to go to God, according to some magical texts for example, you had to figure out the tricks to go through the different ranks of demons or angels that lived in the sky between you and God. One way to do that is to learn the secret passwords, so magical texts often will give you what look like passwords, because we’ve had this password, and when your soul is flying up to God, you can give the password to whatever demon or angel is guarding different gates between you and God. These *stoichea* refers to elements of the universe in a physical sense but it also refers to these spiritual beings that rule the cosmos, or even make up the stuff of the cosmos and a lot of ancient thought.

[21] Now notice what Paul is saying here, “When we were under the law we were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the universe.” Being under the law is being enslaved to these, and he says you want to go back to that slavery? Wait a minute, what are the Galatians doing? They’re not saying, we want to go back and serve idols. What Paul is saying is, when you served idols you were actually serving the *stoichea* of the universe. They weren’t real gods they were fake gods. These are some kind of angelic

beings or demonic beings. Paul, I think, believed they were real beings behind idols but they were demons or something like that, and the stoichea were those. The Galatians are not wanting to go back to idol worship apparently, what are they wanting to do? They're just thinking, well we're going to keep the Jewish law. But Paul, not they, equates keeping the Jewish law, if you're a Gentile, with going back to idolatry. That is radical, for any Jew in the first century to equate law observance, keeping kosher, being circumcised with actually worshipping idols. That's radical, and yet that's what Paul's doing here in Galatians.

[22] I say that because in 4:8 he says, "Formerly, when you did not know God you were enslaved to beings that are by nature not gods." That is you're enslaved to demons or some kind of other being like that. "Now however that you've come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly stoichea?" He's equating their attempt to keep kosher or be circumcised with their returning to idolatry. Then look what he says in his little exegesis in 4:21, here he has a good ten verses that are important so I'm going to read the whole ten verses.

Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law will you not listen to the law? [He's going to give you a little exegesis here.] For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. One, the child of a slave, was born according to the flesh, the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. Now this is an allegory, these women are two covenants. One woman in fact is Hagar from Mt. Sinai bearing children for slavery.

[23] Wait minute, Hagar is the slave of Abraham not his wife. Sarah is the wife of Abraham not his slave. Isaac, who then had Jacob, who then had Joseph and all the brothers, from whom the people of Israel came, came through Sarah not Hagar. According to Jewish mythology who were the descendants of Hagar and Ishmael?

[24] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[25] *Professor Dale Martin:* Pardon? Who are the—

[26] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[27] *Professor Dale Martin:* Not Muslims but Arabs. Yes—because not all Muslims—but according to Jewish mythology Arabs are the ones who descend from Hagar and Ishmael, not the Jews. Paul equates Hagar with Mt. Sinai, which is the mountain from which Moses got the law. Why does he connect Hagar who represents the non-Jews with Sinai which represents the law? You would think he would represent Sarah with Sinai. "Now Hagar is Mt. Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem ..." Jerusalem? Sarah should correspond to Jerusalem, "... for she is in slavery with her children, but the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above." Now he gets another Jerusalem, now there's some kind of heavenly Jerusalem that's—what's represented by Sarah. "

She is free and she is our mother. For it is written, "Rejoice, you childless one who bear no children, burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pains, for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous than the children of the one who is married." Now you my friends are children of promise like Isaac.

[28] Now he's talking to Gentiles here, he's not talking to Jews. He's saying, you Gentiles are children of promise, you're connected to Isaac. "But just as that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the spirit, so it is now also." Wait a minute, it seems like he's accusing the Jews of persecuting non-Jews, followers of Jesus.

What does the scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her child for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman." So friends we are children not of the slave but of the free woman.

[29] Drive out the slave woman. If he's equated the slave woman Hagar with Mt. Sinai, with Jerusalem in Judea, it seems like he's equating Hagar with the Jews, at least the law observant Jews, and he says, drive them out? That is very radical.

[30] And then finally he ends up later in Chapter 5:4 and then I'll move on, "You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ, you have fallen away from grace." Notice he's not saying that you're going to fall away from grace if you sin. That doesn't seem to be the problem. He's saying, if you Gentile followers of Jesus even attempt to keep the Jewish law, you'll be cut off from the grace of God. That's radical. It's no wonder that all this stuff got Paul into trouble.

[31] Now we don't know what happened with Paul's letters to the Galatians. We don't know whether he convinced them that he was right and the other people who were coming—telling them—teaching them to obey the law were wrong. We don't have second Galatians unfortunately, or any other letters. It has been pointed by some scholars that Paul never talks about the collection that he later takes up which—among his different churches which I'll talk about in a minute. He never talks about that in Galatians, nor does he ever mention the area of Galatians again to any of his other churches in other areas, and that's led some people to suggest, well maybe Paul lost the battle in the churches of Galatia, and, therefore, he just didn't deal with them anymore after that. We have references in his his letters to churches in Achaea, like Corinth. We have reference to his churches in Macedonia, we have reference to churches in Ephesus, we have reference to different churches where we know Paul founded churches, but we don't ever have any reference elsewhere to Galatia. Some people have said, maybe he lost the battle, maybe he lost the argument, and that's why we don't hear anymore about it. But we don't know that for sure. The letter though, if Paul went around teaching this kind of stuff, it clearly, though, got him in trouble with other people who just thought, not only was this wrong but it sounded antinomian, it sounded anti-law in general, and that leads us to Romans.

2. *Paul Nuances His Position in Romans*

[32] Now turn over to Romans. Romans is written in a very different situation, but let's first just see, what does Romans tell us about Paul's reputation with regard to the law? Look in Romans 3:8. Now in chapter 3 he's talking about a lot of different things about

justification by faith, apart from law, but just in verse 8 I'm just going to take a clue out here, "But why not say, as some people slander us by saying that we say, let us do evil that good may come? Their condemnation is deserved." Paul denies the charge, but is it very hard to imagine why some people who may have heard about the kinds of stuff he says about the law, the law was brought in to increase transgression, and then transgression increased so that God could have more grace and mercy? Doesn't that sound like Paul is saying, let us do evil so that good may come? Apparently some people thought it did, so Paul brings up the charge and denies it, but it shows that Paul had already developed by this time some kind of antinomian reputation.

[33] Notice what he says in Romans 6, in the sixth chapter: "What then are we to say, should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" It sounds like that would be the logical outcome, Paul. You've just said several times that as sin increased in the world grace increases more, so let's sin. We're not saved by doing good anyway, we're not saved by following the law, so let's just ignore the law and sin, and grace will abound. Paul again seems to be echoing something that could be a very logical charge against him. How does he answer it? "By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?" Here he goes on to answer the charge in the rest of Chapter 6 by saying, by coming—by being baptized in the Christ you have so vacated the whole realm of sin that it's inconceivable that you could go back to it. As long as you're in Christ you can have nothing to do with the whole world of sin. He gets rid of that charge, but we can see that some people saw that there was a logical connection between some of the things he had said in places like Galatians. He has to deny it.

[34] He does the same thing in 6:15, "What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" He says no, no, no, no by no means; that's not what I mean. You can see how he got the accusation. Then in 3:20, some of the other places he talks about the law in Romans. "For no human being will be justified in his sight by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes knowledge of sin." You can hear Paul's gears working, he's trying to nuance some of the things he's saying about the law so that it doesn't sound quite as radical as he had sounded in Galatians, and that he

may likely have sounded elsewhere. Right here he admits, therefore, well the law is good for some things, through the law came knowledge of sin, so that's a good thing.

[35] Look what he says in 3:21, right below that: "But now apart from law the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and it is attested by the law and the prophets." So both the Torah, the law, and the prophets at least bears witness to the righteousness of God, because, as you'll notice, throughout both Galatians and Romans, Paul quotes Jewish scripture more than he does in any of his other letters. It's precisely when Paul is dealing with the problem of what is the relationship between non-Jews to Jewish law that Paul actually quotes Jewish scripture the most, and that's in Galatians and Romans. Here he's saying we can look at the law and the prophets to learn about this doctrine of righteousness that I'm now saying to you because the law will attest to it. It's a much more positive view of the law. And then he also says, we uphold the law by doing this.

[36] Look at 3:27:

Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from what is prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not God of the Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one.

[37] Look at the last verse of that chapter: "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?" You would have thought from things that he said in Galatians that the answer to that would be "yes." "By no means, on the contrary, we uphold the law." And then look one more place here 7:12, Romans 7:12 –back up one verse to verse 11, "For sin seizing an opportunity in the commandment deceived me and through it killed me." Notice what happens here. Sin is talked about as this agent of the cosmos; sin is almost like one of the stoichea, kind of an intelligent being. This is actually a debate among scholars of Paul. Some people really believe that sin is a hypostatized intelligent being of some sort in the cosmos. Other people say no, no, Paul's talking metaphorically when he talks about sin in these words, and we need to see sin not at this actual hypostatized being

but simply a metaphor, a metaphorical being. So scholars themselves debate about what Paul means when he talks about sin as this agent. At least he talks about sin as the agent who uses the commandment, uses the law—where was I just reading?

[38] *Student:* 7:11.

[39] *Professor Dale Martin:* 7:11 yes, "Sin seizing an opportunity of the commandment," so sin uses the commandment to deceive the human beings and kill them. Paul is not talking about himself personally here; he's talking about himself as a representative of all human beings. Then he says, "So the law is holy and the commandment is holy, and just, and good." Doesn't it strike you that that little addition of verse 12 doesn't seem to follow so logically from verse 11? How can the law be holy, and just, and good if it's deceiving people? What's clearly going on is Paul is backing off the more radical things he's said about the law and trying to nuance this, and that's the question I'll ask.

[40] Let's read the rest of that,

For we know that the law is spiritual but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want; I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want I agree that the law is good, but in fact it is no longer I that do it, but the sin that dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want it is no longer I that do it but sin that lives within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self but I see in my members another law at work with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

[41] Well all of that is very confusing, and if you want to get a PhD you can do the exegesis of it for the rest of your life. The main thing I'm pointing out here is that Paul is being very careful to nuance a straightforwardly negative depiction of Jewish law and say that, well it's still good in a sense. It still is true, it's still holy, and he's doing this because I think he

knows that he's got a reputation as being anti-law and being antinomian.

3. *The Social Context of the Letter to the Romans*

[42] So why these differences between Romans and Galatians? Well we need to understand a little bit more about the Roman situation. First, Paul did not found the church in Rome; it grew up on its own by other people. According to church tradition, according to Roman Catholic tradition, Peter, the Apostle Peter founded the church in Rome, but that's tradition and we don't have any historical data to really prove it. And I personally believe that probably the church in Rome was started by anonymous Jews who happened to hear about Jesus and went to Rome and then started little house groups of Jesus followers on their own, and then Apostles came later, just like Paul seems to have gone there later. The Roman church, at the time Paul is writing this letter, is by this time no longer a purely Jewish group. They now seem to be predominantly Gentile, with some Jews in the churches in Rome also. And remember we're not talking about one church building or even one house church; we're talking about probably several different house churches that met in different people's houses, or in their apartments, in tenements and these sorts of things. Maybe some of them had more Judaism than others. But the overall church in Rome is by now apparently Gentile and when Paul writes Romans he directs his rhetoric to Gentiles. He does say hello to some Jews in the last chapter. He greets the Jews who are there that he knows. But if you look through the rhetoric of Romans, more and more of us scholars are convinced that the main recipients of Paul's rhetoric is supposed to be Gentile believers in Jesus.

[43] Why does Paul write this letter? Several different reasons, not just one. For one thing he can't write like he's written most of his other letters as talking to a group he founded. He can't talk about himself as their father in the faith in that way, he can't set himself up as their Apostle in a straightforward way because he's never been there at this point. He didn't found the churches there, so he's writing a letter, this is one of the very, very few things we have of him—well the only letter perhaps where he writes a letter to a church that he himself didn't found, so that's important. What

do we find out? Why is he writing it? Look at 15—Romans 15:22:

This is the reason I have so often been hindered from coming to you. [so he's wanted to go to Rome] But now with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you once I have enjoyed your company for a little while.

[44] Paul sees himself as the Apostle to the Gentiles, as Peter was the Apostle to the Jews. So why not?—I mean he didn't found the church there but if he believes that he's already done all this missionizing in Asia Minor and Greece. It's kind of ironic for Paul to say this because what had he actually done? Christianity wasn't this big movement with thousands of people everywhere. It wasn't even like there was a Christian church in each city or town, but Paul seems to act like he's done everything he can in the East. Yep, everything in Greece and Asia Minor, my churches are all doing great, I got to get out of here, my work here is done. And so he's taking off to the west. It's kind of exaggerating, I think, just exactly what he's accomplished, but in his mind by planting a few house churches in major cities, he's sort of done the first job of evangelization that he saw himself called by God and sent out to do. Now he's looking to the west, and he wants to go to Spain, and so he's going to stop in Rome. Notice how he says, "I want you to send me on." That Greek actually means that he's asking them—he's asking them for a financial contribution, sending him along is not just, hey Paul don't let the door hit your butt on the way out! It's sending him along with money. What he's doing is saying, I want a little contribution from you so I want some support from you, both symbolic support and financial support. That's what he's—he's writing to them to talk about his further mission to Spain. He's writing to them also because Rome is the center of the earth for the Romans and for many people, and so he's the Apostle to the Gentiles of the whole earth. So what more likely place for him to go than to Rome, at least some time, on his way to Spain. That's one thing he's doing.

[45] We'll keep reading there at 15:25. "At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints." A liturgy, he's taking some help to what he calls "the saints" in Jerusalem. "The saints" just means "the holy ones," he's probably talking about believing Jews, Jews in Judean Jerusalem who believe that Jesus is the Messiah. So he's taking them some kind of help too.

For Macedonia and Achaea [remember his churches in Philippi and Thessalonica or in Macedonia, his church in Corinth is in Achaea] have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them. For the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they also ought to be of service to them in material things.

[46] He's taking money that he's been collecting in his different churches that are Gentiles churches back as a gift to the poor followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, the Jews.

So when I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain. And I know that when I come I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

[47] This collection was much more important to Paul than a lot of modern Christians seem to think. It's just kind of—all churches take up money. But remember Paul had agreed when he met in Jerusalem with Peter, James, and John, and other people, that he would go to the Gentiles, and they didn't have to circumcise the Gentiles. Peter would go to the Jews. The one thing they said was, remember the poor. And so this was interpreted that in the different churches that Paul founded among non-Jews, he would continue to take up financial contributions to send back to Jerusalem. This was partly, just of course, they were poorer there. But it's also apparently seen by Paul as very symbolically important. The giving of money from the Gentile churches to the Jerusalem churches would be an acknowledgement by them, by the Gentiles, of the somewhat superiority, at least in time in the Gospel. They got their Gospel from the Jews; it's an acknowledgement of the importance

and the centrality of Jews in the Jesus movement by Gentiles.

[48] It's also reciprocal. Remember I talked about—we talked about the patron client structures and we've talked about gifts, and people giving things to other people. In the ancient world the whole patron client structure was very much centered around giving and receiving, so if I give you something you're indebted to me and if you don't want to be shamed you have to give something back to me, so giving and receiving is always a very important issue with status and relationships and friendships in the ancient world, whether you're talking about equals or people on different statuses. Paul is setting up the relationship between the Judean churches, predominantly Jewish, and his Gentile churches that he's founded as something like a patron client structure where the Jews gave the Gentiles something, the Gospel; now the Gentiles owe it to the Jewish followers to give them something. So he's taking this collection. Paul has talked about this collection in several of his letters, it's been very important to him, and so he's on his way to Jerusalem to do this.

[49] But now notice what happens. We know a little bit about Paul's last trip to Jerusalem as is depicted in Acts. How does Acts portray this? Paul goes to Jerusalem, he's got some Gentiles with him, he's got some other Jews with him. He goes to the temple purely to pray, to be a good Jew. Other people, non-believing Jews, see him there, and they think that he's trying to bring Gentiles into the temple. So he's arrested, he's tried, and then he has to eventually appeal to Caesar to get to Rome. What does Acts tell us about the collection? What happened to the collection in Acts? We don't know. The writer of Acts may have known about this collection. It was certainly one of the most important things to Paul in his ministry. The writer of Acts tells us nothing. Notice also, Paul seems to be a little nervous if you read between the lines, because what happens if he's collected all this money and he takes it to Jerusalem and the Jewish leaders say, Paul do you know what kind of rumors have been flying about what you're saying about the law? Do you know what we've heard? We're not going to take your money; we're not going to justify your activities. I think Paul was concerned that the Jerusalem churches wouldn't take his money, and that

would be catastrophic for his vision of having a united church, that included both Jews and Gentiles.

[50] He writes to the Romans partly because he's going to Spain and he wants to prepare the ground for a trip to Rome and to Spain, but also he goes so carefully to explain what he really believes about the law and justification, because I think, he's afraid of what may happen in Jerusalem. He's, in a sense, trying to get the Roman Christians on his side before his trip to Jerusalem.

[51] That takes us to what's become a new interpretation of Romans. I'm going to do this quickly and we can talk about it maybe more after the break, but the traditional interpretation of Romans was that this was Paul's theological treatise. It didn't have much of anything to do with the circumstances. Paul just kind of decided he was going to Rome, so he sits down and he says, what's really my Gospel in 16 chapters? He writes it up; he sends it to the churches in Rome to present my Gospel to them. This is sort of a theological treatise, and the main point of the treatise is: you're not justified by works of law, by any works no matter which law, you're justified by grace through faith alone.

[52] The big Protestant, the Lutheran, the Calvinist reading of Romans set Romans as the center book of the Bible, and it's thought that what it's mainly about is individual salvation, your personal salvation. You need to recognize that you won't be saved by your works, by anything you do. Not only you're not saved by Jewish law; you're not saved by Roman Catholic rules, you're not saved by any law, you're saved by putting your faith in Jesus, accepting Jesus as your Lord and personal Savior, or something like that. It's individual salvation, and it's a doctrine of individual salvation by faith that's the reason Paul wrote Romans. And that's what its central message is: very individualistic, very doctrinal, very theological.

[53] That reading of Romans has been severely challenged in the last forty years or so. Now people are starting to say it's not the first few chapters of Romans that constitute the most important part of Romans, which has always been the Protestant interpretation, because that's where Paul talks doctrinally about

justification by faith. Scholars have said now, look to the end of Romans, chapter 9-11 the latter part of Romans, that's where you'll see what the real point of Romans is, and it's not about individual salvation. It's about the relationship between the nations—when I say “Gentiles” remember that's just a term that Jews used for all the nations except themselves, so when I say “the nations” I mean all non-Jewish peoples in the ancient world. That's the way the Gentiles [correction: Jews] used the term. In fact, “Gentiles” is just sort of Latinized translation of the Greek work “nations.” When you see “Gentiles” in Paul's text, read “nations,” they refer to the non-Jewish nations. What's the relationship of the nations to Israel and the God of Israel?

[54] Look at a few places. In chapter 9 Paul basically gives this apocalyptic expectation, he even quotes Hosea saying, “The people who are not my people will be my people.” In other words, again Paul's quoting Jewish scripture to enforce his belief that at the end of time Gentiles would become people of God and this was common in Jewish apocalyptic idea. The basic scenario was, the Messiah's going to come at the end. The Messiah will bring in—will overthrow the oppressors of the Jews, and the Messiah will bring in all the other nations, all the nations, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans will all come to the temple in Jerusalem. They'll bring gifts; they'll all worship the God of Israel. You find this in Isaiah; you find it in Hosea. So Jewish scripture itself gave Jews of Paul's day the idea that the apocalyptic end would bring all the nations in. The Messiah had already come for Paul, so that's why he seems himself as going to get the Gentiles in. His whole mission is part of this end time scenario.

[55] What does that mean? Look at Romans 11:13:

I'm speaking to you Gentiles, [so he turns directly to the Romans] in as much then as I am an Apostle of the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If a part of dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy. If the root is holy then the branches are also holy.

[56] Paul gives a theology here of the remnant. Some of the—a lot of the Jews have not accepted that Jesus is the Messiah. Therefore, they seem to be cut off, they're like branches of an olive tree that are cut off. And the Gentiles, who are not natural branches of the olive tree, have been grafted in their place. That means that they're part of Israel now. Notice what this means.

That you may not claim to be wiser than you are brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery. A hardening has come upon part of Israel [some of the Jews don't believe] until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. [That's his job is trying to bring in the full number of the Gentiles.] And so all Israel will be saved.

[57] Wow, all Israel? Notice he doesn't explain how this happens, but in Romans 9-11 Paul presents this magnificent scenario that he believes was prophesied in Jewish scripture itself. That at the end of this cosmos, the end of this world, the Messiah would come, overthrow the oppressors of the Jews, set up Jerusalem as the center of the earth. And then all the Gentiles, all the nations, would come to

the God of Israel, they would be grafted into the nation of Israel, they would worship the God of Israel. Paul's addition to this myth is simply that you don't need to keep the law in order to do this. All that Paul is saying about the law is secondary to his main point, which is, you're now part of Israel.

[58] Paul is not about starting a new religion. There's no "Christianity" in Paul. There are no "Christians" in Paul's letters. You can't find the word. You can't find the concept. There's no "Christianity" or "Christians" in Paul's world. He believed that he was the Apostle to the Gentiles to bring them into Israel to make the Gentiles part of Israel. Then, as he says right here, most wildly along he somehow believes, although he doesn't tell us how it's going to happen, that somehow God and God's miraculous mercy is going to figure out a way in the end to even bring all of Israel back in also. All Israel, he says, will be saved. Paul's not necessarily the first Christian theologian. He's one of the most radical Jewish theologians in the ancient world. Okay, we'll stop now and papers will be handed out. You all come up here to hand out the papers.

[end of transcript]