

## ROMANS

**Introduction:** Paul's letter to the Romans stands among the most important pieces of literature in the history of Western man. Though Paul would probably be surprised to hear such a statement, he never would have questioned the power of the message which the letter contains. In it, the apostle gives the most compelling discourse in Scripture on the saving power of the gospel.

**Author** - Paul, the apostle. (Romans 1:1)

**Place of Writing** - Corinth; as evident from the greetings of Gaius, who lived at Corinth (Romans 16:23; I Corinthians 1:14), and of Erastus, who had settled down there (Romans 16:23; II Timothy 4:20). Also, Phoebe, who apparently accompanied Paul (Romans 16:1-2), was from the church at Cenchrea, a "suburb" of Corinth.

**Time of Writing** - 57-58 AD while on his third journey (Acts 20:13), just prior to his arrival to Jerusalem with the collection for the needy Christians there. (Romans 15:25-26; Acts 20:16; 24:17)

### **The Epistles (Letters) as a Literary Form**

1. The epistles of the New Testament are the 21 books from Romans through Jude. The apostle Paul is identified as the writer of 13 of them (Romans through Philemon).
2. Letters were a common literary form in the time of Paul. The letter form was used for purposes larger than mere communication.
  - a. Paul's letters were designed to be read aloud in churches. (I Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16)  
It is clear that the epistles were intended to benefit more than the primary recipients.
  - b. It is in the epistles that the order, position, privileges, and duties of the church are most fully given. The church as the body of Christ, the "mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God (Ephesians 3:9) is revealed.
3. A convenient way to group Paul's epistles is as follows:
  - a. Letters to churches written during the missionary tours: I & II Thessalonians, Galatians, I & II Corinthians, and Romans.
  - b. Letters written while a prisoner at Rome (AD 60-62): Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.
  - c. Letters following the first Roman imprisonment: I & II Timothy and Titus.

### **I. Background of the Book of Romans.**

#### **A. Rome**

1. The beginnings of the city of Rome are lost in legend. The story was that it had been named after its founder, Romulus, whose ancestors had escaped from the Greek destruction of Troy. The date was said to be 753 BC. That was the year from which the later Romans counted the beginning of their history.
2. For centuries Rome was a small and struggling city-state. After times of strife, poverty and war, Rome slowly won ground, and by 275 BC, controlled all of Italy.
3. By the first century AD Rome was the capital city of the empire, and the largest and most important city of the world, with a population somewhere between two and four million souls.
  - a. There were more slaves than free people in Rome at this time. The stark contrast of wealth and poverty could not have been missed by a visitor.
  - b. The hedonistic life (personal pleasure the chief goal in life) of Rome during this period is well known.
  - c. Rome was a city of bewildering religious diversity, encompassing all manner of eastern mysticism, astrology, magic, and Greek mythology. When the Romans conquered the Greeks, they took over

all their gods and gave them Roman names (Zeus became the Roman god Jupiter, etc.).

- d. This smorgasbord of "religious" options did not satisfy people. It offered no real answers to the problems of good and evil, life and death. Life was uncertain. These gods had no power to save their cities from sudden disaster. People looked for purpose in life. Why should they live good lives if the gods could not give them justice?
- e. A sizable Jewish colony was there. Rome had often protected the Jews in the past. Paul was both a Jew and a Roman citizen, and he naturally looked to Rome for justice and protection. Rome had provided the peace and freedom to travel and spread the gospel. When Paul was treated unjustly, he used his right as a Roman to appeal to the Emperor. (Paul may not then have known what an evil man Nero was becoming.)

#### B. The church at Rome.

1. Nothing is revealed in the New Testament as to the start of the church in Rome.
  - a. It is possible that visitors to Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost were among the 3000 saved (Acts 2:10) and later took the gospel with them back home.
  - b. Or it could be that among those dispersed following Stephen's death were some that went to Rome and preached the gospel there. (Acts 8:1-4)
2. The first we read of Christians at Rome is possibly that of Aquila and Priscilla along with all the Jews who were expelled from Rome by Claudius and were found by Paul at Corinth during his second journey. (Acts 18:1-2) After traveling with Paul to Ephesus and working with the church there (Acts 18:18-19, 24-26; I Corinthians 16:19), we find them back at Rome and hosting a church in their house. (Romans 16:3-5)
3. From the greetings given by Paul in chapter sixteen, it appears that there were Christians in Rome meeting in various homes (Romans 16:5, 14-15). The names of individuals suggest that the Christians were primarily Gentiles, with a smaller number of Jews.
4. The reputation of the Christians in Rome was widespread; both their faith (Romans 1:8) and obedience (Romans 16:19) were well known. For this reason Paul had long wanted to see them (Romans 15:23), with the goal of sharing in their mutual edification (Romans 1:11-12) and to be assisted on his way to Spain. (Romans 15:22-24)

#### C. Purpose of the Letter.

1. The spreading cancer of the "Judaizing teachers" which had disrupted churches in Antioch, Corinth and Galatia was likely to make its way to Rome.
2. To prevent this, and to assure that his visit to Rome would be a favorable one (Romans 15:30-33), Paul writes this letter **TO SET STRAIGHT THE DESIGN AND NATURE OF THE GOSPEL.**
3. In doing so, he demonstrates how the gospel of Christ fulfills what is lacking in both heathenism and Judaism, thereby effectively replacing them as religious systems. Such a letter would arm the church at Rome against those who would pervert the gospel or suggest that it was inadequate by itself.
4. The letter will always serve as a nourishing exposition of the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

### II. The Main Message of the Letter - Romans 1:16-17

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

### III. Outline of the Letter.

#### A. Introduction (1:1-17)

1. Address and salutation. (1:1-7)
2. Thanksgiving. (1:8-15)
3. Theme. (1:16-17)

- B. Man under the wrath of God. (1:18- 3:20)
  - 1. The unrighteous Man - Gentile. (1:18-32)
    - a. Knowledge of God possible. (1:18-20)
    - b. God not acknowledged. (1:21-32)
  - 2. The self-righteous man - Jew. (2:1-3:20)
    - a. Self-righteous critics. (2:1-29)
    - b. Law reveals man's estrangement. (3:1-20)
  
- C. Righteousness as a gift to sinners. (3:21 5:11)
  - 1. For all who believe in Jesus Christ. (3:21-26)
  - 2. Apart from the law. (3:27-31)
  - 3. Fulfillment of the covenant. (4:1-25)
  - 4. Peace of Reconciliation. (5:1-11)
  
- D. Creation of a new humanity. (5:12-8:17)
  - 1. Christ as the new Adam. (5:12-21)
  - 2. Baptism as death and resurrection. (6:1-14)
  - 3. The new life is freedom. (6:15-8:17)
    - a. Freedom from "Freedom." (6:15-23)
    - b. Freedom from Law. (7:1-12)
    - c. Freedom from Anxiety. (7:13-25)
    - d. Freedom in the Spirit. (8:1-17)
- E. Freedom is dependent on God's sovereign love. (8:18-11:36)
  - 1. God's love is sovereign over the creation. (8:18-39)
  - 2. God's love is sovereign over history. (9:1-11:36)
    - a. Paul's grief concerning Israel's disbelief. (9:1-5)
    - b. Affirmation of the power of God's word. (9:6-26)
    - c. Righteous remnant doctrine. (9:27-11:10)
    - d. Universal hope. (11:11-36)
  
- F. Freedom acts in love. (12:1-15:13)
  - 1. Toward God. (12:1-2)
  - 2. Toward brethren. (12:3-13)
  - 3. Toward persecutors. (12:14-21)
  - 4. Toward authorities. (13:1-7)
  - 5. Toward the law. (13:8-14)
  - 6. Toward the weak. (14:1 -15:13)
  
- G. Personal notes. (15:14-16:27)
  - 1. Proposed itinerary. (15:14-33)
  - 2. Commendation of Phoebe. (16:1-27)

#### **IV. Key Themes in the Letter.**

- A. All have sinned and fall short.
  - 1. Jews and Gentiles alike are under condemnation because of sin. (1:18f)
    - a. Gentile pagan moralizers were no better than other pagans. (2:1-11)
    - b. When considering our spiritual condition, we must look to God who is holy, rather than seek the pseudo-security which comes by comparing ourselves to other sinners. (2:1-4); 3:23)
  - 2. Paul himself struggled with his "sinful nature" and knew that apart from Christ, he had no hope of righteousness or eternal life. (7:15-25; see also Ephesians 2:1-10)

3. Law cannot save us, but it does make us aware of our sinful state. (3:20)

B. Justification by faith.

1. "But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known." (3:21)
2. This wonderful doctrine is summarized in Romans 3:23-26.
  - a. **Sin** is the problem. (v. 23)
  - b. **Christ** is the solution. (v. 24)
  - c. **Faith** is the means to salvation. (vs. 25-26)
3. Salvation cannot be gained by doing good works. (4:1-25) It is the work of Christ giving Himself as the perfect sacrifice on the cross which secures our salvation. (4:24-25)
4. But grace is not a license to sin! True faith is a living and active faith that involves the kind of surrender to God by dying to sin, being buried in water and being resurrected In Christ symbolized in baptism. (6:1-23)

C. Life in the Spirit.

1. Not only has God freed us from the guilt and condemnation our past sins have generated, He has made it possible for the new life in Christ to be lived in victory over past weaknesses and temptations. (5:1-11)
2. The presence and power of the indwelling Spirit make this a reality. (8:1-17, 26-27 also see I John 4:4) At baptism, God's Spirit is given to quicken (make alive) and empower us for a new life (6:5-11). (See also Acts 2:38 and I Corinthians 6:19-20)
3. We now can have full confidence that our God will deliver us from sufferings. (8:18-39)
4. We are to dedicate our lives to God - this pleases our great God who first had mercy on us. (12:1-2)

D. The community of faith.

1. We are to serve our fellow Christians, the church, with our spiritual gifts. (12:3-8)
2. We are to love one another (12:9-16), and those outside of God's family. (12:17-21)
3. We are to model good citizenship. (13:1-14)
4. We are to live in unity with one another. (14:1 -15:7)
  - a. True *unity* does not depend upon *conformity* in the body of Christ. Regarding debatable matters, there must be tolerance and forbearance. (14:1-8)
  - b. We are to "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." (14:19)