

Pauline Epistle: **ROMANS**

INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther called the book of Romans the purest gospel. Robust in theology, styled like a court argument, and rich in encouragement for the believer, the book of Romans is meant to spur on believers wherever they are in their walk with Christ. Paul wrote the book of Romans to the church in Rome. Although he did not start this church or had even visited it, he was very invested in the life and growth of this church. Paul saw the strategic nature of the church to disciple their believers well and then launch them out into the community. With this lens in mind, Paul's focus was to unpack very specific topics and issues to a very specific group of people. An example of that is explaining the connection of Abraham to the Jews and how he is now also important for the Gentiles.

Most New Testament scholars agree that Paul wrote this epistle and likely while he was in Greece during the winter/spring of 56-57. Some theologians believe that Phoebe may have carried the letter to Rome. Paul seems to have written this letter sometime after the Jews were kicked out of Rome (Acts 18:2) and then eventually allowed to return.

While Romans is theologically rich, it is not necessarily Paul's entire doctrinal statement, but rather that it addresses specific issues in the church at Roman, including matters concerning Jewish and Gentile Christians. The book of Romans presents the most robust explanation of the gospel in the New Testament in four main movements:

- Romans 1-4 reveals God's righteousness;
- Romans 5-8 creates a new humanity through faith in Christ;
- Romans 9-11 concerns God's promises to Israel; and
- Romans 12-16 unifies the church in service.

All of these matters are essential to the integrity of the letter, and all of them center around correctly understanding the doctrine of justification. Some of the themes of Romans include: the gospel and the law; the significance of Abraham; the future of Israel; sinners, the law and righteousness of God; justification; and God's sovereignty within salvation. Early church father Irenaeus rightly observed: "Jesus became what we are, so that we can become what he is."

IMAGE FOR UNDERSTANDING

It is often said of the Old Testament that it is a fully furnished room that is very dimly lit. As you read, you are seeing, but not seeing the full picture. In the same way, the New Testament seems to turn on the lights in this dimly lit room. The book of Romans puts a spotlight on specific people, theological themes, and movements throughout the Bible. Some of the spotlights are seen in how Paul addresses the two "origin men"—Adam and Jesus (Romans 5); the Patriarch of the faith, Abraham (Romans 4); and even how it was never about being a Jew physically, but a Jew in the posture of your heart (Romans 10). Even addressing the renewal of the mind in Romans 12 connects back to how Christians now CAN renew their mind in light of their new hearts in the new covenant, which is alluded to in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36.

BOOK ORGANIZATION

Romans: The Righteousness of God

Chapter 1-3: Sin

Chapter 4-8: Salvation

Chapter 9-11: Sovereignty

Chapter 12-16: Service

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

- Jesus is the better Israel, better Adam, and even better Abraham.
- Whereas Adam, in his unique and foundational role brought in sin and death to the human race, Jesus brings hope, life, and redemption.
- Paul highlights a contrast of degree/consequence, i.e., the work of Christ being a manifestation of grace, is greater in every way and in the results that it achieves.
- John Calvin summarizes:

“We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ [Acts 4:12]. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is “of him” [1 Cor 1:30]. If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth. For by his birth he was made like us in all respects [Heb 2:17] that he might learn to feel our pain [compare to Heb 5:2]. If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross [Gal 3:13]; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his [death]; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom, in his entrance into heaven; if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given to him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other.”

BIBLE STUDY SPECIFICS: HOW TO APPROACH THE BOOK OF ROMANS

OBSERVATION

- Identify the author (Whenever explicitly stated)
- Note any contextual information given in the heading.
- Romans is written going from argument to argument, stacking. Which argument/topic is Paul discussing?
- Does Paul reference anything in the Old Testament in this section?
- What is the organization of Romans?
- What literary devices are used? What is the author emphasizing, contrasting, bringing attention to, and what is being repeated?

INTERPRETATION

- Literary context: How do you read the book considering the given epistle genre? What is the significance of the literary devices used? What do they teach or emphasize?
- Narrative context: Who is the author, who is the original audience, what was the intended message, and where/how does this book fit into the overarching narrative of Scripture? How does the author want the reader to respond?
- Historical context: What was happening at this point in history?
- Cultural context: What customs, practices, actions, and attitudes were common then?
- Looking at the whole story of Scripture, do these passages remind me of other parts of Scripture?

APPLICATION

- Read in light of Christ.
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to repent from?
- Is there a promise to cling to?
- Is there an example to follow? Or one to avoid?
- Is there any part of my heart that is apprehensive about this passage? Topic? Why or why not?

PRAYER

- Holy Spirit, please help me have the boldness to share the gospel and to not be afraid to share it. (Romans 1:16-17)
- God, please give me deeper gratitude for the work of justification you have done in my life! (Romans 4-5)
- Help me to be transformed by the renewing of my mind! (Romans 12:1-2)
- Lead me to see suffering as something that can produce endurance, character, and hope! (Romans 5:1-5)
- Help me look to serve, love, and outdo others in showing honor. (Romans 12:9-21)
- Thank God for the better righteousness that is found in Jesus! (Romans 3:21-31)
- Thank God for the love of Jesus that we are never separated from. (Romans 8:35-39)

CHURCH HISTORY: WHAT HAS CHURCH HISTORY SAID ABOUT THE BOOK OF ROMANS

“Really the chief part of the New Testament, and . . . truly the purest gospel.”

“I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith.”

— Martin Luther

“The principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure Euangelion, that is to say, glad tidings . . . and also a light and a way in unto the whole Scripture.”

— William Tyndale

“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 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 Wesley

“There is no saying what may happen when people begin to study the letter to the Romans. So, let those who have read thus far be prepared for the consequences of reading further: you have been warned!”

—F.F. Bruce

