

Romans – Lesson 1

An Introduction to the Letter to the Romans

Martin Luther's introduction to Romans:

This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.

William Tyndale

Wherefore it appeareth evidently, that Pauls mind was to comprehend briefly in this epistle all the whole learning of Christ's gospel, and to prepare an introduction unto all the old Testament. For without doubt, whosoever hath this epistle perfectly in his heart, the same hath the light and the effect of the old Testament with him. Wherefore let every man, without exception, exercise himself therein diligently, and record it night and day continually, until he be full acquainted therewith.

First, behold thyself diligently in the law of God, and see there thy just damnation. Secondly, turn thine eyes to Christ, and see there the exceeding mercy of thy most kind and loving Father. Thirdly, remember that Christ made not this atonement that thou shouldest anger God again; neither died he for thy sins, that thou shouldest live still in them; neither cleansed he thee, that thou shouldest return as a swine unto thine old puddle again; but that thou shouldest be a new creature, and live a new life after the will of God, and not of the flesh. And be diligent, lest through thine own negligence and unthankfulness thou lose this favor and mercy again.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge said Romans was "*the profoundest book in existence.*"

A member of the church (RC Bell) once called it, "*a walking tour through the grand cathedral of Christian truth.*"

Purpose of the Letter

From Robert W. Yarbrough Expository Commentary

(1) He wrote to mobilize support for his eventual outreach to Spain (1:13; 15:24). In that sense Romans is a missionary letter.

(2) He wrote to correct misunderstandings of his ministry and message, whether due to defective grasp, mischief stirred up by opponents of Paul's teaching, or both. The entirety of Romans should be viewed in part as an apologetic presentation to support this plea:

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. (16:17–18)

In that sense Romans is a pastoral letter, expounding on the “standard of teaching” (6:17) affirmed by the apostolic churches and calling for living that lines up with that faith.

(3) He wrote to encourage mutual understanding and reconciliation between two viewpoints in the Roman church that were struggling to coexist. It is customary to term these groups the “strong” and the “weak” (14:1–15:13). In that sense Romans is a situational letter, calling for reconciliation and sustained harmony in the face of relational challenges. Where people gather, there will be bickering. Christian congregations are no exception.

(4) He wrote to clarify the responsibilities of Christians in an empire that was at best indifferent to a small subgroup like the Christians and at worst antagonistic. Jesus' followers should be loyal subjects of the governmental structure in which they find themselves to the extent it is possible without compromised loyalty to God (13:1–7). In that sense Romans serves a political function, clarifying how Christians whose citizenship is in heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20) should render to Caesar what they owe him (Matt. 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25) without short-changing God and Christ.

Relevance for Today

- Sin: what it is, how it enslaves us, the consequences of sin, how we escape sin
- Flesh vs Spirit: Our temptation to choose the flesh and the necessity of walking in the Spirit
- God: His existence, character and nature
- The Holy Spirit: His role in salvation and the Christian life
- Church problems: How to deal with differing opinions and disagreements
- Government: How and why a Christian should obey and submit
- Salvation: How faith and baptism lead us to salvation
- Christian living: How the gospel changes our relationships and our behaviour in everyday life. How we deal with guilt and growth.

Key Words in Romans

1. God (theos) 153
2. law (nomos) 74
3. Christ (Christos) 65
4. sin (hamartia) 48
5. Lord (kyrios) 43
6. faith (pistis) 40
7. Jesus (Iesous) 36
8. righteousness (dikaiosyne) 34
9. Spirit, spirit (pneuma) 34
10. Gentile (ethnos) 29

Note: References to God, Christ, Lord, Jesus and Spirit = 331 in 432 verses

Also note: "In Christ" appears 13 times

Challenges to studying Romans

- The length and compactness.
- Complex themes - Predestination, faith and works, the Spirit and the flesh, the new covenant and the law
- Answering questions that we aren't asking.
 - 3:1
 - 4:1
 - 7:7
- Difficulty in understanding words:
 - Righteousness
 - Faith
 - Death
 - Spirit

Layout

The Problem - Sin

1. God's righteousness has been revealed
2. The unrighteousness of the Jews
3. The unrighteousness of all

The Solution - Faithfulness

4. Abraham - father of all the faithful (Jew and Gentile)
5. Salvation brings hope
6. Slaves of sin become slaves to God
7. Wrestling with the law and sin
8. No condemnation when we live in the Spirit over the flesh

The Plan - God's Election of the True Israel

9. God's promises of salvation to Israel
10. Israel's rejection of God
11. God's plan is for Jews and Gentiles

The Result - New life in the Spirit

12. Our new life in God
13. Submitting to God by submitting to Government
14. How strong and weak Christians get along
15. Paul's Mission to teach the Gospel
16. Appreciation for fellow Christians and a summary of the gospel