

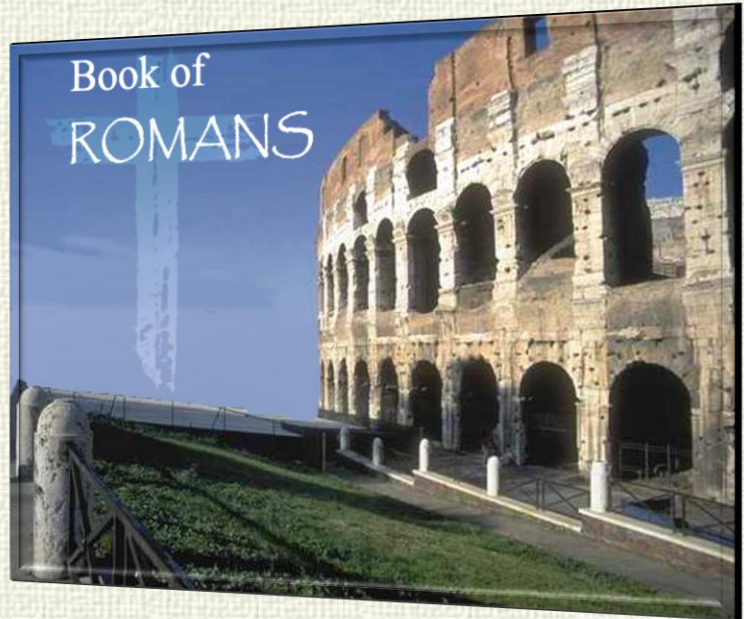
Introduction to Romans

Romans



We embark this morning on what could be a life changing adventure thru the book of Romans. It could be life changing because the Bible is no ordinary book—it is God's word to man. It is a book about God and man's relationship to Him. Therefore, every time we consider or study the Bible we are of necessity worshipping God. Study of the Bible is worship, we seen this in Nehemiah 8:

Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. Nehemiah 8:2-3 NASB



When the Ezra read the Word before the people, it caused them to worship:

Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Nehemiah 8:6 NASB

So as we study the book of Romans we are worshipping God, we are giving Him honor.

We cannot consider this great epistle in a merely academic manner we must seek the illumination of the Spirit. Illumination is God making Himself understood through the writings. I think that illumination requires three H's on our part, Humility, Holiness, Hard work.

Humility—by this I mean dependence. We must be dependent upon God to open our understanding to the Scriptures.

Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law. Psalms 119:18 NASB

We are all prone to read our own conceptions into the text and so we must be humbly dependent upon God to teach us.

Holiness—If we are asking God to reveal Himself to us from His word we must walk in holiness.

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. James 1:21 NASB

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 NASB

The word **“sanctification”** is the Greek word *hagiasmos* which is often translated as **“holiness”**. The word **“see”** is the Greek word *horao* which means: “to discern clearly, to understand” It is a Hebraism for experience.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 1 Peter 2:1-2 NASB

Sin must be put away so that the word can be received.

Hard work—we must be willing to work and work hard if we are going to understand the word:

My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God. Proverbs 2:1-5 NASB

We live in a different culture, speak a different language, and are historically separated by thousands of years. We live in an instant society and we want everything now, but understanding of God’s word takes time and effort. It’s not for lazy people. N.T. Wright said, **“One of the marks of human maturity is delayed gratification.”** Most people in our culture are looking for a biblical Band-Aid. They’re having problems in their marriage so they want a message on marriage to fix it. Or it’s always about what will a message do for me practically speaking. It’s understanding God and His will that gives us strength for daily living and that comes from a consistent study of His Word. Understanding comes in time to those who put in the effort. So I would ask you to put in some effort in understanding this great book. Read it on a regular basis, over and over. Pray for me as I study and for yourself as you seek to learn.

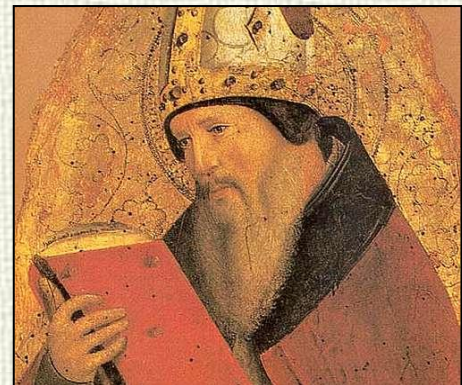
The Epistle to the Romans has possibly played a more important and a more crucial part in the history of the Church than any other single book in the whole of the Bible. In a very basic sense Western civilization is a by-product of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Indisputably Paul's letter to the Romans is one of the most influential pieces of literature ever composed. It's amazing if you just go back in history and see how the book of Romans affected people's lives.

Godet, one of the better commentators on the Epistle to the Romans, has gone so far as to say, **“It is probable that every great spiritual revival in the church of Jesus Christ is connected as effect and cause with a deeper understanding of this book,” the Epistle to the Romans.”**

Let me remind you therefore of some of the things which have been achieved in the history of the Church through this particular book.

In the summer of A.D. 386 a man named Augustine, a native of North Africa, who had for two years been the Professor of rhetoric at Milan, sat weeping in the garden of his friend, Alypius. He was almost persuaded to begin a new life and yet he found it impossible to break with his old life. As he sat, historians tell us that he heard a child singing in a neighboring yard, **“Tolle Lege, Tolle Lege”** a little melody that means, **“Take up and read...take up and read.”** Picking up a scroll which lay at his friend's side, he eyes fell upon the words:

Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. Romans 13:13-14 NASB



“No further would I read,” he said, **“Nor had I any need, instantly at the end of this sentence a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away.”** And in that very moment from one sentence in the book of Romans the church received the great Augustine. Who has probably exerted more influence on the church worldwide than any theologian in the history of the church.

It was Augustine who refuted and finally demolished the teaching of Pelagius simply by expounding the Epistle to the

Romans. Pelagius taught that there was no inherent inclination to evil in human nature, no original sin. He taught [moralism](#), which—that man apart from God could save himself.

In November, 1515 there was a priest by the name of [Martin Luther](#), who himself was an Augustinian monk, and was a professor of sacred theology at the Catholic university of Wittenberg. And to his students he began to expound the epistle to the Romans. So from November of 1515 to the following September of 1516, he gave himself daily to the understanding of that epistle. And as he daily prepared his lectures, he became more and more appreciative of the centrality of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. He writes, *"I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, 'the righteousness of God.' Because I took it to mean that righteousness 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 that righteousness whereby through grace and sheer mercy he justifies us by faith. There upon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through 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, it now began to fill me inexpressible with a sweet love. The passage of Paul became to me the gateway to heaven."*

This led to that tremendous change in his life which really introduced the Protestant Reformation.

Martin Luther wrote in his preface the epistle of Romans, *"This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."* (Luther 1972: 365)

It the evening of May 24, 1738 John Wesley went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where a man was reading Luther's Preface to the epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, as he wrote in his journal, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, *"I myself felt my heart strangely warmed."* Wesley goes on, *"I felt I did trust in Christ and Christ alone for my salvation and an assurance was given me that He had taken my sins away, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death."* And so it was in Aldersgate Street at the reading of the book of Romans that John Wesley was redeemed.

That critical moment in John Wesley's life provided the spark which kindled the blaze of the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival.

One of the most eloquent preachers the church has ever known was John Chrysostom of Constantinople. He said that the Epistle to the Romans was so remarkable that he had it read to him twice every week. He wanted to listen to it to get its message.

John Calvin said of Romans, *"If a man understands it, he has a sure road open to him to the understanding of the whole of Scripture."*

The Epistle to the Romans is, by popular consent, the greatest of Paul's writings. William Tyndale, the great English reformer and translator, referred to Romans as *"the principle and most excellent part of the New Testament."*

You go through history and you will find transformation after transformation in individual lives in nations and across the world that came when men discovered the truth of the book of Romans.

Dr. Barnhouse said this, *"A scientist may say that mother's milk is the most perfect food known to man. And the scientist may give you an analysis showing all of the chemical components. He may give you a list of all the vitamins in the milk and an estimate of the calories in a given quantity. But a baby will take that milk without the remotest knowledge of its content and will grow day by day. So it is with the profoundest truths of the Word of God. Some of us may be able to analyze it, some of us may not, but all of us do well to drink and to grow."*

Why has Paul's Epistle to the Romans has such an effect down through history? What is it that makes this book so life-changing? One point that is often overlooked and needs to be stressed is that Romans is fundamentally a book about God! Obviously Romans is concerned with the gospel, with salvation, and so on, but we must not miss 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. This is more often than in any other New Testament writing except for 1 Peter and 1 John.

Apart from a few prepositions, pronouns, and the like, no word is used in Romans with anything like the frequency of **“God”**. The word law is used 72 times, the word Christ 65 times, the word sin 48 times, the word Lord 43 times and the word faith 40 times. Paul writes on a number of topics, but everything is related to God. Romans may truly be described in a way that no other book can be, as a book about God. It is perhaps this that gives it its importance.

AUTHORSHIP—who wrote this book?

Throughout the history of the church, from post-apostolic times to the present, Christians have regarded Romans as having been one of the Apostle Paul's epistles. But I think it was written by...just kidding, I believe it was written by Paul:

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, Romans 1:1 NASB

We learned in our study of Acts that Paul wrote this book while on his third missionary journey. The details are given in the 20th chapter of the Book of Acts. It was during the winter of the year of **fifty-four and fifty-five A.D.** While Paul was in the city is **Corinth** (the Vanity Fair or the Paris of the ancient world), the apostle is staying in the house of a man by the name of Gaius.

Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. Romans 16:23 NASB

So the apostle is in the house of **Gaius**, and he has a secretary by his side, and the secretary by his side is a man by the name of **Tertius**, which means simply the third:

I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. Romans 16:22 NASB

Tertitus was Paul's amanuensis or secretary. Paul dictated the letter word for word, and Tertitus wrote it down.

The letter was taken from Corinth to Rome by a woman by the name of **Phebe**;

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; Romans 16:1 NASB

And so, it is very likely that it was in the hands of Phebe because he says, **"I commend to you...Phebe."** And so, she was the bearer of this epistle.

RECIPIENTS

We know very little about the founding of the church in Rome. It is possible that the Jews from Rome who became believers in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost carried the gospel back to the synagogues in Rome.

Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Acts 2:10 NASB

This church was most likely established by Jewish Christians. By the time Paul wrote Romans the church in Rome was famous throughout the Roman Empire for its faith:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. Romans 1:8 NASB

It is likely that a church existed by the late 30's or early 40's.

So this letter was written to the believers in Rome. The big debate comes as to whether Paul was writing to mainly Jewish or Gentile believers.

Sam Frost in his commentary of Romans writes, ***“The letter to the Roman ekklesia, I believe, spells out what we would have encountered had we been a Gentile overhearing the very Jewish Paul arguing with a Jewish leader within the***

synagogue (Acts 13.14-52, particularly verse 48).” He goes on to say, “Paul is writing, I believe, to a Jewish audience with Gentile attendance.”

Is Paul writing to the Jews or to the Gentile Christians? Notice what Paul says in the intro:

through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; Romans 1:5-6 NASB

Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and he specifically includes the Roman readers within the sphere of his Gentile commission. This would imply that the majority of his readers were Gentiles. This view is strengthened in:

But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, Romans 11:13 NASB

This does not exclude the Jewish Christians, it is quite clear that he addresses them throughout the letter. So it is my opinion that he is addressing both Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome.

PURPOSE—why did Paul write this letter?

Romans has traditionally been understood as an exposition and summary of Paul’s theology. But since central Pauline teachings are missing or only spoken of in a passing way it seems unsatisfactory to describe Romans as a summary of Paul’s theology.

Paul wrote this epistle under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for several reasons. The central one being his desire to evangelize the west:

Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. Romans 15:28 NASB

Paul wanted in Rome a home base from which the gospel would go out to Spain and the western Mediterranean world, having “fully preached the gospel” in the eastern Mediterranean he wanted to move on:

...so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; Romans 15:19-20 NASB

So Paul wanted to move on to a new base in Rome to carry the gospel to the west. His base in the east had been Antioch. In the opening verses of Romans Paul tell them that his missionary method is:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Romans 1:16 NASB

Paul tells the Romans Christians that his method of evangelism is to go to the Jew first and then to the Greeks. Not only did he go to the Jews first but Paul was telling the Gentile world that they had to accept what was essentially a Jewish message. How would they respond to that? There was much anti-Semitism in Roman society. And this predominately Gentile church may have felt, what is the use in going to the Jews, God is done with them. Jesus prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem and told parables about God taking the Kingdom from them and giving it to others:

"So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? "He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others." When they heard it, they said, "May it never be!" Luke 20:15-16 NASB

So in their mind God was through with Israel, so why should they support a mission to the Jew first, with an essentially Jewish message?

We need to understand a little bit of history. In 49 A.D., the Romans Emperor Claudius, expelled all Jews from Rome. We

see this in:

After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, Acts 18:1-2 NASB

Why did Claudius kick all the Jews out of Rome? The Roman historian **Suetonius** says, "*Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus*" (Claudius 25.4). In Latin the "e" and "i" could be interchangeable, so they probably would have pronounced it "Cres-tus". The conflict between Jews and Jewish Christians in Rome was over who "Christ" was. The Christians said that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. As a result of these disturbances, Claudius banished the Jews from Rome. This dismissal of the Jews from Rome had a significant effect of the Roman churches and they therefore became mainly Gentile. These Gentile house churches developed for a number of years apart from Jewish influence. Then when Nero became emperor in A.D. 54, many Jews returned to Rome along with Jewish Christians. Paul probably wrote Romans in AD 55 or 56 when the Jews had just begun to return to Rome. The sudden influx of Jewish believers in the Gentile churches would have no doubt caused some tensions to say the least.

So there is most likely tension in the churches between Jew and Gentile and then Paul writes to them and wants to use Rome as a base for evangelism to the Jew first. This would not go over well in the predominately Gentile churches. So Paul needs them to understand that the gospel he preaches is in line with all the promises that God made to Israel. It is for the Jew first and also for the Greek. This Gospel makes all one in Christ as he tells the Galatians:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 NASB

I think that Paul goes into so much theology in Romans because he wants them to understand the Jewishness of the Gospel, so not to despise their Jewish brothers. Paul wanted to unify the church in Rome through doctrine, so that the church would be a strong base for world evangelism:

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Romans 14:1-2 NASB

Who are the "*weak*" in this text? They're Jews who are still bound by dietary restrictions. Paul says that they are to "*Accept the one who is weak in faith*"—the Greek word used for "*accept*" here is *proslambano*, [pros-lam-ban'-o] which means: "*to take to one's self and so taking into friendship.*" This exhortation is directed to the strong—the Gentiles. The strength of the plea is indicated by the use of the same term in verse 3 for God's reception of us,

The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Romans 14:3 NASB

Paul says they are to accept each other "*just as Christ accepted us*":

Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. Romans 15:7 NASB

Paul wanted to build up a strategic church in Rome, to unify them so they would function as a home base for missions.

Let me close this morning with a point of hermeneutics [science of interpretation] that we need to understand. The letter of Romans is not written to *us*. It is written to the Roman Christians of the first century. It is applicable to us but before we can apply it to our lives we must understand it's meaning to its original audience.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. Romans 16:1-2 NASB

Are we supposed to "*receive*" and "*help*" Phoebe with whatever she needs? No, of course not. Paul is not writing "*to*" us, but what he writes is "*for*" our edification.

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. Romans 1:9-10 NASB

Is Paul praying for specifically to us? Is he planning to come and see us here at Berean Bible Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia in the year 2010? No, he is not!

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Romans 16:20 NASB

Oh good, Satan will *“soon”* be crushed under our feet? No, the reference to *“soon”* is to the first century Romans, not us. I hope you see my point.

Paul was writing to unify these believers so that they could be used to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Does God want us unified for the sake of the gospel? Look with me at what Jesus says in John 17. This is Jesus praying to the Father and is **THE** Lord's Prayer:

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. John 17:20-21 NASB

He is praying for His disciples and all who will come to believe in Him. He prays for our unity, *“that they all be one”*. And why does he pray for unity? *“So that the world may believe that you sent me.”*

According to these verses, unity among believers verifies Jesus' God-given mission and the Father's love for the world. Over and over Jesus prayed for our unity, because it is a passion of His heart. Unity is our Lord's passion and it should be ours.



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