

August 16, 2026

Series: “Romans: The Gospel according to Paul”

Sermon: “Introduction to Romans” Part 1

Scripture: Romans 1:1-7

Memory Verse: Romans 8:1

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Introduction

A. The Book of Romans is one of the most powerful and influential books ever written.

B. It was the instrument used by God to bring spiritual life to Augustine.

C. Martin Luther recovered the doctrine of justification by faith from his study of Romans 1:17. For Martin Luther, the message concerning the righteousness of God “became the gateway of heaven.” It was “the true masterpiece of the New Testament, the purest gospel. “

D. Martin Luther wrote that Romans “deserves not only to be known word for word by every Christian but to be the subject of his meditation day by day, the daily bread of his soul; for it can never be too much or too well studied and the more time one spends on it the more precious it becomes” (Preface of Luther’s commentary on Romans).

E. Hearing the words of the Preface of Luther’s commentary being read, John Wesley felt his heart “strangely warmed.”

F. “Romans is the greatest piece of literature ever” (R. C. Sproul).

G. This morning we will look at the history of Rome, the purpose of the letter, and the history of the letter.

I. What Is Rome’s Story?

A. A long time ago in a land far, far away the Greeks were at war with the Anatolian people of Troy.

B. Background story

C. The story of Romulus and Remus

D. Is this the true story of the founding of Rome? NO. Rome was destroyed by the Gauls in 386 BC. We do not have any record of the actual founding of the city of Rome.

E. This origin story is a legend, although some parts contain truth (Latins and Etruscans).

II. Why Should We Begin Our Study of Romans with This Story?

A. Our world is filled with all manner of unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, and hatred. (Romans 1:29)

B. Man cannot help but act this way. It is who we are apart from Christ. (Romans 3:23)

C. We don't write stories about love, grace, and peace. We are bored by those kinds of stories.

D. From soap operas to MMA to binge watching a streaming show to catching a movie at the theater, you see stories like I just described to you. Stories filled with jealousy and greed, violence and vengeance, sexual immorality and pagan godlessness.

E. The people who contributed to the legend of the founding of Rome mentioned gods to connect their story to the divine. They mentioned sexual immorality and materialism to show you the pleasures they sought. They mentioned war and conquest so you would be in awe of their strength.

F. Their message is that all of this can be yours if you'll bow before it. You too can taste the pleasures of this world if you will pursue them above all other things.

G. The truth is none of these things will satisfy your deepest longings or needs.

H. Rome came to be through violence and strife but God's kingdom does not come by force, but through love and peace, sacrifice and suffering.

I. God's kingdom does not advance through violent force but through suffering. We will not conquer like Rome did but we will "overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

III. What's the History of Paul's Letter to the Church in Rome?

A. The epistles were written to instruct and correct the church. (1 Timothy 3:15-16)

B. We must keep in mind that there are no perfect churches. Churches are always in need of reformation. (Hebrews 12:2)

C. Paul's Epistle to the Church in Rome was written by the apostle Paul while he was in Corinth sometime in AD 56-57. The Holy Spirit led Paul to write exactly what He wanted Paul to write (doctrine of inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:16). Paul spoke as God guided his thoughts and a man named Tertius wrote the letter. (Romans 16:22)

D. Paul's Epistle to the Church in Rome contains sixteen chapters and 433 verses. This letter would have been read aloud on the Lord's Day when the church gathered for worship. It will take you one hour and twenty minutes to read the letter from start to finish.

E. It is important to remember that the chapter divisions were added by Stephen Langton in AD 1202. The verses were added by Robert Estienne in AD 1551. Chapters nor verses were a part of the original inspired writings.

F. What kind of letter is Romans? It's not a letter of rebuke like Galatians or 1 Corinthians. Some believe it is a missions support letter (Romans 15:20-24). I have no quarrel with that view. But there were other issues in the church at Rome that needed to be addressed. I prefer to call Romans a teaching letter.

G. The big idea of Romans is justification by faith alone. The thesis statement for Romans is Romans 1:16-17. Notice Paul said the gospel goes first to the Jews and then to the Greek.

H. The purpose of Romans is inextricably linked to the makeup of the church in Rome.

I. On Pentecost Jews from Rome heard the gospel and were saved. They returned to Rome, proclaimed the gospel, and God saved Jews living in Rome. It is believed that the early church in Rome consisted mainly of Jews along with some Gentiles.

J. The Jews had an arrangement with Rome. As long as they paid their taxes and didn't seek to convert others to their religion, Rome would leave them alone.

K. But Christian Jews in Rome proclaimed the gospel. They intentionally sought to convert people to Christianity. Emperor Claudius heard that the Jews were seeking after people to follow after a "Jewish carpenter." He became furious and exiled the Jews from Rome in AD 49.

L. When Nero became emperor in AD 54, he allowed the Jews to return to Rome. By this time the church in Rome had more Gentiles than Jews. And the Gentile Christians didn't practice the Jewish customs. Internal friction resulted.

M. Paul wrote to clarify what Christians believe and explain what that belief produces in us as believers (new people in Christ).

N. The big idea is that sinners are justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Conclusion

A. Martin Luther called Romans “the purest gospel.”

B. John Calvin said: “If we have gained an understanding of this Epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture.”

C. J. I. Packer said: “All roads in the Bible lead to Romans.”

D. I want to encourage you to read Paul’s Epistle to the Romans this week.

E. God will speak to us as we read and study Romans. This book of the Bible will reveal to you what you truly long for and desperately need. (Romans 8:1)

F. The Gospel Definition