



We're All Romans

Romans 1:1-7 | Jan 5, 2020

The Book of Romans is widely regarded as the greatest Christian treatise ever written, and one of the most important books in the Bible. Not to take anything away from the other 65 inspired writings, but Romans is special. It's like when you go to a Hall of Fame: Everyone enshrined is an all-time great, but some are just more so. They're the greatest of the greats. That's the Book of Romans. At its start, Paul follows typical epistolary form, introducing himself, greeting his audience, and tipping his hand on the themes he will address in the letter. We can apply all of this to our own lives.

We're All Pauline

The first word of Romans is "Paul," and there's a whole story behind that name. Born "Saul" after Israel's famous, first, too-tall king, he started out distinguishing himself as a scholar under Gamaliel, a hard-core Pharisee, and a zealous persecutor of Christians. But on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9), Jesus met Saul with a blinding light and called him decisively into his kingdom and service. Hence Saul became Paul, meaning "small." And now he defines himself as a servant of the Lord, an apostle to the Gentiles, and a man set-apart for the gospel of God.

Have you experienced such a reorientation, such a "re-self-definition" in Christ? Whether dramatic or not, every conversion is essentially Pauline: "God who called light out of darkness made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

We're All Roman

Romans was written circa AD 55-58. The church in Rome was still somewhat under the radar, but within the decade (AD 64) the great persecution under Nero would break out. The Christians would be driven underground, into the catacombs. Those captured would be tortured and killed in the Colosseum. Many Romans would be called to die for their faith, confessing "Jesus is Lord" (*and Caesar is not!*). We too live in tumultuous times, and could be called on to die for our faith. Even if the hardship stops short of death, anyone who wants to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). How will we be steel-spined Romans in that moment?

We'll know ourselves as Paul knew the Romans: "beloved of God and called to be saints." Our saint-hood does not consist in our religious performance or holy morality, but in our holy matrimony to God. He is our God; we are his people. We're married. All that God is, he gives to us. All that we are, we give to him.

We're All Christians

The great theme of Romans is God. We don't want to miss that. The word "God" is used 153 times, more than in any other Bible book, and more than any other word in Romans besides the likes of "and" and "the." God is Paul's preoccupation. The very gospel is "the gospel of God." It's of, by, and for God, incarnated in Jesus. Paul's mission is to bring all nations to the obedience of faith "for his name's sake." We'll grow strong and deep—Pauline, Roman, and Christian—as God and his glory captivate our hearts.

Discussion Guide

1. Have you ever studied Romans before? What was your experience?
2. Some of the greatest, most foundational passages of the entire Bible are found in Romans. Do you know some of them? Remind each other of some of these great verses.
3. John Calvin said, "If we gain a true understanding of this epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture." Why do you think that's the case?
4. Discuss the main points of today's teaching:

We're all Pauline.

- According to 2 Corinthians 4:6, every conversion involves "seeing the light." That is, it involves God revealing Christ as glorious to you. Have you experienced this? If so, in what ways was your experience like Paul's?
- After conversion, what would it mean for us to henceforth understand ourselves as...
 - (1) servants of Christ
 - (2) "small-a" apostles sent to represent him, and
 - (3) set-apart ones for the gospel of God?
- In what ways do you find it hard or easy to define and identify yourself this way?

We're all Roman.

- What does being "beloved of God and called to be a saint" mean to you? Emotionally, how does that strike you?
- In the sermon we talked about sainthood not being a matter of our own holy morality but rather of "holy matrimony" to God. What does that mean? How would you explain that to a seeker or new Christian?
- The Romans were soon to face extreme persecution and martyrdom for their confession that Jesus is Lord. Do you think we need to prepare for that? Why or why not? How would an understanding of ourselves as beloved of God and called to be saints enable us to face such hardship?

We're all Christian.

The Bible scholar Leon Morris notes, "One point that is often overlooked and should be stressed is that Romans is fundamentally a book about God. It is obvious to all that Romans is concerned with the gospel, with salvation, and so on. But many students seem not to have noticed Paul's preoccupation with God. The thought of God dominates this epistle. The word "God" occurs 153 times in Romans, an average of once every 46 words, more than in any other New Testament writing....and more often than any other theme in the book."

- What does it mean to be positively preoccupied with God? What would true God-centeredness look like for you?
- Just as Paul is enthralled with God, he is also amazed and motivated by the fact that he lives "on the right side of history"—on this side of Jesus' resurrection and installation as the King of kings and Lord of lords. What does it mean to you to live in this new testament age?
- Paul's driving aim is to bring about the "obedience of faith" for "His name's sake." What do those two phrases mean? How can they motivate us to follow and serve Jesus more eagerly?