

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 14, New/Old Paul, Romans Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 14, New/Old Paul, Romans, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's lecture introduces the letters of Paul, beginning with Romans, emphasizing that they are responses to specific problems. He uses analogies of phone conversations and reading someone else's mail to illustrate how we must reconstruct the situations Paul addressed to properly interpret his letters. **The lecture highlights Paul's background as both a devout Jew and a Roman citizen and challenges the traditional view of Paul's conversion, suggesting he was confident in his Judaism before Christ intervened.** Mathewson then explores the reasons Paul wrote Romans, including missional, apologetic, and pastoral purposes, specifically related to Jew-Gentile relations. **Finally, the lecture discusses different perspectives on interpreting Paul's message in Romans, contrasting Luther's focus on legalism with the "new perspective" of Sanders and Dunn, which emphasizes nationalism and Jewish exclusivism, ultimately suggesting that both perspectives are relevant.**

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 14 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



**Mathewson_NTLit_S
ession 14.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 14, New/Old Paul, Romans

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from Dr. Dave Mathewson's lecture on Paul and the introduction to Romans.

Briefing Document: Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 14

Subject: The Apostle Paul and Introduction to Romans

Overview: This lecture introduces the letters of Paul, specifically focusing on Romans. Dr. Mathewson emphasizes the importance of understanding the "occasional" nature of Paul's letters, meaning they were written in response to specific situations and problems in the early churches. The lecture also dives into two prominent methods of interpreting Romans, offering his own balanced solution to the topic.

Key Themes and Ideas:

- **The Occasional Nature of Paul's Letters:**
 - Paul's letters are not theological textbooks but rather responses to specific problems and situations in the churches he founded.
 - "The occasional nature of his letters meant Paul's letters emerged as responses to rather specific situations and problems."
 - Understanding the context is crucial for interpreting the letters.
 - Analogies for understanding this: listening to one end of a phone conversation or reading someone else's mail. You only get Paul's side of the story.
 - Some letters, like Colossians, were intended for wider circulation, while others, like 1 Corinthians, seem more context-specific. By the end of the first century, a collection of Paul's letters was already circulating.
- **Paul's Background and Conversion:**
 - Paul was a citizen of two worlds: Jewish and Roman.
 - He was a devout Jew, a Pharisee with zealot tendencies, who persecuted the early church.
 - "Paul was of the zealot type, a Pharisee, but with zealot tendencies. Out of zeal for the law, he would even exterminate Christians because he saw this new faith in Christ as a threat to his ancestral religion."

- He was also a Roman citizen, familiar with Greco-Roman culture and willing to use his citizenship for protection.
- The traditional view of Paul's conversion (frustration with the law leading to faith in Christ) is challenged. Mathewson argues, based on Paul's own accounts, that Paul was confident in his ability to keep the law *before* his encounter with Christ.
- "As to righteousness under the law, I was blameless." - Philippians 3
- The Damascus Road experience was both a conversion and a commissioning, transforming Paul and calling him to preach to the Gentiles.
- "But when God, who had set me apart before I was born, and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles."
- **Introduction to Romans:**
- The letter is the first in the canonical order because of its length, not its date of writing.
- Key figures like Martin Luther and Karl Barth were profoundly influenced by their reading of Romans.
- The lecture emphasizes the importance of recognizing that your own understanding of Romans has been influenced by those who have read it before you.
- Paul identifies himself as the author, but Tertius served as his *amanuensis* (secretary), writing the letter under Paul's direction.
- "I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord."
- **Purposes of Romans:**
- **Missional:** To secure Rome as a base for further missionary activity, particularly his planned journey to Spain.
- "I will set out by way of you to Spain. And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ." - Romans 15
- **Apologetic:** To explain and defend the gospel that Paul preached.
- **Pastoral:** To address disunity between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, possibly exacerbated by the temporary expulsion of Jews from Rome by Claudius.

- **Interpretations of Justification by Faith vs. Works of the Law:**
- Paul's key statement "a person is justified by faith in Christ apart from works of the law" is analyzed through various lenses.
- **Martin Luther's View (Traditional):** Paul is combating *legalism*, the idea that one can *earn* salvation through good works.
- **E.P. Sanders (New Perspective):** First-century Jews were *not* legalistic. They believed they were saved by God's grace, and the law was a means of expressing obedience (covenantal nomism).
- **James Dunn (New Perspective):** The problem was *nationalism*. Jews were excluding Gentiles by making the law a requirement for inclusion in God's people. They used the law as an identity badge (circumcision, Sabbath, food laws).
- The lecture notes a tension regarding *who* Paul was addressing. While Paul is writing to a diverse church (both Jew and Gentile), he seems to be primarily addressing *Christian* Jews, especially those who continued to cling to the Old Testament Law as an identity marker.
- **Mathewson's Synthesis:** Both perspectives are valid. Paul is addressing both the issue of Jewish exclusivism *and* the larger issue of what is required for salvation. The question of how Jews and Gentiles relate raises the larger issue of how one stands before a holy God.
- This issue is not human inability and sin (as Luther thought), but Jewish exclusivism.

Key Quotes:

- "The occasional nature of his letters meant Paul's letters emerged as responses to rather specific situations and problems."
- "As to righteousness under the law, I was blameless."
- "I will set out by way of you to Spain. And I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ."
- "I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord."

Implications: Understanding the historical context and various interpretations of Paul's letters is crucial for accurate biblical interpretation. The debate over justification by faith vs. works of the law has significant implications for understanding Christian theology and the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 14, New/Old Paul, Romans

Paul, Romans, and Justification: A Study Guide

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What does it mean to say that Paul's letters are "occasional" in nature?
2. What two analogies are used to illustrate the challenges of interpreting Paul's letters, and how do they relate to understanding the context of these writings?
3. What two worlds was Paul a citizen of, and how did these backgrounds influence his life and writings?
4. How does the traditional view of Paul's conversion contrast with the view presented in the lecture?
5. According to the lecture, what was Paul's conversion and what did it also represent?
6. Name three purposes for why Paul wrote the book of Romans.
7. Who was Tertius, and what does his role tell us about letter writing in the first century?
8. According to Martin Luther, what was Paul addressing when he said you can't be saved by works of the law, but only by faith in Christ?
9. According to E.P. Sanders, what was the function of the Law of Moses in first century Jewish thought?
10. According to James Dunn, what problem was Paul addressing when he wrote about justification by faith?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The "occasional" nature of Paul's letters means they were written in response to specific situations and problems faced by the churches he founded. They weren't meant to be comprehensive theological treatises, but rather targeted solutions to particular issues that arose in those communities.

2. The two analogies are a phone conversation and reading someone else's mail. Both highlight the fact that we only have Paul's side of the communication, requiring us to reconstruct the context and the issues being addressed to understand his letters fully.
3. Paul was a citizen of both the Jewish world and the Roman world. His Jewish background instilled in him a deep understanding of the Old Testament and the Law, while his Roman citizenship provided him with certain rights, protections, and a familiarity with Greco-Roman culture and language.
4. The traditional view suggests Paul grew disillusioned with his inability to keep the Law, leading him to Christ. The lecture proposes that Paul was confident in his adherence to Judaism, and his conversion was a result of an encounter with the resurrected Christ.
5. According to the lecture, Paul's experience on the road to Damascus was both a conversion from one religious system to one centered on Jesus and a commissioning to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He was not only converted, but also given a specific mission.
6. Three purposes for Paul writing the book of Romans include: a missional purpose (securing Rome as a base for missionary activity, perhaps including financial support), an apologetic purpose (explaining and defending the gospel he preached), and a pastoral purpose (addressing disunity between Jewish and Gentile Christians).
7. Tertius was Paul's amanuensis, or secretary, who physically wrote the letter to the Romans. His role demonstrates the common practice of employing scribes in the first century to produce written documents, with the author sometimes adding a personal signature.
8. According to Martin Luther, Paul was combating legalism, the idea that one could earn salvation through performing good works and adhering to the Law. Luther believed Paul argued that salvation is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ, not through any human effort.
9. According to E.P. Sanders, the Law of Moses wasn't a means of earning God's favor, but rather a way for Jews to express their obedience and maintain their identity as God's people after they had already been saved by God's grace.
10. According to James Dunn, Paul's main concern was nationalism, the idea that the Jews too narrowly tied the promises of salvation to being a Jew and following the

Law of Moses. This created exclusion between Jews and Gentiles, making it seem as though following the law was a necessary component for salvation.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the challenges of interpreting Paul's letters due to their "occasional" nature. How do the analogies of a phone conversation and reading someone else's mail illuminate these challenges, and what strategies can be employed to overcome them?
2. Compare and contrast the traditional view of Paul's conversion with the alternative view presented in the lecture. What textual evidence is used to support each perspective, and how does each interpretation impact our understanding of Paul's theology?
3. Analyze the three primary purposes for Paul's writing of the book of Romans: missional, apologetic, and pastoral. How do these purposes intersect and inform one another, and what specific passages in Romans support each interpretation?
4. Explain the different interpretations of Paul's phrase "justification by faith apart from works of the law" as articulated by Martin Luther, E.P. Sanders, and James Dunn. How does each scholar's understanding of the historical and cultural context of Paul's writings shape their respective interpretations?
5. Synthesize the perspectives of Martin Luther, E.P. Sanders, and James Dunn on Paul's concept of justification. Is it possible to integrate these perspectives into a more comprehensive understanding of Paul's message in Romans, and if so, how?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Amanuensis:** A secretary or scribe who writes down dictation, especially in the context of ancient letter writing.
- **Apologetic:** The act of explaining and defending a particular belief or doctrine.
- **Canon:** The collection of books recognized as authoritative scripture.
- **Conversion:** A turning or change from one belief or way of life to another, often in a religious context.
- **Diaspora:** The dispersion of Jews outside of Israel.
- **Gnomism (Covenantal Nomism):** The belief that obedience to the law is a response to God's grace and a means of maintaining one's covenant relationship with God.
- **Greco-Roman:** Relating to the combined influence of Greek and Roman cultures.
- **Justification:** Being declared righteous or innocent in the eyes of God.
- **Legalism:** The belief that one can earn salvation or God's favor through adherence to rules, laws, or good works.
- **Nationalism:** The emphasis on national identity and the exclusion of others based on that identity.
- **New Perspective on Paul:** A re-evaluation of Paul's theology that emphasizes the social and communal aspects of salvation, particularly the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God.
- **Occasional:** Refers to the nature of Paul's letters as responses to specific situations and problems.
- **Pharisee:** A Jewish sect known for their strict adherence to the law and their emphasis on tradition.
- **Reformation:** A 16th-century movement for religious reform, leading to the establishment of Protestant churches.
- **Zealot:** A member of a radical Jewish sect advocating violent resistance to Roman rule.

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 14, New/Old Paul, Romans, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Paul's Letters and the Book of Romans: FAQ

1. What does the "occasional nature" of Paul's letters refer to, and why is it important for understanding them?

The "occasional nature" of Paul's letters means that they were written as responses to specific situations, problems, or questions arising in the churches he had established. Paul wasn't writing comprehensive theological textbooks. Instead, his letters address particular concerns of specific communities at particular times. Understanding these circumstances is vital for interpreting his letters accurately; without context, parts of his arguments may be confusing or misinterpreted. Think of it like listening to one side of a phone conversation or reading someone else's mail – you need to try to reconstruct the other side to fully understand what's being said.

2. How were Paul's letters typically written and distributed in the first century?

It was common practice to employ a secretary, known as an amanuensis, to write letters. Paul likely dictated his letters to a secretary like Tertius, who is mentioned in Romans 16:22, who physically wrote the text. Paul may have reviewed and signed the letter himself. While some letters seem very specific to the community they addressed (like 1 Corinthians), there are hints, like in Colossians, that Paul intended other letters to be circulated more widely among different churches. By the end of the first century, a collection of Paul's letters was already circulating.

3. In what ways was Paul a citizen of two worlds, and how did this influence his ministry?

Paul was both a devout Jew, trained as a Pharisee with zealot tendencies, and a Roman citizen. His Jewish background provided the foundation for his theological understanding, particularly his extensive knowledge of the Old Testament. His Roman citizenship granted him certain rights and privileges that he used to his advantage, especially during his travels and when facing legal challenges, and provided him with the Greek language to write his letters. This dual identity allowed him to effectively communicate with and minister to both Jewish and Gentile audiences.

4. How does the traditional view of Paul's conversion differ from the account presented in the lecture?

The traditional view suggests Paul was increasingly frustrated with his inability to keep the law, leading to a growing sense of guilt that prepared him to accept Jesus Christ. However, the lecture challenges this by pointing to Paul's own statements in Galatians and Philippians where he describes himself as blameless and advanced beyond his peers in his observance of the law. According to Paul's autobiographical accounts, he was completely confident in his ability to live under the law of Moses. The lecture posits that Paul's conversion was a sudden and transformative event, an encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus that changed his perspective.

5. According to the lecture, what two things happened to Paul on the Damascus Road?

The lecture suggests the event on the road to Damascus was both a conversion *and* a commissioning. Paul converted from a religious system that excluded Jesus as Messiah to one where Jesus is at the center. At the same time, Paul was commissioned by Jesus to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

6. What are the three primary purposes for Paul writing the letter to the Romans, as suggested in the lecture?

The lecture identifies three main purposes:

- **Missional:** Paul aimed to secure Rome as a base for future missionary work, particularly his desire to travel to Spain. He sought the Roman church's support in this endeavor.
- **Apologetic:** Paul wanted to explain and defend the gospel he preached, providing a detailed explanation of his theological understanding.
- **Pastoral:** Paul addressed the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians within the Roman church, seeking to foster unity and understanding. This may have been prompted by tensions arising after Jewish Christians returned to Rome following the rescinding of Claudius's edict.

7. What are the key differences between Martin Luther's interpretation of Paul's message in Romans and the "new perspective" offered by scholars like E.P. Sanders and James Dunn?

Martin Luther viewed Paul's critique of "works of the law" as a rejection of legalism – the attempt to *earn* salvation through good deeds. He believed Paul was arguing that salvation comes only through faith in Christ. Sanders and Dunn, however, argue that first-century Jews weren't legalistic in that way; they saw the law as a means of expressing obedience to God and maintaining their covenant relationship *after* having been saved by God's grace. The "new perspective" suggests Paul's problem wasn't with legalism but with Jewish "nationalism" – the tendency to exclude Gentiles by making adherence to the Mosaic Law a requirement for inclusion in God's people. Luther focused on the individual's relationship with God, while the new perspective focuses on the relationship between Jewish and Gentile communities.

8. What is the suggested approach for understanding and interpreting the Book of Romans, considering both the traditional and the new perspective?

The lecture suggests embracing both perspectives. While the "new perspective" is likely correct in that Paul addresses the Jew-Gentile relationship, issues that relate to Jewish exclusivism, and forcing gentiles to observe mosaic law, this issue is part of a bigger question: what is required of salvation? The question of what it takes for gentiles to belong to God is connected to how one stands before a holy God. Therefore, Luther was also correct. A complete reading of Romans should therefore address both perspectives.