

Paul and Luther



St. Paul
Rembrandt van Rijn



Martin Luther
(1483-1546)
Portrait by Lucas Cranach

Luther's Tower Experience – The Reformation

- God's commandments cannot be kept – too demanding; futility
- Grace must be imputed to the sinner
 - Human beings lack inherent merit
 - The merits of Christ must be declared to apply to fallen humans
- Romans 1:17 “he who is righteous by faith shall live”
- *Justification by faith alone*
 - This becomes the centre of the Christian proclamation, especially for Protestants
 - Still seen by many to be the heart of Christian doctrine
- “The introspective conscience of the West”
- “Cheap grace”

Luther's Assumptions about Paul

- Paul converted from Pharisaic Judaism to Christianity
- Paul opposed Judaic religion
 - A religion of “works righteousness”
 - In its place Paul proposed a universal gospel free of the Law
 - Torah and Covenant are abandoned because they are obsolete, invalid
- Law and Gospel, works and faith are opposed
- Jews are endemically flawed
 - Christians can triumph in their condemnation of self-righteous Pharisees
- Christian responsibility for the Holocaust
 - Christian roots of anti-Semitism

Luther's Assumptions about Romans

- Written to set out a systematic presentation of Christian theology
 - Paul was writing at leisure without pressure of any conflicts
- Chapters 1-8 develop the “debate with Judaism”
 - The rest don't relate and can't be explained

Setting the Record Straight

- There is no Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone
- Romans is not a systematic presentation of theology
 - It is a letter with an occasion and a purpose not an abstract treatise
- There is no criticism of Judaism in Romans
 - Written to Gentile Christians to persuade them to have regard for Jewish Christians
- Paul does not declare the Torah and Israel's Covenant to be obsolete or invalid
 - Paul's gospel is rooted in the Covenant — God's redemptive purpose is universal