

# Introduction to the Book of Romans

## Through Church History

The great revivals to the truth of God's word throughout the church age are directly connected to Romans.

**Augustine** was converted reading a verse from Romans. He was a teacher in Milan who was living a life of a heathen. One day as he sat in the yard of a friend crying because of the wickedness of his life he heard a child singing a child's song with the words,

"Take up and read. Take up and read."

Next to him lay the open scroll of the book of Romans. He did "take up and read" the first thing his eyes focused on where the words, "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

Augustine would later write: "No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended, - by a light, as it were, or security infused into my heart, - all the gloom of doubt vanished away."

**Martin Luther** unleashed the reformation by gaining a renewed understanding of what the epistles says.

He was teaching the book to his students at the University of Wittenberg in Germany when he gradually became more and more convinced of salvation by justification by faith. He said, "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. Thereupon 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, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love."

Martin Luther said, "Romans 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."

**John Calvin** said, "When any one gains a knowledge of the New Testament and the very purest gospel."

**William Tyndale** wrote in 1534: "I think it meet that every Christian man not only know it, by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. No man verily can read it too oft, or study it too well; for the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is; and the more groundly it is searched, the preciouser things are found in it."

**John Wesley**, an ordained minister in the Church of England, was converted as he listened to a pastor read the Preface to Luther's commentary on Romans. Wednesday evening, May 24, 1738, Wesley wrote in his journal, "I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. 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 my 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."

## Ancient Letters

We have 14,000 letters from antiquity. (Most copies, though some originals)

Private letters range from 18-209 words.

Literary works in letter form are longer.

We have 796 letters by Cicero that average **295 words** ranging from **22 - 2,530** words.

Seneca has 124 letters ranging from **149 - 4,134** words. Seneca **averages 995** / letter.

Paul's 13 epistles **averaged about 1,300** words.

**Romans has 7,100 words.**

That alone makes this a very unusual letter.

Paul made use of letter writing to spread the gospel, to teach churches and to manage the churches he started.

## Founding of the Church in Rome

Information is lacking on who started the Roman church or when it began.

It is clear that Paul did not start the Roman church since in this letter he says that he has never visited the church in Rome before:

- "I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now)." (Rm.1:13)
- The idle notion that Peter started the church in Rome is contrary to Peter ministry which was to the Jews (Gal. 2:7-8).
- Although Peter had a traveling ministry (1 Cor. 9:5), the church of Rome would have started long before Peter arrived to preach in Rome.
- If Peter had started the church in Rome then Paul would have been building on Peter's apostolic ministry in Rome, but Paul says,  
"From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation." (Rm. 15:20)
- Church history is silent on how the church in Rome began. It is most probable that the church began when Jews returned to Rome from Jerusalem after the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). This means the church would have began in the Jewish synagogues first.
  - These believing Jews may have split off from those who rejected Christ and formed their own synagogues (or, churches) since any ten adult male Jews could form a synagogue. In fact the term used to identify a group meeting as a synagogue ("proseucha"="metting") is used in James 2:2 to refer to a church meeting of Jewish believers (synagogue of believers in Jerusalem).
  - The fact that Jews were leaving the traditional teaching and embracing Christ in Rome early is defended in secular writing.
  - The Roman historian Suetonius in "Life of Claudius" records that Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome at this time when he writes: Claudius "expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus." This is dated as 49 AD  
The reason for the imperial order was because the Jews "constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (or, Christos, Christ). He records the danger of rioting and describes the efforts and strategies enforced by Claudius to control the situation.
  - When they were allowed to return they were not allowed to meet synagogue assemblies because these meetings were the source of disputes.
  - This situation is captured in the book of Acts 18:2: "There he met a Jew named Aquila, a natives of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jew to leave Rome."
  - This was in Corinth and was in the year 50 AD. The dating of Claudius order is agreed by most to be in the year 49 AD.
  - Ambrosiaster writing in the 300's says that the church in Rome was NOT founded by an apostle but was started by a Hebrew believer whose name was not recorded. The first members of the church in Rome were probably Jewish, but that did not last long.
  - After Claudius' death in 54 AD the Jews began to trickle back into Rome.
  - But, at this time the churches they had left behind had a definite Gentile flavor

We can tell by the Roman letter there was a large Gentile group.

This is seen in these verse: 1:5-6 1:13 11:13-32 9:3 10:1-2 15:15-16

Yet, the Jewish group within the church remained yet in Paul's day as can be seen with these Jewish references:

4:1 our forefather

7:1 people who know the law

7:4 died to the law

3:31 charging the Jews for having nullified the law

6:1 freedom from the law.

That Paul is addressing both groups is seen in

15:7-9: become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy."

These verses address both Jews and Gentiles with the subject being discussed:

1:16 - "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile"

2:9 - "There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

3:29 - "Is God the God of Jews only: Is he not the God of Gentiles too?"

10:12 - "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him."

Romans quotes the Old Testament 57 times.

## Popular Words

God - 154 times

Law - 77 times

Christ - 66 times

Sin - 45 times

Lord - 44 times

Faith - 40 times

## Date and Place of Writing

- Paul's third journey took him to Corinth.
- During his stay in Corinth at this time Paul wrote Romans.
- While in Corinth Paul collected money to take to the needy believers in Palestine according to Romans 15:2. Paul would have left for Jerusalem in the early spring of 57 AD. This is referred to in Romans 15:25. He was trying to get to Jerusalem before Pentecost according to Acts 20:16.
- Phoebe from Cenchrea carried the letter (Rm. 16:1,2). Cenchrea was a few miles from Corinth.
- Paul sends the Romans greetings from Titius Gaius Justus whose house he was staying at in when he wrote the letter to the Romans (Rm. 16:23).
- Titius Gaius Justus was one of Paul's converts in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:14) and it was in this house that the church met when it left the synagogue in Acts 18:7. Gaius was a Gentile.  
So, clearly Paul was in Corinth and had just completed the offering for the Jerusalem believers.

## Paul's History

34 AD Converted on Damascus Road

- -Preached in Damascus
- -Spent time in Arabia
- -Returned to preach in Damascus
- -Visited Jerusalem and met James and Peter
- -Fled to Tarsus

37-43 AD Based his ministry out of Tarsus

43 AD Barnabus found Paul and invited him to the Antioch church

43-47 AD Paul served in the Church in Antioch

47 AD Paul and Barnabus take first missionary trip

48 AD Paul goes to the Jerusalem Council

49 AD Paul writes Galatians

50-52 AD Paul & Silas on second missionary trip through Asia Minor, Macedonia & Achaia.

51 AD From Corinth in Achaia Paul writes 1 and 2 Thessalonians

52 AD Paul sails from Corinth to Ephesus and back to Antioch

53-56 AD Paul goes on third missionary trip through Asia Minor and stops in Ephesus to spend three years there.

56 AD From Ephesus he writes 1 Corinthians

- -Paul leaves Ephesus and passes through Macedonia on his way to visit Corinth.
- -While in Macedonia Paul sends a letter ahead of himself into Corinth called 2 Corinthians.

56-57 AD Winter Paul spends in Corinth. From Corinth at this time Paul writes a letter to the Roman church and sends it with Phoebe who is from a town just outside of Corinth called Cenchrea

57 AD Paul leaves Corinth by going up through Macedonia and down to Troas and then sailing from there to Jerusalem where he is arrested and imprisoned in Ceasera for 3 years

57-59 AD Paul in prison in Ceaserea

59-60 AD Winter, Paul is taken on a ship of prisoners to Rome and is shipwrecked

60-62 Paul is in Rome as a prisoner. Here he meets the Roman believers for the first time and writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon from prison.

63 AD Paul is back in the Aegean area and writes 1 Timothy and Titus

64-66 AD Paul may have gone to Spain

67 AD Paul is arrested near Troas and taken back to prison in Rome.

- -At this time he writes 2 Timothy

68 AD in the spring Paul is beheaded by Nero.

## **Reason for the Letter**

1) Paul wanted to visit the church in Rome (Rm.1:13) He had established the church in Asia Minor and in the Aegean area. He now wanted to move through Rome in order to go further west with his ministry. (15:23)

2) Paul wanted to share his spiritual gift with Rome and wanted to partake of their spiritual gifts. (Rm.1:11). They were believers so they had spiritual gifts to share, but they had not had apostolic teaching or foundational instruction so they could benefit from an apostles ministry.

3) Paul wanted them to accept his ministry and help send him further into the western world of the Gentiles. He wanted them to assist him in getting to Spain (Rm. 15:24, 28).

4) Paul used this letter to collect his Christian theology. Paul realized his life was in danger as he prepared to return to Jerusalem (Romans 15:31, "Pray that I may be delivered from unbelievers in Judea.") By doing so in this letter he collected his doctrine and wrote monumental treatise that could be used to:

- a) introduce him and his teaching to the Romans, and hopefully, receive their approval and support
- b) establish them in the truth

c) in case he was killed in Jerusalem the Romans (and the church) would have his teaching in written form

5) Paul knew the best way to keep false teaching out of the church was to teach the truth.

***The best antiseptic against the infection of false teaching is the truth.***

## Basic Outline

- 1) Introduction 1:1-7
- 2) The need for God's righteousness 1:18-3:20
- 3) Imputation of God's righteousness 3:21-5:21
- 4) Impartation of God's righteousness 6:1-8:39
- 5) Vindication of God's righteousness 9:1-11:36
- 6) The Practice of God's righteousness 12:1-15:13
- 7) Conclusion 15:14-16:27

## Details

1. Paul used an amanuensis (scribe) to write this letter. Tertius is identified in 16:22
2. Paul identifies three travel targets: Jerusalem, Rome and Spain
  - a. Jerusalem, to deliver the collection and to ease the split between Jews and Christians.
  - b. Rome, a stopping point to refuel and move on to regions where the Gospel has not yet been preached (Romans 15:20)
  - c. Spain, Paul had spent 25 years planting churches in the eastern Mediterranean. Now he is ready to move further west.
3. Paul greets several house churches in Romans 16
4. The church of Rome had taken on a Gentile flavor since the Jews had been driven out of Rome in 49 AD and only returned in 54 AD.
5. Paul greets 25 individuals, 2 families in this letter
6. The book of Romans is a letter and serves the purpose of a letter. In 15:15 Paul says he "has written on some points by way of reminder." But, also Paul is communicating to the Romans his own personal ministry situation and goal. There is some focus on some problems or questions in the Roman church addressed in the letter.

**Romans 1:1** "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God."

PAUL **paulos** SLAVE **doulos** OF-ANOINTED **christos** JESUS **iesous** CALLED **kletos** COMMISSIONER **apostolos** HAVING-BEEN-FROM **aphorizo** INTO **eis** WELL-MESSAGE **euaggelion** OF-God **theos**

The first 7 verses are one sentence in the Greek. Romans 1:1 "Paul" is his Roman name. He began to use it when he began to work among the Gentiles on his first missionary trip. (Acts 13:9) Many Jews of this time had a Hebrew and a Roman name. Since Paul was born a Roman citizen in Tarsus he would have been given a Latin name also at birth. His full name would have been **Saulos Paulos Benjaminos**. Paul was the one entrusted with the mystery of Christ and the responsibility "servant" ("**doulos**") means slave or bondservant. It emphasizes bondage and that the slave belongs to another person. The Christian meaning meant complete devotion and does stress oppression. God calls Abraham the same in Genesis 26:24, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. . . . for the sake of my servant Abraham." 1 Corinthians 3:5 "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants (**diakonos** – our word deacon; a Greek word used for table waiters) through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task." In Joshua 1:2, "Moses my servant is dead." Amos 3:7, "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets." Paul is putting himself in line with other great men and prophets of God. One difference may be that in the OT they were servants of God, Paul considers himself a personal servant of Christ Jesus. "Christ" is the Greek word "**christos**" ("anointed one") and is the word for Messiah. The OT foretold the Messiah would come.

There were many priests, kings and prophets, but there would only be one man that filled the office of the Messiah. "Jesus" is the name of the man or as Jesus called himself "the son of man." It was this man who was anointed to be the "anointed one" or the Christ, the Messiah. "Apostle"