

# Introduction to Romans

I want to start by sharing with you the significance of the book of Romans. Most all major revivals and reformations in the history of the church have been directly related to the book of Romans.

In 386 AD, a native of North Africa who had been a professor for several years in Milan, Italy, sat weeping in the garden of his friend Alupius, contemplating the wickedness of his life. While sitting there, he heard a child singing, Tolle, lege, Tolle, lege, which in Latin means “Take up and read, Take up and read.” An open scroll of the book of Romans lay beside him, and he picked it up. The first passage that caught his eye read, “Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (13:13-14) the man later wrote of the occasion:

“No further did I read, nor did I need; for instantly as the sentence ended, by a light, as it were, or security infused into my heart, all the gloom of doubt vanished away” The man was Aurelius Augustine, who upon reading that short passage from Romans, received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and went on to become one of the church’s outstanding theologians and leaders.

One thousand years later, Martin Luther, a monk in the Roman Catholic order named after Augustine, was teaching the book of Romans to his students at the University of Wittenberg, Germany. As he studied the text, he became more and more convicted by Paul’s central theme of justification by faith alone. He wrote.

“I greatly longed to understand Paul’s epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in my way but that one expression, “the righteousness of God” because I took it to mean that righteous whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous... Night and day I pondered until ... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is the righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone thru open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the righteousness of God had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage became to me a gateway to heaven”.

Several centuries later, and ordained minister in the Church of England by the name of John Wesley was similarly confused about the meaning of the gospel and was searching for a genuine experience of salvation. In May of 1738 he wrote, I went very willingly to a society in Alders Gate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed; I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death.

John Calvin said, “When any one gains knowledge of this epistle he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.

There are many more that I could quote, but I will conclude with the words of a Presbyterian radio preacher from the fifties, Donald Gray Barnhouse who taught Romans for eleven years on the Radio Bible study hour, he wrote of this beloved epistle,

“A scientist may say that mother’s milk is the most perfect food known to man, and may give you an analysis showing all its chemical components, a list of the vitamins it contains and an estimate of the calories in a given quantity. A baby will take that milk without the remotest knowledge of its content, and will grow day by day, smiling and thriving in its ignorance. So it is with the profound truths of the word of God.

To that story I would say, drinking up the profound truths of The Word of God works every time it is tried! If you want to grow in the things of the Lord you must be in the Word!

The epistle quotes the Old Testament some 57 times. more than any other NT book. It’s repeated key words are, God 154 times, law 77 times, Christ 66 times, sin 45 times, The Lord 44 times, and faith 40 times.

Roman’s answers many questions concerning man and God. Just a few of the more significant questions it answers are: What is the good news of God? What is God like? Is Jesus really God? How can God send people to hell? Why do men reject God and His Son, Jesus Christ? Why are there false religions and idols? What is man’s biggest sin? Why are there sex perversions, hatred, crime, dishonesty, and all the other evils in the world? And the big gospel question, how can a sinner be forgiven and justified by God?

Roman’s speaks to us today just as powerfully as it spoke to those in the first century church.

It speaks morally, about adultery, fornication, homosexuality, hating, lying, murder, and civil disobedience.

It speaks intellectually, telling us that the natural man is confused because he has a reprobate mind.

It speaks socially, telling us how we are to relate to one another.

It speaks psychologically, telling us where true freedom can be found to deliver men from the burden of guilt.

It speaks nationally, telling us our responsibility to human government

It speaks internationally, telling us the ultimate destiny of the earth and the future of Israel.

It speaks spiritually, answering man’s despair by offering hope for the future

It speaks theologically, teaching us the relationship between the flesh and the spirit, between law and grace, between works and faith.

But most of all, it profoundly brings God Himself to us.

Roman’s is named for the original recipients: the members of the church in Rome.

No one disputes that Paul wrote Romans. Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5) He was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37) He was born about the time of Christ’s birth in the city of Tarsus, He was trained in Jerusalem under the celebrated rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) He was a Pharisee, a member of the strictest Jewish sect.

He was converted miraculously on the road to Damascus in (AD 33-35) and immediately began proclaiming the gospel message. He spent three years in Arabia. During this time he received much of his doctrine as direct revelation from the Lord. (Gal. 1:11-18)

Paul was responsible for the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. He made three missionary journeys through much of the Mediterranean world. When Paul returned to Jerusalem with an offering for the needy in the church there he was falsely accused and held in custody in Jerusalem for 2 years. He exercised his right as a citizen to be heard before Caesar. After a most difficult trip, including shipwreck Paul reached Rome. Paul was released for a brief period of ministry, but later arrested again. Paul suffered martyrdom at Rome in AD 65-67.

Turn to (2 Tim. 4:6-8) Paul is ready to meet his Lord, to hear well done thy good and faithful servant

Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire and was home to over 1 million people, many of whom were slaves. The city boasted many magnificent buildings, but its beauty was marred by the slums in which so many lived.

Some of those converted at Pentecost probably founded the church in Rome. Paul longed to visit the church at Rome but was prevented from doing so.

In God's providence, Paul's inability to visit Rome gave the world this inspired masterpiece of gospel doctrine. Paul's primary purpose in writing Romans was to teach the great truths of the gospel of grace to believers who had never received apostolic instruction. The letter also introduced him to a church where he was personally unknown but hoped to visit soon for several important reasons: to edify the believers (1:11), to preach the gospel (1:15), and to get to know the Roman Christians so they could encourage him (1:12), better pray for him (15:30), and help him with his planned ministry in Spain (15:28).

Unlike Paul's other letters (for example, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians) his purpose was not to correct wrong teaching or rebuke ungodly living. The Roman church was doctrinally sound, but, like all churches it was in need of the rich doctrinal and practical instruction this letter provides.

A simple outline that is often used for Romans is: The 5 S outline, anyone familiar with that? Sin, Salvation, Sanctification, Sovereignty, and Service

With a theme of sharing doctrine, Romans has little historical information, but Paul does use many historical figures from Israel's past as illustrations.

**The overarching theme of Romans is the righteousness that comes from God: the glorious truth that God justifies guilty, condemned sinners by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.**

Chapters 1-11 present the theological truths of that doctrine, while chapter 12 -16 details its practical outworking in the lives of individual believers and the life of the whole church.

Some specific theological topics include principles of spiritual leadership (1:8-15). God's wrath against sinful mankind (1:18-32) principles of divine judgment (2:1-16) the universality of sin (3:9-20) an exposition and defense of justification by faith alone (3:21-4:25) the security of salvation (5:1-11) the transference of Adam's sin (5:12-21) sanctification (chapters 6-8) sovereign election (chapter 9) God's plan for Israel (chapter 11)

spiritual gifts and practical godliness (chapter 12) the believer's responsibility to human government (chapter 13) and principles of Christian liberty (14:1-15:12)

As the preeminent doctrinal work in the New Testament, Romans naturally contains a number of difficult passages. The perpetuation of Adam's sin (5:12-21) is one of the deepest, most profound theological passages in all of Scripture. In chapter 7 is Paul speaking of himself as a believer, or prior to his salvation, When he says, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep doing"

The doctrine of election (8:28-30 who chose who? Eph. 1 - He chose me before the foundation of the world

The sovereignty of God (9:6-29) Man cannot understand his own mind, but wants to question the One true God, the Creator of all things.

Does God have a future plan for Israel (chapters 9-11)

Paul's teaching on the believer's obedience to human government (13:1-7)

As you know Paul had been taught the OT and was a member of the Pharisee's and had come to believe as most religious Jews of his day that they were waiting for the Messiah to come and be their earthly king, but they reject the true Messiah (Jesus) and dismissed Christianity as a heresy to be stopped. So Paul was granted authority to go to Damascus and arrest those who speak in Jesus name. But God!

You are all probably very familiar with Paul's conversion story, but let's take another look at it. Turn to Acts 9:1-22

Paul was so vehemently bent on destroying Jesus' followers that no Christian could have been able to present the gospel to him successfully, only God by His miraculous intervention could get his attention.

By that remarkable divine illumination, Paul was immediately able after his conversion not simply to testify to what had happened to him but to defend the gospel so powerfully that he confounded every unbelieving Jew who argued with him, proving that Jesus is the Christ.

## Romans One – The Good News

What is the Good News? A free gift from God that leads to eternal life! Jesus Christ paid for my sins and yours. Paul's message is in contrast to the bad news that we hear every day. Most news that we hear daily is bad news and seems to be getting worse. (MacArthur statement on the condition of our world)

MacArthur says, "a terrifying power grips humans at the very core of their being. Left unchecked, it pushes them to self-destruction in one form or another. That power is sin, and that is always bad news. The tidbits of good news are often merely brief respites from the bad. And sometimes what appears to be good merely masks something evil. One cynic commented that peace treaties merely provide time for both sides to reload.

Paul's letter to the Romans and to us as well is that God has brought good news into this sin infested world that can overcome the sin, guilt, and hopelessness that grips all of mankind. He brought the good news that, in Christ, sin can be forgiven, selfishness can be overcome, guilt can be removed, anxiety can be alleviated, and people can, indeed, have hope and eternal glory!

## **A Letter from Paul**

Imagine the excitement, of receiving a letter from the Apostle Paul, many knew him and other knew of him, Sinclair Ferguson said, “little did they know that they were about to hear for the first time the most important letter ever written.” Peter tells us that Paul’s New Testament letters were already being collected in the churches and were regarded as part of the new Scriptures that God was giving to his people.

Listen to the Apostle Peter speak of Paul’s letters - (2 Peter 3:15-18) And count the patience of the Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other **Scriptures**. You therefore, beloved, knowing this before hand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

### **Paul’s Introduction - Turn to Romans 1:1-7**

The letter was to a church Paul did not start and had not visited. Looking to be accepted and supported by a church where he was not well known, he knew he would need to clearly explain the gospel, and clear up the false rumors that had been spreading about his teaching. Verse 3 speaks of Jesus’ humanity, while in verse 4 Paul describes Christ Jesus in terms of the resurrection in which he was declared to be the Son of God in power.

### **Paul’s Character**

Paul had personal characteristics that made him useable by God. Obviously he possessed a biblical mind. He was absolutely saturated with the Word of God, which in his day was what we call the OT. His great intellect was continually immersed in the Hebrew Scriptures, being constantly instructed by God’s previous revelation of Himself and His will. The biblical thinking of Paul combined with a determined and resolute sense of mission which would not be side tracked. If beaten, he continued to minister, if imprisoned, he would start an evangelistic meeting. If stoned and left for dead because of his preaching God would raise him up and he would go on his way. When a weary listener fell from a window and died while Paul was preaching late at night, the apostle went out and raised him from the dead and then continued his preaching. He was unstoppable in his desire to complete his task.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, **Gideon** would you please stand and face the class and read the passage for us.

These are the things he endured without complaint in his service of His Lord.

### **Paul’s Attitudes – Thankful and Prayerful – In verses 8-15 Turn with me.**

Paul’s sense of gratitude is an important challenge for us. Paul says in Phil. 3:17 – Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” Unreserved submission to the Savior, he is both preacher and pray warrior. Verses 9-10 at the outset of his letter he expresses his bond of fellowship with the believers in Rome.

He cares deeply for them all and he wants to embrace those he has never met. All ministry is two-sided. Paul had apostolic gifts to share with the believers in Rome, and he knew that if he were able to visit them it would lead to mutual encouragement. Iron sharpens iron

### **True Spiritual Leadership**

In the opening verses of his letter to the Romans, Paul sets himself forth for his readers to see before he attempted to teach them some deeper truths of the gospel. He opened his heart and said, in effect, before I teach you my theology, I am going to show you myself. In his opening words to the believers at Rome, Paul tells of his sincere spiritual motives in wanting to minister to them. With warmth, affection, and sensitivity permeated the entire letter, he assures them of his genuine devotion to God and his genuine love for them.

Think of those who have taught you the word of God, think of how you are affected by their words. Can you see their lives, can you tell they care, do they do as they teach others. Men who have been to bible college or Seminary will speak of their closeness with a professor or two, special to them because they could tell their love, and desire to share truth with them was real. This is what we see in Paul's life and actions, serving God and loving others before himself. We cannot truly minister without love for others!

Paul displays the heart of a Pastor, the zeal of a prophet, and the determination of an Apostle. True spiritual leadership can only be accomplished with the love and desire that we see in Paul's letter to the church in Rome. Paul himself had served God in an external, self interested way in the years prior to his salvation. But now that he belonged to Christ and had Christ's own Spirit indwelling him, he worshipped and served Him in spirit and in truth.

Listen to verses 15-17

**Unashamed of the Gospel** – Paul had been imprisoned in Phillippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Berea, laughed at in Athens, regarded as a fool in Corinth, stoned in Galatia, (reminds me of Jesus' words in Acts 9 that I will show him the things he must suffer on my behalf) but Paul remained eager to preach the gospel in Rome. In verses 16-17 we see the spiritual gift he had spoken of in verse 11, the why of his eagerness to share the truth of the gospel. He is undaunted to preach the gospel in the capitol city of Rome. At this time in the history of Christianity it was still just viewed as a Jewish sect. The Christians were very counter cultural, the elites looked down on them as a lowly minority, even most Jews were opposed to them.

Paul states his thesis of the epistle. These verses express the theme of the book of Romans, they contain the most life transforming truth that God has put into men's hands. To understand and positively respond to this truth is to have one's time and eternity completely altered. These words summarize the gospel of Jesus Christ, which Paul then proceeds to unfold and explain throughout the remainder of the epistle.

Paul identifies 4 key words in this passage that are crucial to our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, power, salvation, faith, and righteousness. Let's briefly look at each:

Paul declares, the gospel is the **power** of God. (dynamis) where we get our word dynamite, the gospel carries with it the omnipotence of God. His power alone is sufficient to save men from their sin and give them eternal life.

The world offers many self help plans to make people feel and look better, but man can't overcome his sinful nature no matter what he tries. Jesus rebukes the Sadducees when they try to trap Him and He says to them, You are mistaken not understanding the Scriptures or the power of God.

Only the power of God is able to overcome man's sinful nature and impart spiritual life.

Paul uses the noun (soteria –**salvation**) some thirteen times in Romans in either its noun or verb form. The basic idea behind the term is that of deliverance, or rescue, and the point here that the power of God in salvation rescues people from the ultimate penalty of sin, which is spiritual death extended into tormented eternal separation from God.

The power of God for salvation is for everyone who has (**faith-** believes) (Pisteuo) carries the basic idea of trusting in, relying on, having faith in. We have faith in many things in the world around us. Airplanes, and bridges, the water in the kitchen faucet is safe to drink. All of life requires a natural faith.

But Paul is talking about a supernatural faith, produced by God, a faith that is not of yourself, but the gift of God, Ephesians 2:8. Not of your own doing, it is a gift of God, not of works.

**Let's look at this word Righteous – Paul uses it 35 times in Romans** – Faith activates the divine power that brings salvation, and in that sovereign act the righteousness from God is revealed, and He imparts His own righteousness to those who believe. So His righteousness is reckoned to those who believe in Christ.

Romans 4:5 – And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Paul says in Phil 3:8-9 – Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.

We will look deeper into these truths in week 3

Let's close in prayer