

All Saints

Petersham

*Outline Studies*

*in*

*Romans*



## The Letter to the Romans

## SESSION 1: WHY DID PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER?

**A. INTRODUCTION**

The influence of Romans: four examples.

Romans is the longest and most theologically significant of the letters of Paul.

Martin Luther called it 'the very purest gospel'.

Written in AD 57-58 from Corinth.

**B. PAUL'S SITUATION AND THE REASONS FOR ROMANS**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Paul has completed his pioneer missionary work in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, and he now proposes to take the money collected by the churches of Macedonia and Achaia up to Jerusalem for the Jewish believers.

Paul then plans to go to Spain to continue his missionary labours. He hopes to visit Rome on his way westward and to spend a short time with the church there. Encouraged by their fellowship, he hopes to journey on to his new mission field with their blessing, their interest, their support. This is clear from 1:8-16 and 15:14-33.

It was perfectly natural that he should write a letter to inform them of his plans at this point, particularly if he was going to Spain via Rome. But if this is the only reason for his writing to them why does Paul include so much doctrinal teaching in chapters 1:16 to 15:13? He only needed to write chapters 1 and 15. But Romans has a lot of solid instruction in it.

## 2. WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

How then do we find out why Paul wrote this letter? And what are its contents all about?

Does the letter itself give us any clues?

*2.1 Are there any specific statements to help us?*

Romans 15:15-16: Paul has written boldly to remind these Christians of what they had heard previously. He does this because he is the apostle to the Gentiles.

But this statement is fairly general and we need to look further to see if there is a central theme. A thread running through, that might help us work out why he wrote Romans.

### 2.2 *Is there a major theme? Some earlier suggestions*

Luther and other Reformers said the most important chapters of Romans were 1-5, and *justification by faith* was at the centre of the letter.

Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the real centre of Romans was in chapters 5-8 where Paul speaks about his doctrine of *union with Christ* and the work of God's Spirit.

More recently other scholars have focused on Romans 9-11 and saw the big issue to be the *relations between Jews and Gentiles* in the people of God.

Finally, in the last thirty years the focus has been on the needs of the Roman Christians. Paul's exhortation to unity in Romans 14-15 tells us the major theme and why Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans.

The value of each of these suggestions. But each has the drawback of emphasizing only one part of Romans, not the total package.

### 2.3 *If there is a major theme how do we find out?*

Clues a Greek writer might give us. The place of 'book ends'.

The overarching topic that frames the letter is the GOSPEL:

Introduction to Romans (1:1-2, 9, 15)

Conclusion to the Letter (15: 16, 19; 16:25).

Central to the theme statement: 'For I am not ashamed of *the gospel* . . .' (1:16-17)

Only the theme of the gospel is broad enough to include the different topics we find in the letter. (This was the major weakness of the earlier suggestions: but with a theme as broad as 'the gospel' we are able to incorporate the other suggestions.)

### 3. SO WHAT'S OUR ANSWER?

'The function of Romans is to preach the gospel by letter to the Christian converts at Rome' (Ann Jervis).

The 'gospel' of the Lord Jesus Christ is the spiritual gift that Paul longs to impart to the Roman Christians to make them strong (1:11). He and they will be mutually encouraged by each other's faith in the Lord Jesus and his gospel. This fits with Paul's great eagerness to 'preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome' (v. 15), and with his not being ashamed of the gospel (v. 16).

But this is not all that can be said about Paul's reasons for writing Romans.

We need to unpack this further. Let me suggest that as Paul *preaches the gospel* of God's marvelous grace *by letter* he has three closely related goals or purposes in mind:

2. RANSOMED FROM SLAVERY AT GREAT COST (v. 24)

3. CHRIST'S ATONING SACRIFICE—A PUBLIC ACT (v. 25)

4. HOW DO WE RECEIVE ITS BENEFITS? (v. 25)

### E. **Justice and Mercy Meet Together** (vv. 25b-26)

1. GOD PASSED OVER SINS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT—JUSTICE?

2. THE DEATH OF JESUS AND GOD'S JUSTICE

3. THE DEATH OF JESUS AND GOD'S ACQUITTAL

4. JESUS' FAITHFULNESS AND OUR SALVATION

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**D. THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN NEED MET (ROMANS 3:21-31)****A. Introduction**

The dreadful human predicament and its solution.

This passage has been described as 'possibly the most important single paragraph ever written' (Leon Morris).

**B. A New Day has Dawned: God's Righteousness is Revealed (v. 21)**

1. AN INCREDIBLE EVENT HAS OCCURRED

2. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED APART FROM THE LAW

3. ALREADY ATTESTED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

**C. Christ's Involvement and the Human Tragedy (vv. 22-23)**

1. CHRIST'S INVOLVEMENT AND GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (v. 22)

2. THE HUMAN TRAGEDY (v. 23)

2.1 *All have sinned*

2.2 *All Keep on Falling Short of God's Glory*

**D. From Tragedy to Triumph (vv. 24-25a)**

1. MEN AND WOMEN ARE FREELY ACQUITTED (v. 24)

*3.1 Paul's purpose is theological*

Paul had not founded the 'church' in Rome, yet it came within the sphere of his apostolic mission. These Christians were among the Gentiles, and Paul was 'the apostle to the Gentiles'. So Paul obviously wants to encourage them and strengthen them in the Christian faith. Romans is a powerful theological document.

This desire to lay out his gospel may also be related to his forthcoming trip to Jerusalem (15:30-32).

Paul's own future. The importance of this strong group of believers in the capital, Rome, wholly committed to the Lord Jesus and his gospel. Strategic importance.

*3.2 Paul's purpose is missionary*

In Romans Paul introduces himself to the Roman Christians: in chaps. 1:8-17 and 15:14-32 he states: (a) that he has repeatedly been prevented from fulfilling his heartfelt desire of coming to Rome, where he expects to encourage and be encouraged in the faith, and to preach the gospel (1:11-13);

(b) that his intention is to come as soon as he has delivered the collection to Jerusalem (15:23-28); and

(c) that he looks forward to seeing the Roman Christians as he goes on his way to Spain. So in preparation he writes this letter of self-introduction, with the hope that it will prepare the ground for a fruitful response on the part of his addressees to his Spanish mission (15:23-29).

*3.3 Paul's purpose is pastoral*

The apostle wrote to deal with potential divisions within the house churches at Rome, and especially wished to deal with the danger of Gentile believers despising the less-liberated Jewish believers (11:17-25, etc.).

Chaps. 14-15 reflect the actual problems at Rome, revolving around issues of the Jew-Gentile question. The rest of the letter focuses on helping the Romans be unified and understand the priority of Israel in the gospel.

To sum up: Paul's purpose in writing Romans was to preach the gospel by letter to the Christian converts at Rome. Under this overall purpose he had theological, missionary and pastoral goals, that impacted on Paul himself, the Roman Christians and believers generally.

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## SESSION 2: THE FLOW OF ROMANS AND A PURPLE PASSAGE

**C. AN OVERVIEW OF ROMANS IN THE LIGHT OF THE 'GOSPEL'****1. READING ROMANS**

As we read Romans, we need to realize that it was a letter written to a particular group of Christians, probably meeting in different congregations throughout the capital city of Rome. (The Christians seem to have been scattered in different areas of the city. Paul does not assume that they will all gather together in one place to hear his letter read in the assembly, as he expected 1 Corinthians to be read in the 'whole church' at Corinth.)

But because Romans is a letter we should not treat it, as has often been done in the past, as a systematic theology covering all the doctrinal topics of the Christian life. Some of those topics are not covered, for example, ecclesiology, while others are only touched up briefly, e.g. the second coming.

This is not to say, however, that we aren't dealing with issues of doctrine (see above under session 1).

If our earlier suggestions about the gospel of the Lord Jesus being the overarching theme of Romans is correct, then we may analyze the book along the following lines (this is a shortened version of the analysis of Doug Moo in his *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996]).

The value of an outline like this is that it helps us to follow the flow of the author's presentation, even his argument, as he seeks to persuade his listeners.

**2. AN ANALYSIS OF ROMANS****I. The Letter Opening (1:1-17)**

The opening contains the usual

- A. PRESCRIPT OR INTRODUCTION (vv. 1-7),
- B. THANKSGIVING (vv. 8-15)
- C. THE THEME OF THE LETTER (vv. 16-17).

An important statement that the gospel is the revelation of God's righteousness that can be experienced only through faith.

**II. The Heart of the Gospel: Justification by Faith (1:18–4:25)**

- A. THE UNIVERSAL REIGN OF SIN (1:18–3:20)
- B. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (3:21–4:25)

**III. The Assurance Provided by the Gospel: The Hope of Salvation (5:1–8:39)**

- A. THE HOPE OF GLORY (5:1-21)
- B. FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE TO SIN (6:1-23)
- C. FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE TO THE LAW (7:1-25)
- D. ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE IN THE SPIRIT (8:1-30)
- E. THE BELIEVER'S SECURITY CELEBRATED (8:31-39)

**IV. The Defence of the Gospel: The Problem of Israel (9:1–11:36)**

- A. The Tension between God's Promises and Israel's Plight (9:1-5)
- B. GOD'S SOVEREIGN ELECTION (9:6-29)
- C. CHRIST THE CLIMAX OF SALVATION HISTORY (9:30–10:21)
- D. ISRAEL, THE ELECT AND THE HARDENED (11:1-10)
- E. THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL (11:11-32)
- F. PRAISE TO GOD FOR HIS AWESOME PLAN (11:33-36)

**V. The Transforming Power of the Gospel: Christian Conduct (12:1–15:13)****V. The Letter Closing (15:14–16:27)**

- A. PAUL'S MINISTRY AND TRAVEL PLANS (15:14-33)
- B. GREETINGS (16:1-24)
- C. CONCLUDING DOXOLOGY (16:25-27).