

# Romans Introduction

## Sunday, January 23, 2022

With input from Liberty University "What You Need to Know About the Book of Romans" (2010), Chuck Swindoll, O'Neal, Sam. "Earliest Days of the Roman Christian Church." Learn Religions, Sep. 4, 2021, learnreligions.com/the-early-church-at-rome-363409.

### Who wrote Romans? The Apostle Paul

Paul had never been to Rome when he wrote the letter to the Romans, though he had clearly expressed his desire to travel there in the near future:

*Acts 19:21: Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."*

*Romans 1:10-12 always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— 12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.*

Paul greeted twenty-six different people by name, personalizing a letter from a man who would have been a personal stranger to most of the recipients. No doubt they had heard of Paul and would have been honored by the letter, but Paul always took opportunities to personally connect with his audience so that the message of the gospel might be better received.

Before his conversion he was known as Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 9:11). He was a relentless enemy of Christians (Acts 8:3; 22:5, 19; 26:11; Gal. 1:13) would, following his conversion (Acts 9:3-9), become the greatest missionary, church planter, soul winner, and theologian in church history, authoring nearly half of the New Testament books! The books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.

The book of Romans was vitally important to the church of that day and still so very important now, the reason? 2000 years ago he warned that "in the latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). So then, the only real cure for bad doctrine is biblical doctrine; thus, the most theological book ever written – the book of Romans! This book overviews the need for, method of, and results of salvation. It also provides God's relationship to the nation Israel.

### What is the theme? Salvation by Faith

Romans has nearly every major doctrine of the Christian Faith

Three key words:

1. Law (78 times)
2. Righteousness (66 times),
3. Faith (62 times)

It is so foundational to the faith that it has been called the "Constitution of Christianity"

### Where was Paul when he wrote Romans?

Paul wrote to the Romans from the Greek city of Corinth in AD 57, just three years after the 16-year-old Nero had ascended to the throne as Emperor of Rome. The political situation in the capital had not yet deteriorated for the Roman Christians, as Nero wouldn't begin his persecution of them until he made them scapegoats after the great Roman fire in AD 64. Therefore, Paul wrote to a church that was experiencing a time of relative peace, but a church that he felt needed a strong dose of basic gospel doctrine.

Writing from Corinth, Paul likely encountered a diverse array of people and practices—from gruff sailors and meticulous tradesmen to wealthy idolaters and enslaved Christians. The prominent Greek city was also a hotbed of sexual immorality and idol worship. So, when Paul wrote in Romans about the sinfulness of humanity or the power of God’s grace to miraculously and completely change lives, he knew that of which he spoke. It was played out before his eyes every day.

**Location of Rome:** The city was originally built on the Tiber River in the west-central region of modern Italy, near the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Rome has remained relatively intact for thousands of years and still exists today as a major center of the modern world.



**Population:** At the time Paul wrote the Book of Romans, the total population of that city was around 1 million people. This made Rome one of the largest Mediterranean cities of the ancient world, along with Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and Corinth in Greece.

**Politics:** Rome was the hub of the Roman Empire, which made it the center of politics and government. Fittingly, the Roman Emperors lived in Rome, along with the Senate. All that to say, ancient Rome had a lot of similarities to modern-day Washington D.C.

**Culture:** Rome was a relatively wealthy city and included several economic classes -- including slaves, free individuals, official Roman citizens, and nobles of different kinds (political and military). First-century Rome was known to be filled with all kinds of decadence and immorality, from the brutal practices of the arena to sexual immorality of all kinds.

**Religion:** During the first century, Rome was heavily influenced by Greek mythology and the practice of Emperor worship (also known as the Imperial Cult). Thus, most inhabitants of Rome were polytheistic -- they worshiped several different gods and demigods depending on their own situations and preferences. For this reason, Rome contained many temples, shrines, and places of worship without a centralized ritual or practice. Most forms of worship were tolerated.

Rome was also a home to "outsiders" of many different cultures, including Christians and Jews.

### **The Church in Rome**

Nobody is certain of who founded the Christian movement in Rome and developed the earliest churches within the city. Many scholars believe the earliest Roman Christians were Jewish inhabitants of Rome who were exposed to Christianity while visiting Jerusalem -- perhaps even during the Day of Pentecost when the church was first established (see Acts 2:1-12).

What we do know is that Christianity had become a major presence in the city of Rome by the late 40s A.D. Like most Christians in the ancient world, the Roman Christians were not collected into a single congregation. Instead, small groups of Christ-followers gathered regularly in-house churches to worship, fellowship, and study the Scriptures together.

As an example, Paul mentioned a specific house church that was led by married converts to Christ named Priscilla and Aquilla (see Romans 16:3-5).

In addition, there were as many as 50,000 Jews living in Rome during Paul's day. Many of these also became Christians and joined the church. Like Jewish converts from other cities, they likely met together in the synagogues throughout Rome alongside other Jews, in addition to gathering separately in houses.

Both of these were among the groups of Christians Paul addressed in the opening of his Epistle to the Romans:

**Romans 1:1,7** *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God .... To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

## **Persecution**

The people of Rome were tolerant of most religious expressions. However, that tolerance was largely limited to religions that were polytheistic -- meaning, the Roman authorities didn't care who you worshiped as long as you included the emperor and didn't create problems with other religious systems.

That was a problem for both Christians and Jews during the middle of the first century. That's because both Christians and Jews were fiercely monotheistic; they proclaimed the unpopular doctrine that there is only one God -- and by extension, they refused to worship the emperor or acknowledge him as any kind of deity.

For these reasons, Christians and Jews began to experience intense persecution. For example, the Roman Emperor Claudius banished all Jews from the city of Rome in 49 A.D. This decree lasted until Claudius's death 5 years later.

Christians began to experience greater persecution under the rule of Emperor Nero -- a brutal and perverted man who harbored an intense dislike for Christians. Indeed, it's known that near the end of his rule Nero enjoyed capturing Christians and setting them on fire to provide light for his gardens at night. The apostle Paul wrote the Book of Romans during the early reign of Nero, when Christian persecution was just beginning. Amazingly, the persecution only became worse near the end of the first century under Emperor Domitian.

## **Conflict**

In addition to persecution from outside sources, there is also ample evidence that specific groups of Christians within Rome experience conflict. Specifically, there were clashes between Christians of Jewish origin and Christians who were Gentiles.

As mentioned above, the earliest Christian converts in Rome were likely of Jewish origin. The early Roman churches were dominated and led by Jewish disciples of Jesus. When Claudius expelled all Jews from the city of Rome, however, only the Gentile Christians remained. Therefore, the church grew and expanded as a largely Gentile community from 49 to 54 A.D.

When Claudius died and Jews were allowed back in Rome, the returning Jewish Christians came home to find a church that was much different from the one they had left. This resulted in disagreements about how to incorporate the Old Testament law into following Christ, including rituals such as circumcision.

For these reasons, much of Paul's letter to the Romans includes instructions for Jewish and Gentile Christians on how to live in harmony and properly worship God as a new culture -- a new church. For example, Romans 14 offers strong advice on settling disagreements between Jewish and Gentile Christians in connection with eating meat sacrificed to idols and observing the different holy days of the Old Testament law.

## **Why is Romans so important?**

The letter to the Romans stands as the clearest and most systematic presentation of Christian doctrine in all the Scriptures. Paul began by discussing that which is most easily observable in the world—the sinfulness of all humanity. All people have been condemned due to our rebellion against God. However, God in His grace offers us justification by faith in His Son, Jesus. When we are justified by God, we receive redemption, or salvation, because Christ’s blood covers our sin. But Paul made it clear that the believer’s pursuit of God doesn’t stop with salvation; it continues as each of us is sanctified—made holy—as we persist in following Him. Paul’s treatment of these issues offers a logical and complete presentation of how a person can be saved from the penalty and power of his or her sin.

## **What's the Primary Theme?**

The primary theme running through Paul’s letter to the Romans is the revelation of God’s righteousness in His plan for salvation, what the Bible calls the gospel:

**Romans 1:16-17** *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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”*

Paul showed how human beings lack God’s righteousness because of our sin (1–3), receive God’s righteousness when God justifies us by faith (4–5), demonstrate God’s righteousness by being transformed from rebels to followers (6–8), confirm His righteousness when God saves the Jews (9–11), and apply His righteousness in practical ways throughout our lives (12–16).

## **How do we apply this?**

The structure of Romans provides a hint into the importance of the book in our everyday lives. Beginning with eleven chapters of doctrine, the book then transitions into five chapters of practical instruction. This union between doctrine and life illustrates for Christians the absolute importance of both what we believe and how we live out those beliefs. Does your day-to-day life mirror the beliefs you hold, or do you find yourself in a constant battle with hypocrisy?

## **Key Points by chapter:**

1. God’s general indictment of humanity
2. God’s specific indictment of both Gentiles and Jews
3. The final verdict declares the entire world guilty before God; a definition of divine justification
4. Justification by faith illustrated by Abraham and David
5. The results of justification; justification compared and contrasted with condemnation as seen through the lives of Adam and Christ
6. The three commands leading to sanctification: (1) know, (2) reckon, and (3) yield
7. The relationship of the law of God to the unsaved and to the saved
8. The believer’s new position and future destiny in Christ
9. Israel’s past selection by God
10. Israel’s present rejection by God
11. Israel’s future restoration by God
12. The believer’s responsibilities regarding (1) his own body, (2) his gifts, (3) his fellow believers, and (4) his unsaved acquaintances
13. The believer’s responsibilities regarding (1) the government, (2) society, and (3) the future return of Christ
14. The believer’s responsibilities regarding weaker members of Christ’s body
15. The believer is to please others, not himself; Paul writes of his future travel plans

16. Paul's closing greetings to his friends in Rome; his advice concerning troublemakers in the Church at Rome

### **Key Individuals**

1. Paul
2. Abraham, referred to by Paul showing that justification in the Old Testament was accomplished apart from circumcision
3. David, referred to by Paul showing that justification in the Old Testament was accomplished apart from the Law of Moses
4. Adam, referred to by Paul in contrasting his sin with that of Christ's righteousness
5. Isaac, Jacob, Moses and an Egyptian Pharaoh, referred to by Paul to illustrate God's sovereignty
6. Phoebe, godly woman who was entrusted to carry the epistle of Romans to the Church in Rome

If all of the Bible were lost except Romans, scarcely any fundamental doctrine would be lacking. As he explained the gospel in Romans, Paul quoted from the Old Testament more often than in all his twelve other letters combined—showing how important the Old Testament is to understanding the gospel. No less than 57 quotes can be found.

It is Paul's second longest epistle. First Corinthians is the most lengthy.

It defines for us more great theological terms and concepts than any other biblical book:

1. Justification (5:1)
2. Sanctification (6:1-13)
3. Propitiation (3:23-25)
4. Imputation (4:6-8)
5. Glorification (8:16-23)
6. Preservation (8:35-39)
7. Supplication (8:26, 27)
8. Transformation (12:1, 2)

### **Concepts:**

1. It is the only biblical book which states that the indwelling Holy Spirit actually prays for the believer (8:26, 27).
2. We are told just what righteousness is, what it isn't, who needs it, why it is needed, where one may and may not find it.
3. Romans provides the greatest contrast between Christ and Adam in the Bible (5:12-21).
4. It gives us the most expanded explanation of God's past, present, and future dealings with Israel in all the Bible (9-11).
5. It includes the most comforting verse in the Scriptures for Christians in distress (8:28). Romans 8 is considered by many as the most profound and precious chapter in the New Testament.
6. In general it gives the most severe condemnation of sin in the Bible (1:18-23; 3:9-18).
7. In particular it gives the most severe condemnation of sexual sin in the Bible (1:24, 32)
8. It provides the most detailed account concerning the results of justification (5:1-11).
9. Romans offers one of Scripture's greatest statements regarding God's matchless wisdom (11:33-36).
10. It records the first of two overviews in regard to the responsibility of the believer and secular government (13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17).
11. It contains the first of two passages concerning the responsibilities involved in Christian liberty (14:1-6, 13-21; 1 Cor. 8-10).
12. In this book is found the first of three sections dealing with the future judgment seat of Christ (14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-17; 2 Cor. 5:1-10).
13. It offers us the first of three listings of the spiritual gifts (12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11-16).

Four facts concerning the internal affairs of this church.

The positive things:

1. They shared their faith (1:8).
2. They were obedient to the faith (16:19).

The negative things:

1. Some were guilty of judging others (14:10).
2. Some were causing divisions (16:17).

Romans is the only New Testament book with no less than five distinct benedictions. (See 11:33-36; 15:13; 15:30-33; 16:20; 16:24-27).

### **Comparison with other biblical books:**

1. Genesis: • In Genesis, Abraham is the patriarch of Israel; in Romans he is the patriarch of all who believe (4:16).
2. Galatians: • Galatians, with its discussion of justification by faith, could be called “Romans in shorthand.”
3. James: • Romans shows the root of salvation: faith alone. James shows the fruit of salvation: good works.

### **Titles for and Types of Jesus:**

1. Jesus Christ (1:1)
2. The Seed of David (1:3)
3. The Son of God (1:4)
4. The Lord Jesus Christ (1:7)
5. Christ Jesus (3:24)
6. A Propitiation (3:25)
7. Jesus (3:26)
8. Jesus our Lord (4:24)
9. Lord of Sabaoth (9:29)
10. A Stumbling Stone and Rock of Offence (9:33)
11. The End of the Law (10:4)
12. The deliverer (11:26)
13. Lord of the Dead and Living (14:9)
14. A Root of Jesse (15:12)

# ROMANS

## THE GOSPEL

Introduction — Personal (1:1–17)	<b>Saving the Sinner</b>	<b>Concerning Israel</b>	<b>Concerning Christian Conduct</b>	Conclusion — Relational (15:14–16:27)	
	<u>Depravity of humanity</u> <u>Grace of God</u> <u>Justification by faith</u> <u>Sanctification through the Spirit</u> <u>Security of the saint</u>	<u>Divine sovereignty and human will</u> Past, present, and future <u>of the nation</u>	<u>Social</u> <u>Civil</u> <u>Personal</u>		
	<i>CHAPTERS</i> 1:18–8:39	<i>CHAPTERS</i> 9–11	<i>CHAPTERS</i> 12:1–15:13		
<b>Emphasis</b>	Doctrinal	National	Practical		
<b>Response</b>	Faith	Hope	Love		
<b>Doctrine of God</b>	Wrath	Righteousness	Glory	Grace	
<b>Doctrine of Humanity</b>	Fallen	Dead	Saved	Struggling	Freed
<b>Doctrine of Sin</b>	Exposed	Conquered	Explained	Forgiven	
<b>Scope</b>	Dead in sin	Dead to sin	Peace with God	Love for others	
<b>Theme</b>	God's righteousness is given to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.				
<b>Key Verses</b>	1:16–17				
<b>Christ in Romans</b>	Jesus is the focus of the gospel and the means of salvation by God's grace apart from works (1:1–4, 16–17).				