

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Lecture 1

Introduction

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session 1, Introduction.

Paul's letter to the Romans has had a major impact throughout history.

In 2 Timothy 1:15, we read that all those who were in Asia had turned away from Paul. Kind of a sad ending you might think for Jeremiah the prophet in the Old Testament. But like Jeremiah, Paul's teachings lived on after him.

In the next generation and succeeding generations, these changed the course of history. In the case of Paul's letter to the Romans, we see that throughout history it had a major impact. We see Origen writing a very valuable commentary on Romans and others.

We come to more recent times, certainly Martin Luther. It was Romans that revolutionized his view of depending on what Christ had done for salvation. John Wesley, hearing Luther's preface to Romans being read in the Aldersgate Chapel, felt his heart strangely warmed.

Romans continues to speak to Christians today. Christian scholars, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, all across the board, approach Romans as a magnificent masterpiece that pulls together a lot of Paul's teaching. Now, it wasn't meant to be a systematic theology the way it's often treated, but certainly, it has implications for what we do when we systematize our theology because it touches on a number of major points.

We need to look first at the genre, letters versus epistles. That was an earlier distinction. It was based on the papyri.

Some people said, well, you have literary epistles like those of Seneca and so on. They also had ordinary letters like Seneca, Cicero, and Pliny wrote ordinary letters too, but sometimes you had letter essays like Seneca's letter on consolation to Marcella or other kinds of works. But when people discovered the papyri, they got very excited and scholars like Adolph Deissmann said, well, Paul's letters are more like the papyri.

They are not on this elite level. Actually though, when you compare the papyri, they don't look like the average papyrus documents. The vocabulary is often koine.

It's the kind of ordinary vocabulary that ordinary people used. But most of the papyri, averaged about 87 words. Well, somewhere around the length of Philemon, a bit longer, or 3rd John or something like that.

Cicero's average was about 295 words, which could go as high as 2,530 words. Seneca's usually averaged around 995 words, up to 4,134 words. But Paul's averaged around 2,495 words.

His longest extant letter is Romans, 7,114 words, depending on the textual variance. So quite different than what we find in the papyrus letters. Indeed, Paul uses not just what you find in ordinary letters.

I mean, he's got an epistolary frame, opening, and conclusion like you have in letters. But in some letters, including Romans, he's also got argumentation, which was not what we find normally in ordinary business documents or letters of greeting or invitations to parties and so on that we find usually in the papyri. But argumentation is what we find more often in speeches or letter essays than making a case.

Now, today, rhetorical critics have pointed out that Paul's letters are not elite. They're not like Cicero or Pliny or some of the others. But neither are they off the top of his head.

These were carefully constructed. And we need to take into account the commitment that this required to his project. They didn't have shorthand available.

There was some shorthand, but probably not very much. It was just coming into vogue. And dictation to Tertius, who was the scribe who wrote down Romans, according to Romans 16.22, he sends his own greetings, probably a believer himself.

Probably, given ordinary dictation and taking it down, it may have taken Paul over 11 hours to dictate Romans, even though we can read it much faster. Probably he went through at least two drafts, given the length of the document and what we know about those things. The papyrus and possibly the labor, if Tertius was paid for this, would come out to about 20.68 denarii.

Randy Richards has given us this estimate. In today's currency in the U.S., that would be somewhere around \$2,275. So, we need to take those things into account.

This wasn't just written off the top of his head. Hi, Bob, how are you doing? I'm doing great. Hope to see you soon.

This was something into which he put a lot of thought because he really wanted to put the best communication possible into this letter to reach the church, or the church as the saints in Rome, the set-apart ones in Rome. How do we read letters?

Well, between rhetorical criticism and epistolary criticism, that's helped us with Paul's letters, we're leaving aside technical distinctions between letters and epistles, which actually weren't often followed in practice except for letter essays. But ancient rhetorical handbooks provide different sub-genres of letters.

Letters of reproof, like Galatians, and letters of recommendation, like Philemon. There were rules for how to write the various kinds of letters and the different parts of letters. However, these appear in rhetorical handbooks much later than in Paul's day.

In fact, rhetorical handbooks don't actually deal with letters until much later than Paul's day. But there are some things that are in common that we can learn from these. Parts of letters.

Well, not surprisingly, you have an introduction, body, and conclusion. If something's well-written, that's not really a big surprise. But anyway, we'll look at the way the introductions were written because this does fit what we know of ancient letters.

The author, in this case Paul, is an apostle, and then he can go on to describe himself as he wishes. To the audience. So today, in English, you might say dear so-and-so.

In emails, we often say hi, so and so. Or just skip all the technical language and just jump right into it. But in his day, the name of the author.

Then you would say to whom you were writing. In this case, to the saints or to the consecrated ones, the set-apart ones in Rome. And then greetings.

The typical greeting in Greek was *kairein*, which means greetings. However, it's adapted in Paul's letters and in some of the other letters in the New Testament. You still have *kairein* in Acts 15:23.

You still have *kairein* in James 1:1 or 1:2. But you have in some other letters, you have Paul's letters. You have 1 Peter, and 2 Peter in a different way. You have it in Revelation 1. So, it's in a number of different early Christians documents.

Paul may have been the first one to do this. We don't know. But instead of having *kairein*, greetings, we have *karis*, grace.

The term sounds similar to some extent, but he has grace in adapting the typical Greek greeting. And peace adopted the standard Jewish greeting, which was *shalom* in Hebrew. *Shalom aleichem*, peace to you all.

Or *shalom leka*, peace to you. But in Romans and elsewhere in Paul's writings, he's writing in Greek. So, it's a *kairēnē*, peace in Greek.

Grace and peace to you, combining Greek and Jewish greetings. Paul was not the first to do that. Christians were not the first to do that.

We find some others who combine these in some Jewish sources where they'd say something like mercy and peace be with you, or so on. But in this diaspora context, the Christians are especially doing this. What is more significant is how these terms functioned.

Grace to you or peace to you. These were blessings. They were what some scholars have called wish prayers.

If I say, God bless you, I'm addressing you, but I'm implicitly also addressing God, praying that God will bless you. As I'm saying, God bless you. Just like when Isaac blessed Jacob, he may be speaking to Jacob, thinking he's speaking to Esau, but he's invoking God.

He's expecting God to do this for him. And as we have blessings in the Old Testament, also this continues. Peace be with you.

Peace does not mean just, may you not be in a war, although that may be included, but grace and peace be with you. May everything be well with you. I pray that things are good for you.

It was common to have an opening prayer in ancient letters, often a prayer for a person's health. May you prosper and be in health as your soul prospers, as in 3 John. That was common in ancient letters.

But what's significant here, is he also has a thanksgiving for them, which is common in Paul's letters, often summarizes this theme, and often has a separate prayer for them as well, like you'll find here, starting in verse 8 of Romans 1. But what's most significant is that this now becomes grace and peace, a blessing, not just from God the Father, or not grace to you from the Lord Serapis, as some Gentiles would say, as they would send letters giving blessings from their gods. But this is grace and peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. You gave a blessing from deity.

And so right here, right up front in Paul's letters, he is indicating the knowledge that he shares in common with his congregations, that Jesus is divine. Well, you have the introduction to the letter, and we'll come back and look at Paul's introduction to Romans 1 in somewhat more detail. You also have the body of the letter.

It has different parts for different kinds of letters. Some were common in many kinds of letters. Now, what we have here is when you have argumentation, this is

rhetorical criticism, where some kinds of speeches, and therefore some kinds of argumentation, you have narrative or a narratio, the events leading up to the situation.

You have that in Galatians 1. He narrates the events leading up to his writing. Sometimes you would have a thesis statement. Thesis is the Greek name, *propositio*, proposition in Latin, stating the case.

We probably have that in Romans, in Romans 1, verses 16 and 17. And then you would often, again, not usually in letters, but in speeches, you would have an argument, sometimes with proofs. In certain kinds of speeches, you would have an argument and proofs, *probatio* in Latin.

For example, in Paul's case, scripture quotations. Well, there's been a debate about how much rhetoric Paul uses in his letters. We'll talk about that in a little while.

Yeah, we'll talk about that in a little while. He probably does not arrange them like speeches, although that's also a matter of debate. But he certainly uses rhetorical devices.

The hermeneutic, is how to understand letters. Letters were intended as communications. Letter essays may have been more general, general epistles, but most letters were intended to communicate something to a particular audience.

Well, when you have secondary communication, something that was communicated to an audience other than yourself, it helps you to find out something about that audience so that you'll better understand what was being communicated. Relevance theory suggests that we often communicate in ways that by themselves will be incomplete. Words have meanings in social contexts.

If I say, coffee, please, well, coffee please is shorthand for would you please give me coffee? But if I say, would you please give me coffee to a waiter or a waitress and I spell it out the whole way, that may seem strange if they're used to coffee, please. If I speak of 9-11 in the United States since 2001, everybody knows what we mean when we say 9-11. But if somebody in the future is writing sometime after the power grid goes down and everything except paper copies have been lost, and they have to do research a century or two from now to figure out what 9-11 means in a U.S. context, they're not going to know without doing background research on 9-11.

Well, Paul writes letters to individual congregations and therefore will understand those letters better if we get the background. For myself, when I was, I'd just been a Christian for a few years, converted from a non-Christian unchurched background, but I was reading like 40 chapters of the Bible a day and I began to see, whoa, the

background makes a difference because it was actually in Romans. Romans 1:7, Paul says that he's writing these things to the believers in Rome.

And I was like, okay, well, I'm memorizing this verse over here and this verse over here, but I'm ignoring some of these verses in between. For if Paul says he's writing this to the church in Rome, chances are the believers in Rome know some of the issues that he's addressing. They know why he's addressing this.

They know what he means sometimes by these things. Some things he doesn't have to explain are just part of the general shared culture, but I don't know them. And it was because of that that I began digging into ancient culture.

It was because of that I wrote the IVP Bible background commentary. It's because of that that I eventually went on and became a biblical scholar because otherwise, I was just going to read the Bible on my own and preach it. But for the background, I needed to do more research and try to make that research available to others to put it at their fingertips.

Paul applies some of the same principles that he applies in Romans. He applies some of the same principles elsewhere, but the particular situation in Rome makes those general principles concrete for this letter. And that also gives us a model for how we need to concretely apply Paul's principles in our settings today as well.

We need to take this into account when we look at letters or other things from antiquity, I mean, this could also apply to some extent to ancient philosophers and other sages. But here all the more, for those of us who are Christians who hear the Bible as God's word, we want to distinguish between moral issues and what are just cultural issues. Sometimes we have transcultural moral norms.

For instance, Paul has vice lists in Romans 1:28 to 31, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10, Galatians 5:19 to 21. These are things that are pretty much condemned across the board and he condemns them regularly, many of them in his letters, sexual sins, slander, gossip, greed, and so on. Transcultural moral norms.

Now, when I say that some things reflect a particular cultural situation, I'm not saying that things in the Bible are not for all time. I'm just saying that not all things in the Bible are for all circumstances. If we want to apply them rightly, we need to make sure we apply them to analogous circumstances.

And so, it's important to look at the culture to see what the transcultural norms are and also to see how he applies them concretely so we can reapply them concretely in different cultural settings. Paul didn't tell us what to do about nuclear weapons. He didn't address some very crucial ethical issues today.

The Didache speaks about abortion, but Paul doesn't specifically name it in his letters. It seems kind of surprising that he doesn't, but there are issues today we want to address. We have to look for the principles in these letters.

Well, you have transcultural moral norms, but chances are it's not transcultural if Paul allows different practices in different passages. And for the whole Bible, for biblical theology, if we have different passages that allow different practices. 1 Timothy 5:14, women are secluded in the home.

And that was considered the appropriate role for matrons in Ephesus where 1 Timothy is addressed in 1 Timothy 5:14. Women working outside the home. Well, we have that in Proverbs 31:16, Genesis 29:9, and Song of Solomon 1:6. It's a different culture. I would also apply that to some other gender issues like comparing 1 Timothy 2:12 with Judges 4:4 and so on.

Not everybody agrees with me on that. There are a lot of differences of opinion on how we apply cultural background in certain details. But on most issues in Romans, we'll find a consensus.

There will be some issues where there are some major debates going on today, and I will at least try to make those known to you. We need to understand the cultural options available to the writer. For example, if they wrote in an era when nobody was trying to abolish all of slavery, that they don't explicitly address an issue that nobody was raising doesn't mean that they would have sided with slavery supporters if somebody had raised the issue.

I think I can make a pretty strong argument from Ephesians that the abolitionists who were against slavery understood the spirit of Paul a whole lot more correctly than those who were trying to use Paul in support of slavery. He addresses a situation that exists, but in terms of what he thought should have existed when he speaks of your masters doing the same things to them, Ephesians 6:9, and says we have the same master in heaven. Well, I think that kind of suggests that Paul was more radical than most of his contemporaries, and I've argued that in print elsewhere.

But many different things are controversial, not only that but even the authorship of Ephesians, although I agree with those who argue that it's Pauline. But by contrast, while you have different things in different parts of the Bible that seem to point in different directions, suggesting that cultural issues are at play, the Bible sometimes speaks with a unanimous voice against some elements of culture. Greeks in Paul's day held various views regarding premarital sex and homosexual intercourse.

But the Bible condemns all sexual intercourse outside of heterosexual marriage in every passage that mentions them. That suggests that it's something that reflects all

of biblical theology, rather than merely a particular cultural situation. That, like everything else, is debated by some people.

So, I'll explore some of that in more detail, but this is the direction that I believe that it does point. Rhetoric was pervasive in antiquity. It was the dominant discipline.

The two forms of tertiary training, the two forms of advanced training, were philosophy and rhetoric. Rhetoric was more valued often by speakers in the marketplace and civic assemblies than philosophy was. More people went into rhetoric.

Speakers would be heard speaking, using rhetorical principles in the marketplace, certainly in civic assemblies, and public competitions. So, you didn't actually have to be trained in rhetoric to be accustomed to hearing people using rhetorical devices, or accustomed to hearing people following a certain structure in their argument. It was just part of literate communication back then.

Different genres used different structures, of course. I don't agree with those who try to arrange the Gospel of Mark or something like that as if it were a speech. I don't think that makes any sense.

Ancient biographies were not arranged that way. But argumentation did follow certain principles of rhetoric. This became so much the case that in the second century, in the heyday of the second Sophistic, some of the New Testament, and certainly the Greek translation of the Old Testament, became embarrassing to Christians who were trying to defend it as inspired.

Because by these later standards, people were looking back on these earlier documents and saying, no, it should have been this way with precise Attic, Athenian, the old classical Athenian way of using rhetoric. Well, that's kind of anachronistic because that wasn't the dominant way of communicating in the times and places where these documents were written, although we have a few Atticisms in the New Testament. But the church fathers had to address this.

And the church fathers often used rhetorical criticism because many of them were trained in rhetoric. And so, they used that in understanding the letters. Melancthon, who was Luther's successor, was trained as a humanist, and so he also practiced rhetorical criticism.

It came again into use in the late 20th century and early 21st century. Expectations were not as high in Paul's circle as they would have been for orators, but Paul still uses some rhetorical devices. Now, the problem is that Paul is not writing speeches.

He's writing letters. And so here there's been criticism of rhetorical critics. Rhetorical handbooks in this period omit letters.

Later rhetorical handbooks do not treat them as speeches. The speech outlines that we have in rhetorical handbooks don't even fit most speeches because once orators were trained in them, once they learned how to do it, they felt free to adapt them as needed. So, you find a lot of differences with actual speeches, which is why it's good not to read just rhetorical handbooks, but also to read ancient speeches.

Orators' letters and this is perhaps the most important observation in this case, orators' letters, like the letters of Cicero, Pliny, or Phranto in the second century. Cicero is pre-Christian. Pliny is early second century.

Phranto is mid-second century. Their letters were not like speeches. In fact, I find more rhetorical devices in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and much of 2 Corinthians than I find in the letters of Cicero and Pliny because they weren't giving speeches and you weren't supposed to write letters the way you wrote speeches.

So how can ancient rhetoric help us understand Paul's letters, if at all? Well, we do have some rhetoric in Paul because Paul's letters, most of Paul's letters at least, are not normal letters. Most of Paul's letters that have been preserved for us include substantial argumentation, such as you would find in a letter essay. Therefore, even though we're not going to expect these letters to be outlined just like speeches, at least most of them, we're going to we're going to find the value of rhetorical devices.

Sometimes Paul will end successive clauses with the same phrase or the same sound. He'll begin successive clauses with the same wording. Those were standard rhetorical devices.

And they actually, once you start looking for them, you find a lot of them in Paul's letters. And some others who haven't explored it in terms of ancient rhetoricians still find these figures of speech and these ways of speaking as what they call oral communication in Paul's letters. What we've done by drawing on ancient rhetoric is just to say, well, Paul wasn't the only one who did this.

Let's look at how some other people also used these rhetorical devices, not just in speeches, but in some other settings as well. Although Paul does it more in letters than you would expect because he's also good at argumentation. Education in Tarsus, where Paul was from, according to the Book of Acts, was thought the greatest philosophic center in antiquity.

Others would have said that it was Alexandria, but both had surpassed Athens by this period. There were a lot of Stoics. Stoicism was the prevailing when I say prevailing, the predominant philosophic orientation among philosophers in this period.

It's the most popular of philosophic orientations, more than Epicureanism, more than Platonism, which became dominant again later. We find a number of points of contact between Paul and Stoicism in his letters, as well as between Paul and sometimes Platonism, but I think Stoicism more often. I would not argue that Paul had any training as a Stoic, but I think Abraham Malherbe, who used to be a professor at Yale Divinity School, I think Malherbe put it well in one of his books where he speaks of Paul and the popular philosophers.

He knew the language of popular philosophy. He'd been ministering for a long time. He'd been dialoguing with people for a long time.

He knew the language that they could relate to, and he knew how to articulate things in the language of his day, and how to contextualize for his audience. And we'll see a few examples of that, so taking that into account. Rhetoric was also an advanced discipline in Tarsus.

Tarsians often did their advanced discipline abroad. And of course, if you were Jewish, you would want to do your advanced discipline probably in the Torah, and what better place than Jerusalem? But Acts 22.3 seems to suggest that Paul actually went abroad before the advanced level, before the tertiary level. That is probably from other things we see in Acts, which I do take very seriously.

I wrote a four-volume commentary on Acts. Acts suggests that probably his family moved to Jerusalem when he was still fairly young, so he's got the best of both worlds in a sense. And in Jerusalem, if he studied with Gamaliel, as Acts 22.3 says, probably comes from a family of means.

He got a good education. Gamaliel, according to Jewish tradition, you could be educated not only in the Torah but you could also be educated in some things related to Greek. Paul doesn't seem to have a great knowledge of Greek classics.

He cites them very rarely, and where he cites them, it's the kind of thing that was very commonly known from just manuals of quotations and so on. But he cites the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, all over the place, and that's undoubtedly what he did, his advanced training in. But just like a preacher today who may have advanced training in the Bible, but at least a course or two in homiletics, in preaching.

Well, Paul probably had some training in speaking at a lower level, and whatever training he had, he certainly had the opportunity to develop over the years as he was often doing it. Paul would have had the best of both worlds as a Greek-speaking Jew in Jerusalem in terms of his education. Studying with Gamaliel at the feet of

Gamaliel, in Galatians 1:14, Paul says that he was advancing beyond his contemporaries.

So, he's trained in scripture. He is probably at least exposed to some rhetoric. He learns about some philosophy.

He has a facility in Greek intellectual discourse. In Judea, that was available only in Jerusalem. Wealthy people sent their children to Alexandria, Athens, Ephesus, or Tarsus, but for Torah, especially in Greek, Jerusalem was the place to go.

And some could teach in Jerusalem. Josephus was fluent. His Greek is very fluent.

He says he had a style editor to help him because of his language. Probably that means his koine had very much Semitic influences. Well, let me not get into the debates about where koine comes from, but in any case, Josephus probably had a style editor to help his Greek, but Josephus clearly knew Greek.

We see him in settings where he's speaking with people in Greek. So, Josephus was fluent in Greek. Gamaliel's household apparently was fluent in Greek, and diaspora immigrants certainly would know Greek as well.

Studying with professors is a great thing. Professors are always normal people, as you can tell by looking at me. But in any case, Paul's letters provide evidence that, in fact, he was pretty well educated.

I mean, he wasn't part of the elite. He wasn't a Cicero. He wasn't a Seneca.

He wasn't a Pliny in rhetoric, although in content he has very high-level argumentation. But if you compare him with the papyri, ordinary business documents, Paul didn't have just a grammatical education, the lowest level of education. Paul had clearly more education than that.

The content of his letters differs from that, though, of highly respected Greek orators. We have, as I mentioned earlier, we don't have a lot of classical quotations. That was how educated people showed off back then.

Their education was by inappropriate moments, including quips from previous writers. Instead, it's full of subdued quotes. Paul wasn't a professor of rhetoric.

He wasn't a professional rhetorician. He wasn't an orator. I like to compare him to a seminarian who had some homiletic courses and was a Bible major.

That may reflect my own bias because guess what? I was a Bible major. But in any case, some portraits of Paul in the past century of scholarship. About a century ago,

there were some people arguing that Paul was a Hellenistic Jew, unfamiliar with Jerusalem, and didn't really know much about Jerusalem.

Montefiore, who had a lot of good information, and a lot of things, suggested that. But he underestimates the Hellenization of Judea and Galilee, as a number of scholars have shown, starting with some Jewish scholars in the 1960s and actually earlier. Saul Lieberman, though, in that period, other scholars, Tcherikover and others, but especially established by Martin Hengel in the 1970s, that Hellenization had gone very far by the first century.

That was true in Judea and lower Galilee, as well as many other places. Not to say it's the same as in the diaspora outside of Judea and Galilee, but there was a lot of Hellenization already there. So, Paul could still be somebody who thrived in Judea, who thrived in Jerusalem.

Also, Paul's own writings. Philippians 3:5, Paul tells us that he was a Pharisee, a Pharisee of Pharisees. Well, when we read about Pharisees elsewhere in ancient literature, we read about them in Jerusalem.

He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. So same passage. Paul tells us that he had this kind of training.

He also tells us that he had an advanced Jewish education in Galatians 1:13 and 14. He also tells us that he persecuted the church in Judea, Galatians 1:22 to 23. He didn't just come from the diaspora and just show up in Jerusalem to persecute the church in Judea without having another reason to be in Judea.

He already had been in Judea before this happened. Another approach was to view Paul as a Palestinian Jew, as a number of people put it, a rabbinic Pharisaic portrait of Paul with W. D. Davies and others. W. D. Davies argued that Paul was a Messianic Pharisee, a Pharisee who believed that the Messiah had come.

And E. P. Sanders, who was one of my own professors, one of my own mentors in my doctoral work, E. P. Sanders argues that he has a book called Paul and Palestinian Judaism and places Paul in that context. Now, even though that's Ed Sanders' expertise, Paul and Palestinian Judaism or Jesus and Palestinian Judaism, he would not limit that to the full background of the New Testament. What he told me was one time, you know, originally when he started, what he wanted to do was do a comparison of Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism, but life is only so long and he didn't get around to all of it.

But he says, you know, I really respect what Abraham L. Herbie has done with the Epistles and so on. So, these are not mutually exclusive options. Paul did have a Hellenistic Jewish background.

He also had a Palestinian Jewish background. And also, something that prevailed out of the Yale School, I had E. P. Sanders at Duke, the cosmopolitan Greco-Roman background. That was argued earlier by Edwin Judge, who was a classicist teaching in Australia from New Zealand.

I had the privilege of talking with him several years ago in Australia. And Abraham L. Herbie, who picked up some of that from him, and Wayne Meeks at Yale. Well, there's also a widespread focus on rhetoric, for instance, Ronald Hawke, Ben Witherington, and others, and philosophy.

For example, Tuls Amberg Pedersen, is a classicist who's a scholar of Stoic philosophy. Some have argued that some have, well, nobody agrees with everything that everybody else says. But there's something that we can learn from many of these others.

Also, Jeff Wyma, and Stanley Porter on epistolary background, the way epistles were written back then. We can learn from many of these different scholars, and many other scholars. The danger of me starting to list some is that I'm leaving out a lot of them, including some of my good friends, Linda Belleville, and others.

But Paul blends all of these backgrounds. I mean, all of these are part of his background. He uses what he has, which is considerable, to reach his culture, just like we should try to take into account the cultures that we're reaching and be culturally sensitive without compromising at all God's true message that's been given to us in the scriptures.

Paul in the Torah, was devoted to the Torah, to the law, before his calling. But he discovered that such zeal had led him not to God, but actually to rebel against what God was doing. I guess I can identify with this because I was an atheist before my conversion.

And I was so arrogant about my intellect. And I eventually discovered that my intellect had led me just in exactly the wrong way. And I realized that the smartest thing in the world is to trust that God is infinitely smarter than we are.

It doesn't mean I don't keep trying to figure things out. I do my best. Scripture says the hidden things belong to God, but it also says God hides things, but kings search out things.

I'm not a king, but he's given us our intellects for a reason. We can search for things. We're going to see a lot about the mind in Paul's letter to the Romans and some of Paul's other letters, too, Philippians, 1 Corinthians, chapter 2, and so forth.

But a mind informed by the Spirit, a mind that's led by God, is the mind that's going to go in the best way. Because remember, as Proverbs says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. So, Paul was devoted to the Torah.

He studied it. But he had the wrong framework. And intellect can sometimes solve details.

But if we've got the wrong overall framework, we may miss the big picture, which makes a whole lot more sense. And then when we become believers, anyway, things make so much more sense now than they did when I was an atheist. I was really so wrong.

But thanks be to God. And thanks be to God in Paul's case. He was devoted to the Torah before his calling.

He discovered such zeal that led him in the wrong way. The problem, he says, though, in his letters was not the Torah itself. It was not the law.

It was not God's instruction in the scriptures. The problem was flesh. We are finite beings.

We are vulnerable and susceptible to temptation, to pride, to covetousness, whatever. The written Torah doesn't save us, Paul came to believe. Only God can make us righteous.

We need the Torah written in our hearts. Well, how did this relate to what other Jewish people taught? Well, it depends on what segment of Judaism you're talking about. I mean, the Sadducees held quite different views from the Pharisees, for example.

But Paul uses some ad hoc arguments at times, 1 Corinthians 11 on the head coverings. He uses a range of arguments there. And finally, his final argument is, well, if you don't accept any of my other arguments, this is just the way it's done in the churches of the Eastern Mediterranean world.

Galatians 3:16, Paul makes an argument based on the fact that sperma, seed, is singular. But Paul knows very well that it can be a collective singular. That is, it can refer to more than one.

Because later on in verse 29, in the Greek text of Galatians 3:29, Paul, in fact, uses it that way by saying, you know, we are Abraham's seed. We are Abraham's children. So, Paul sometimes uses ad hoc arguments in polemical contexts, for example, where he's addressing others who use arguments like that against him.

These were common in ancient times. It's not a model of that's how you argue in every situation. But this is how Paul argued in the settings where that kind of argumentation was used.

And that doesn't change his theology. His theology can be very well exegetically grounded. But in persuading people, he's using the kind of things that would persuade them.

In chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, one of his first arguments has to do with a play on words, where he's using both the figurative and the literal sense of *kephalae*, head. There's debate about what the figurative sense is that I won't get into. But my point is that he uses a play on words with both the figurative sense and the literal sense of the thing on top of your neck.

That was the kind of argument that people often used back then. So sometimes he has a caricature. Romans 2:17-24, where he says, you who speak against adultery, do you practice adultery? You who are against idolatry, do you rob temples? Most Jewish people did not go around robbing temples.

Most Jewish people did not commit adultery, although some did. Paul is making a caricature. He's doing what in argumentation is sometimes called *reductio ad absurdum*, reducing your opponent's position to the absurd.

This doesn't literally apply to all Jewish people, but it makes this case that you can't depend on Jewishness alone. The Psalms texts that he cites in Romans 3:10-20 are too general to condemn every individual Jewish person. Now, that doesn't change his ultimate point that all people have sinned.

Some of the texts he uses do claim that, but in fact, he didn't really need to even argue that everybody has sinned because Jewish people almost all acknowledged that everybody had sinned. With the possible exception, some said maybe Abraham didn't. But they all acknowledged that they had sinned.

But polemical rhetoric was that's argumentative, very strong argumentative rhetoric that you use to refute somebody's position. That was standard in debate settings. You have the same kind of thing where John the Baptist speaks of God can raise up stones for these children for Abraham.

Well, Paul speaks of God raising up children for Abraham, spiritual children for Abraham. You have that also in John chapter 8. That was an issue that was being debated already by the time Paul comes along. And Paul just argues that case in ways that hearers in the Greco-Roman world could understand more fully.

Paul's own legacy was caricatured and contested. Romans chapter 3 and verse 8, he says that there were some people who complained about him and said that he taught let us sin that grace may abound, which certainly was not what Paul was teaching. Although some people even today follow that teaching in the name of Paul.

In James chapter 2 verses 18 through 24, many scholars think that James is refuting their misrepresentation of Paul's teaching. So, in a polemical context, we have things represented in a certain way. And Paul builds on solid teaching going back to Jesus, solid teaching going back to the Old Testament.

But the way he frames it is sometimes the way it would be framed in his day. E.P. Sanders has argued that the older anti-Semitic approaches to Judaism, making it a foil for God's grace in early Christianity, were unfounded. And he tends to associate it with a certain denomination in a certain country, German Lutherans.

And that is not where all German Lutherans would stand today. And I'm not sure it's fair to all German scholars. Well, it's not fair to all German scholars, not fair to all Lutherans.

But remember, E.P. Sanders is writing in a generation after the Holocaust. And much of the church there was playing down, the official church, especially once it became the Reich Church, was playing down the Jewishness of Jesus. Gerhard Kittel, if you've heard of the theological dictionary of the New Testament, there's a reason why he only edited the first two or three volumes of that, because he spent the rest of his life under house arrest as a Nazi war criminal.

Some of the Nazi theologians were playing down the Jewishness of Jesus. Kittel was a rabbinic expert, but he also served the Nazi party. So, people who tried to play the Jewishness of Paul down and tried to also make Judaism as a foil for how much better Christianity is, often misrepresented Judaism.

We even find some of that in the Strack and Billerbeck. It wasn't the fault of the rabbinic sources so much or the rabbinic experts so much as the way it was applied to the New Testament so Judaism became a very legalistic religion where you're always trying to achieve more merit before God. And part of it even goes back to Luther, seeing himself as like Paul reacting against Judaism in his reaction against the medieval church.

So, what we actually find when we go back to ancient Jewish sources, we do find some legalism. More, I think, than my mentor E.P. Sanders acknowledged initially. Others have pointed that out, but even those who pointed that out have acknowledged that E.P. Sanders was right to critique the state of affairs that widely existed in his day, which was just very anti-Semitic, very anti-Jewish.

And what we see in Sanders' work, and others have qualified this, is that it's not across the board, but there was much more grace in early Judaism than has been acknowledged. There was a recognition that Jewish people were born as part of the covenant, circumcised as part of the covenant, and they remained part of the covenant people unless they were very bad. Well, what happens though if you're a Gentile and you're converting to Judaism? Well, then you have a little bit more trouble because now you have to prove your loyalty to the covenant as a proselyte.

Also, just because people are emphasizing grace in principle doesn't mean that they're never legalistic in practice. I mean, we've got a lot of churches today that talk grace but practice legalism, meaning it's not an exclusively Jewish problem, it's a religious problem. Interestingly enough, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has to confront the Pharisees, sometimes on legalistic type issues, and you get to the book of Acts, and guess who's echoing the Pharisees in Acts chapter 11? Not, that you went and ate with sinners, but you went and ate with Gentiles.

The same kind of idea is carrying over. So, between the fact that Paul is going to use *reductio ad absurdum*, he's going to take things to their utmost extent, and also the fact that there is some legalism in practice, and also the fact that people aren't always in principle what they are in the paper. I mean, in many of the things where Jesus argues with the Pharisees in the Gospels, we know that the Pharisees actually agreed with him in principle in their ethics, but it's one thing to agree with Jesus in principle, it's another thing to live like Jesus says, and it's another thing to embody the spirit of mercy and the kind of hermeneutic Jesus had towards the Torah that we find in the Gospels.

So, all that to say that, unlike some people, I don't think we have to radically reinterpret Paul once we recognize that there was a lot of grace in Judaism, but we also need to recognize that the issue isn't an ethnic issue, that the problem was that they were Jewish and that if we're Gentiles, we don't face the same temptations, because Paul deals with that issue in Romans chapter 11. The issue is that whatever our religious proclivities, when we use religion in service of ourselves, rather than accepting God's revelation in Christ that brings us into a relationship with God, we are missing what God has done for us, because our hand is too short, we can't save ourselves, it's the Lord who saves us. The setting of Romans.

Paul writes from Corinth this letter, and it's actually delivered by Phoebe, who is Diakonos, we can talk about that later, the meaning of, but the Diakonos of the church at Cenchrea, which is one of the two port cities of Corinth on the Isthmus of Corinth. Paul writes from Corinth and sends it by Phoebe as she travels, Romans 16:1. This would have been during his winter stay in Achaia. It's recounted in Acts chapter 20, verses two and three.

He also has ties to Rome because many of the Jewish Christians were expelled from Rome around the year 49 under Claudius, when Claudius died in the year 54, probably within a year, two years or so before Paul wrote Romans, they returned. Also, Corinth had major ties with Rome, with plenty of trade going back and forth. Corinth was a major Roman colony, and it was the major marine conduit between Italy and Asia Minor.

The southern coast of Achaia was very rugged, and it was difficult to navigate there, so people often would sail just into where the Peloponnesus was. They'd sail to the Isthmus of Corinth, and there was a means for transporting things from the inside of the Isthmus to the outside, to the Aegean Sea. They had not been successful yet in building a canal through the Isthmus, but they had something called the *alcosts*, and they could drag things across, supplies to ships on the other side.

Rome's population in this period, some have estimated it as low as a quarter million due to the water supply. Ancient census records actually suggest, when you also account for those who aren't specifically named in the census or aren't specifically mentioned in the census records, the families, the slaves, that the number of residents of Rome probably is closer in this period to about a million, meaning it was by far the largest city of Mediterranean antiquity, Alexandria maybe being second, maybe somewhere around half a million, possibly. Rome had a lot of tenements.

The rich lived on the bottom. The poor lived in higher, upper stories, and they often would have, on the bottom floor sometimes you had shops with mezzanine apartments, as well as wealthier residents living on the bottom. The bottom was valuable because you had running water only on the lower floor.

You'd have stairs leading up, but sometimes the upper stories were very rickety. You'd have small rooms, just enough room to sleep, and you might have a charcoal brazier in some places, which is probably one reason why they reported fires taking place daily in Rome, buildings burning down, buildings collapsing. Someone joked about it.

I don't think it's very funny, but Juvenal was joking about how you had buildings collapsing in Rome. You'd hear them collapsing every day somewhere. They were often owned by rich landlords.

Sometimes they lived on the bottom floor, but the further up they went, the worse it was. Where could the churches have met there? Well, they could meet on the lower floor. They could meet in the hallway that connected the rooms and some of the higher floors.

So, there were places that they could meet. Jewish residents may have comprised as much as 5% of the population of Rome. Its Jewish population, based on Tiberius's

expulsion, has been estimated somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000 residents, often around 40 to 50,000, so as high as 5% of Rome's population.

The setting for the Jewish community, most Jewish people in Rome lived in the trans-Tiberium. Today it's called Trastevere. I can't speak Italian, so I hope you'll forgive me for my pronunciation there, especially if you're from Italy.

But across the Tiber from the city center is where the majority of the Jewish community lived. Most of the Jewish residents of Rome were poor. Many probably worked in the docks of the Tiber.

There were a number of synagogues. Obviously, if you have that many people, you have to have a lot of synagogues. Several synagogues are known to us by name from this period.

One of them is something like the Olive Tree, which is perhaps relevant for Romans 11, although we don't usually know the dates when these particular synagogues started. But unlike the synagogue community in Alexandria, the synagogue community in Rome was not at all united, and they couldn't be because Rome didn't want anybody being united in their city unless it was, say, the Praetorian Guard or local police force. Greek-speaking immigrants and resident aliens were there in large numbers.

You hear maybe the saying that all roads lead to Rome. It's because the Romans built all the roads. But people would stream into Rome from all over the empire, from many parts of the diaspora.

The Jewish community also, there was also largely Greek-speaking. In fact, the church was largely Greek-speaking there until the second century. First Clement, a Jewish, well, a Christian document from the late first century is written in Greek, for example.

Greek-speaking immigrants from many parts of the diaspora, for the Jewish community there, over half of them have Latin names. So they were trying to identify with the culture, even though Greek was the majority language among them. Many Roman citizens were Jewish in Rome.

Philo of Alexandria tells us that explicitly in his Embassy to Gaius. And probably many of these citizens were descendants of those who had been enslaved by Pompeii, Pompeii not meaning the city that was buried along with Herculaneum at the eruption of Mount Vesuvius later in this century, but Pompeii being the Roman general in the first century BCE. Pompeii enslaved many Judeans, and brought them to Rome.

Jewish people who were in Rome collected all the money they had. They bought the freedom of these other Jewish people. And if you were a freed slave of a Roman citizen, under usual circumstances, you became a Roman citizen.

This is probably the background for Paul's own ancestry a long time earlier, how Paul became a Roman citizen, which we'll have to talk about later on. But first, noting Roman xenophobia. Romans detested Sabbaths, circumcision, and food products.

Actually, some Romans really liked Jewish practices and were adopting them, but it created a backlash among other Romans, especially among the elite, especially among elite men who were upset that some of their wives were following some Jewish practices to this supreme God, including Sabbaths and some food practices. Circumcision they considered a form of mutilation. And we read about this in various collections of Jewish literature from this period, literature like Menachem Stern's work on Gentile writings about Jews in antiquity.

There were also banishments of the Jewish community under Tiberius and Claudius. There's reason to believe that the banishment, at least under Claudius, wasn't a wholesale banishment or wasn't effective completely. But in any case, there had been banishments of the Jewish community.

So, there were some prejudices against the Jewish community there. Roman history and the church there. Claudius expelled Jewish Christian leaders and probably a whole lot of other people.

We can talk about that more in a little while in the next session. But Claudius expelled Jewish Christian leaders in the year 49, or most likely 49. Some say 41, but there's better reason to think 49.

It was automatically repealed, as other edicts would be when he died in the year 54. So, after five years, some Jewish believers in Jesus could return to Rome and other Jewish believers could come to Rome. Nero in the year 64, that's 10 years after Jewish Christians could return to Rome, and roughly 15 years after Claudius expelled Jewish Christian leaders, leaving a predominantly Gentile church probably.

In the year 64, Nero massacred hundreds or thousands of Christians in Rome. Yet the church still seems to be strong at the time that 1 Clement was written in the late first century. So, there must have been a thriving church in Rome at the time that Paul wrote this letter, even though only recently have some Jewish Christians begun returning.

It's usually considered to be a mostly Gentile church. It seems to have a Jewish base or a Jewish foundation at the beginning, where they were taught in Jewish ways. And there are reasons for that, again, with Judaism being well-known in Rome.

But in the next session, we're going to do a survey of some of what we find in Romans. Again, not every point will everybody agreed on. Not everybody will agree even on every point that I just mentioned in the summary of the history of the church in Rome.

But at least you will get a good sense of the center of what Romans is about and what the history, cultural, historical, and social context of the letter to the Romans was about.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Romans. This is session 1, Introduction.