

## Romans Preface and Introduction

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### Preface

If you knew that in a short time you would be spending the rest of your life in another country, what would you do to prepare for that new reality? Wouldn't you be learning the language and culture, learning about legal requirements, learning about the country's leadership, and asking many questions about how to live well in that alien environment? Well, you will be spending eternity outside of wherever you live now. Shouldn't you be spending a lot of time learning about *that* existence and how to please its ruler?

The book of Romans has been called the Constitution for Christians, but it is even more, for it explains Christianity and gives Christians guidelines for life in the Kingdom of God. And, by the way, if you are a Christian, you have already begun to live in the Kingdom of God:

- Eph. 2:4–6 (emphasis added) But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and **seated us with Him in the heavenly places**, in Christ Jesus.
- Phil. 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, **from which** also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When you die, you will move to God's Kingdom and reside there permanently. Just as many earthly countries disallow dual citizenship with another country, one cannot have dual citizenship on Earth and in the Kingdom of God:

Luke 16:13 [Jesus said,] “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

As Christians, we should already be dedicated to God as the ruler of the Kingdom of God, in which we now live. We should spend our time glorifying Him, participating in our sanctification (Phil. 2:12), and preparing for the judgment of our service to Him (not judgment for salvation), which all of us will one day face according to 2 Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

As children of God, we are commanded to study the Word of God (although we should not require a command to make us study what we love). See Psalm 119 for some motivation, especially the following verses:

- Ps. 119:11 Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee.
- Ps. 119:47 And I shall delight in Thy commandments, Which I love.
- Ps. 119:97 O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.
- Ps. 119:165 Those who love Thy law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble.

We should also be prepared to defend the gospel: “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to **give an account** for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” (1 Pet. 3:15, emphasis added) To “give an account,” one must understand what has been received from God to justify such a hope, and Romans is a comprehensive presentation of theology available to every child of God. Many excellent books have been written about Romans, and some are listed in the references section.

The material you are about to read resulted from my studies when teaching Romans to an adult Sunday School class at a congregation of the Presbyterian Church of America over a two-year period. Having worked as a university professor for forty years, I know that instructors have to possess a thorough knowledge of a subject to teach it well. Often the best way to learn the material being taught is to write our understanding of the subject matter in our own words, because we comprehend material that we study and write ourselves much better than by simply reading it in someone else’s book. I dedicated myself to learning Romans as well as I could so I could communicate this knowledge effectively in my own words. I received numerous requests for a printed version of my study notes. This book is my answer to those requests and my attempt at writing my understanding of Romans to aid others in their personal study of this marvelous book.

If readers are not profoundly changed by this study, then the undertaking has been improperly exercised. An appropriate examination of Romans, as led by the Holy Spirit, will convict us of our sin and our lack of understanding the holiness of God. This study, however, will not just leave us cringing in a corner somewhere as we become more aware of our sins and God’s holiness. Rather, it should lead readers to a closer walk with the Lord. This study should provide a constant awareness of the presence of God in our lives and our obligation to prove the will of God as noted in Romans 12:2: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” As we go through this study, this particular verse will be discussed in detail, for it is basic to our Christian walk. Without working diligently to live righteous lives, the will of God is not being proven by our character. As a result, God is not glorified and we are disgraced. Certainly, the truths presented in Romans will continually lead us to make drastic changes in our behavior, and we should soon see a stark contrast between our God-centered walk and that of the world. We will also realize that the Christian worldview is becoming very different from the secular worldview. The paths walked by Christians and non-

Christians are diverging more every year. What is acceptable behavior in the world's eyes is becoming drastically different from Christian standards.

Christians should be dedicated to pleasing God, and their spiritual leaders should be driven to disciple fellow believers. There are many reasons why Christians are diverted from a comprehensive study of God's Word. It is easy for the visible church (all the people who belong to a Christian group) to become entangled in the philosophy of the world by a desire to build a bigger church building, or to become one of the largest congregations in the area, rather than discipling its members with the Bible and building purity and holiness. It is also very tempting to become so preoccupied with our professions that we do not make time for a proper study of God's Word. These worldly tendencies, however, are not the directions the invisible Church members (those who are true children of God) should take. This study of Romans should clarify the work individuals should be doing in the world and as members of local congregations. We should be prepared to make changes in all aspects of our lives so that we can better reflect the life of Jesus Christ in this present world. If you are willing to sincerely dedicate *all* of your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord, then I invite you to press on with this study.

I have been greatly influenced in this study of Romans by the writings of James Montgomery Boice and Martyn Lloyd Jones. I have quoted and referenced some of their writings as part of my attempt to communicate in my own words and in the style of teaching a class. Reference to one of those books is given like "Martyn Lloyd-Jones (2)" in the text where the number refers to the book listed in the references for that particular chapter. However, if one merely reads this material, then the goal God has stated in Rom 12:2 for each of His children will not be achieved. The material must be studied carefully and prayerfully and applied to your daily walk in this world. My prayer is that these notes will assist you in that study and application. Assignments are given at the end of each chapter and in several places before chapter two. It is suggested that each one be completed after reading the corresponding pages of the text to assist in better appropriating the material toward sanctification.

## **Introduction**

While there is no doubt that Paul is the author of Romans, it was written by Tertius (Rom 16:22). The Roman church became one of the centers of Christendom but little is known about the early beginnings of that church. Neither Paul in Romans nor Luke in Acts gives us information about the origin of the church at Rome. The fact that Paul gives us few comments about himself in Romans (as he does give in his letters to the churches at Corinth and Galatia, churches he did establish), indicates that he was not the originator of the church at Rome. In fact, some fourth-century writers proclaim that the church in Rome was not founded by an apostle at all, but by some unnamed Hebrew Christians. The verse in Roman 1:8 indicates that, by the time of Paul's writing, the church in Rome had become widely known for its faith.

Most historians think that Paul probably wrote the book of Romans from Corinth in AD 57. Paul had been preaching the gospel for more than twenty years by that time, and several books of the Bible indicate that his life was constantly in danger. Some theologians have

reasoned that Paul wrote this wonderfully complete systematic theology as sort of a “last will and testament.” If he died soon, the book would go to Rome and from there to all the communities of the faithful. Romans 14:1–15:7 and 16:17 indicate that Paul was somewhat aware of the problems in the Roman church and that he was addressing those problems. The book of Romans presents the true view of salvation and life in Christ, in contrast to the view that salvation comes through legalistic works. Both salvation by faith alone and living the Christian life pleasing to God are dominant concepts in this book. The order of faith followed by works involved in living the Christian life is important because it is impossible to please God without having first received a saving faith.

The total influence of Romans on the world would be difficult to determine. We know, for instance, that God used Romans 13:13–14 as the instrument of salvation for Augustine (1) who then altered history by his work in the church in the middle ages (fourth to fifth centuries). It is also known that God used Romans 1:17 to open the eyes of Luther (2) who was already a monk, to the truth of becoming righteous before God, which then led to the Reformation in the sixteenth century. God also used Romans to bring John Wesley to salvation while reading Luther’s preface to Romans<sup>1</sup> after he had been a missionary to Georgia, and to change the life of John Bunyan, from whose works many people have benefited. Since testimonies abound regarding God’s use of Romans throughout the past two thousand years, we can expect equally great things from the Sovereign God of the universe in the twenty-first century.

Luther called Romans “the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel”; he believed that “every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, [and] occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of his soul.” (2) Although a huge task, memorizing Romans and occupying ourselves with it every day as the daily bread of our souls would lead us to living very different lives, lives dedicated to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul logically presents the foundational doctrines of Christianity. He begins with a presentation of the gospel in 1:1-17 and continues with the defining nature of sin and its consequences in 1:18-3:20. Natural man’s sinfulness in both his condition and his behavior reveals his helplessness to become righteous of his own merit or efforts. The only hope of salvation is presented in 3:20-5:21 attesting to the inability of the Law to save and the power of god’s grace. Sanctification is described in 6:1-8:39 as both the responsibility of the believer to grow in that grace and the benefits of those who have been adopted into the family of God. Paul then gives God all the glory for salvation in chapters 9-11, showing that God is both sovereign and good in all His ways, and that all God does is for His own glory.

Before we begin our study of Romans, we should look at an overview of the entire book. Dr. James Montgomery Boice (3) offers the following outline:

1. A preliminary personal word and introduction (1:1–15)  
The theme is introduced: the gospel of God
2. A brief statement of the theme (1:16–17)

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.forthegospel.org/articles/the\\_conversion\\_of\\_john\\_wesley](http://www.forthegospel.org/articles/the_conversion_of_john_wesley)

“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”.

3. An analysis of the depravity of human beings and an explanation of the work of Christ as the provision for that need (1:18–4:25)

These verses reveal a most penetrating and perspective analysis of human nature in its relationship to God. Even though they know God, they distort their understanding to worship the creation rather than the creator, demonstrating their willful ignorance.

4. A review of the great scope of salvation (5:1–8:39)

Paul discusses justification by faith to the resulting sanctification showing the certainty, fullness and finality of what God has done. The believer’s status and privileges before God and his new life of righteousness are clearly revealed.

5. A Christian view of history (9:1–11:36)

God’s different and separate plan for the Jewish people is discussed, yet salvation is secure and comes only through faith in Jesus.

6. Applied Christianity (12: 1-2)

God is the basis of reality and our proper relationship to Him (proper doctrine) should be the basis for all our actions.

7. The Christian and other People (12:3-21)

Paul continues to stress our relationships with ourselves and other people.

8. The Church and the State (13: 1-7)

So long as the State does not issue orders contrary to God’s commands, Christians are to obey.

9. The Law of Love (13:8-14)

Our love of others should reflect our love of God.

10. Christian Liberty (14:1-15:13)

This concept is very important so Paul devotes the most material of these final chapters to this topic. He also wrote the entire letter to the Galatians on this topic.

11. Paul’s Personal Ministry and Plans (15: 14-33)

Paul writes of his desire to go to Rome, why he was previously hindered from that trip, and what he hopes to receive from them when he gets there.

12. Final Greetings (16: 1-27)

These final verses demonstrate Paul’s personal love for others that he urged others to also demonstrate.