

Message #1

Various Texts

When we begin a new book study, we typically begin by asking why study the book. We typically give several reasons and the first is it is an inspired book of God. To Romans we give only one reason: Romans is an inspired book of God and it is the most important book of God when it comes to understanding the Gospel in all the Bible.

The manuscripts of the book of Romans were being circulated by the middle of the second century. Every listing of inspired books and every church council meeting lists Romans. Romans is cited by Clement of Rome (AD 88-99); Polycarp (AD 116); Irenaeus (AD 130). In 2012, in a garbage dump in Egypt, papyrus manuscripts were found that combined Romans 9, 10. This was a potent book from the moment Paul wrote it.

One of the first letters ever written by the Apostle Paul was the letter to the Galatians. He wrote that letter around AD 48 to a group of fickle churches who were getting all confused about the gospel of the Grace of God. In the opening verses of that letter, Paul drove home some key truths:

- 1) The Gospel of God was revealed to Paul by Jesus Christ Himself. Gal. 1:11-12
- 2) The Gospel of God was a message centered on One Person, Jesus Christ. Gal. 1:15-16
- 3) The Gospel of God is a message of faith alone in Jesus Christ. Gal. 1:23
- 4) The Gospel of God was a message Paul was responsible to take to the Gentile nations.
Gal. 1:16; 2:2

About ten years later, in AD 58, Paul decided to carefully lay out the full theological dimensions of the Gospel of God. Lead by the Holy Spirit, he penned Romans.

That Pauline gospel of God, which he received directly from Jesus Christ, is fully written, developed, explained and applied in the book of Romans.

Literally no other book in the Bible has impacted the Gentile world like Romans. It is impossible to over exaggerate the importance of the book of Romans.

Augustine (AD 386), a libertine professor of rhetoric who called himself a “slave to lust,” was saved by reading two verses from Romans and it transformed and changed his life. Here is his own account of what happened. “Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius (*his friend*) was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle, when I had arisen, I seized, opened, and in silence read that second on which my eyes first fell - *Romans 13:13-14*: Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. No further would I read; nor needed I; for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away” (*Confessions*, p. 218). Augustine was saved by reading two verses from Romans.

Several years later, when Pelagius, with his man-centered theology, opposed the teachings of the Sovereign Grace of God taught by Augustine, Augustine refuted him by giving a series of lectures on the book of Romans.

Even though Augustine never wrote a full commentary on the book of Romans, his doctrine and theology stemming from Romans, as Thomas Schreiner writes, “has probably exerted more influence on the church worldwide than that of any other theologian in the history of the church...” (*Romans*, p. 1).

It was Romans that God used to save and transform Martin Luther. Around AD 1515, Martin Luther, who was a Roman Catholic, was assigned to lecture on the book of Romans at the University of Wittenberg. As Luther carefully studied Romans, he saw what it said about sin, law, grace, the righteousness of God and faith. When he read Romans 1:16-17 that says the Gospel...is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, **it dawned on him that men are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone apart from any human effort or works.**

As Luther continued to study Romans, it so changed Luther’s life that on October 31, 1517, he marched up to the church door of Wittenberg and nailed 95 theses to the door of the church that presented propositions that attacked the doctrine being propagated by the Roman Catholic Church. **Luther’s grasp of Romans not only shook up the Catholic Church, it started a Reformation that would influence and shake up the whole world.**

Romans was the book of the Bible that God used to save John Calvin. Calvin said that it was the study of the book of Romans that led to what he called his “sudden conversion” in AD 1533.

Martin Luther wrote a commentary on the book of Romans in AD 1552. He began the commentary with a preface. One night, in AD 1738, a group of believers decided to get together on Aldersgate street in London, England, to have a Bible study. They decided to study Luther’s commentary on Romans. This particular night they read the preface Luther wrote and at the study was a man named John Wesley. As the preface was being read, which defined some key words of Romans and gave a capsule sum breakdown of each chapter, Wesley said it “strangely warmed my heart” and that night John Wesley was saved. God used Romans to save John Wesley.

Donald Grey Barnhouse began a pastorate in the 10th street Presbyterian church in Philadelphia in 1927. Barnhouse said he decided to start at verse 1 of Romans and preach through the book. He said for the next 3 ½ years he went straight through the book of Romans and never preached any other text other than Romans. He said the church filled up; people were transformed and Barnhouse said I was transformed. It was a careful study of one book that did this. That book was Romans.

The first year I taught at GRSBM in the mid-1980’s, I was assigned two books to teach: Romans and Revelation. I saw some amazing things happen with both books but a story I’ll never forget happened from the book of Romans. That particular class I gave a lecture on Romans 8. When the lecture was over, the class cleared out and one girl was sitting at her desk weeping. So I walked over to her and asked what was wrong.

She said I have been in churches all my life and I have never seen nor heard of anything like this and what I have just learned has brought me to the conclusion I have been taught wrong all of my life and I am overwhelmed with God's grace. In Pocatello, a suicidal woman came to my office who said I have done terrible things. She had been involved in immorality; she had had an abortion, she had done drugs and she was at the end. I took her to Romans 4:5 and had her read it. The tears streamed down her face and she believed on the Lord and was saved.

When we say no other book has impacted lives like Romans, it is no exaggeration. John Chrysostom, the early church father and golden-mouthed orator of AD 400, had Romans read to him twice a week before he died.

Romans is a dynamic, world impacting, church changing, life transforming book and in the next weeks we would like to take you on a journey through all 16 chapters.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #1 – Who wrote Romans?

The overwhelming external and internal evidence clearly supports the fact that Romans was written by the Apostle Paul. This conclusion has never been in any doubt. We may easily prove this by offering six evidences:

Evidence #1 - The author of Romans specifically identifies himself as Paul. **Romans 1:1**

Evidence #2 - The author of Romans was from the tribe of Benjamin, which is true of Paul. **Rom. 11:1/Philippians 3:5**

Evidence #3 - The author of Romans had a close relationship with Priscilla and Aquila, which was true of Paul. **Rom. 16:3/Acts 18:2-4**

Evidence #4 - The author of Romans was taking a major offering to Jerusalem from churches in Macedonia and Achaia, which was a major project of Paul. **Rom. 15:25-27/I Corinthians 16:1-5**

Evidence #5 - The unanimous position of all early church writers say Romans was written by Paul.

- 1) Irenaeus the Bishop of Lyons (AD 178).
- 2) Clement of Alexandria, Egypt the first post apostolic scholar (AD 200).
- 3) Tertullian, the African theologian and apologist (AD 200).
- 4) Origen, the Alexandrian theologian (AD 250).
- 5) Eusebius, the father of church history and bishop of Caesarea (AD 320).
He said, "Paul...was obviously and unmistakably the author of fourteen Epistles (Romans-Hebrews), (*Church History*, p. 108).

Dr. John Witmer said even ancient heretics admitted Romans was written by Paul.

Evidence #6 - Only two liberals in history have ever denied Paul wrote Romans.

- 1) Evanson - an English author of the 1700's.
- 2) Bruno Baur - a German writer of the 1800's.

They used three lame, ridiculous arguments for their conclusions:

- 1) Acts does not say Paul wrote Romans.
- 2) Paul had not been to Rome and could not have known all the people he names in Romans 16.
- 3) Paul would not write such a powerful letter to a place he had never been.

Acts does not mention when Paul wrote any book. Paul knew all of the people he mentions because he had met them in other places in his travels. Eusebius said Paul had so many people against him that he never forgot those who supported him.

As far as writing to a city he hadn't visited. He wrote Colossians to a church where he had never been. Furthermore, Rome was the city that controlled the world. It would be a prime place to receive an inspired letter from Paul.

Romans was written by Paul. This fact right here is an amazing statement for God's sovereign grace. At one time, Paul (Saul of Tarsus) had been a man who truly believed you could be right with God by Judaistic good works and by keeping the O.T. law. He writes Romans that says no one can be right with God except through faith alone in Christ alone.

No one can be right with God by trying to keep the law. **Paul writes in Romans 3:28**, "We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."

Now one can be right with God by their works, **Paul writes in Romans 11:6**, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace."

This man, who at one time had been zealous of the O.T. law and zealous of religious works, came to understand God's grace and it was Paul who wrote Romans.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #2 – When did Paul write Romans?

By making five observations we may date this book:

Observation #1 - Paul wrote Romans before his first visit to Rome. Rom. 1:10-13; 15:22-23
Twice Paul mentions he wanted to go to Rome.
This dates this letter prior to AD 60-62 when he did go to Rome.

Observation #2 - Paul wrote Romans prior to taking his financial gift to Jerusalem.
Rom. 15:26-27
This dates the letter prior to AD 57-59.

Observation #3 - Paul wrote Romans prior to his arrest in Jerusalem. Rom. 15:30-31
He was going to stop in Jerusalem, and was anticipating visiting Rome (15:28) and Spain (15:28) after going to Jerusalem (15:25).
This dates the letter prior to AD 59.

Observation #4 - Paul wrote Romans near the end of his third missionary journey
before his first Roman imprisonment (AD 58) (Acts 18:23ff/20:1-3).

1) AD 47-48; 2) AD 49-52; 3) AD 56-58
The letter was written before AD 57-58.

Observation #5 - Paul wrote Romans before the Feast of Pentecost in May or June.
In Acts 20:16 Paul decided to sail past Ephesus to be in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost.

So these Biblical and historical observations lead us to the conclusion that Paul wrote Romans in **the early spring of AD 57 or 58** during his 3rd missionary journey.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #3 – Where was Paul when he wrote Romans?

This is an interesting question and not difficult to answer based on three revealed facts:

Fact #1 - Paul wrote somewhere near the home of Phoebe, who had been a real help to Paul.
Phoebe lived in Cenchrea. **Rom. 16:1**

Cenchrea was the eastern harbor of Corinth. Many think Phoebe carried the letter to Rome.

Fact #2 - Paul was writing from the home of Gaius, who was housing and hosting him.
Rom. 16:23

Gaius lived in Corinth. **I Cor. 1:2, 14**

Fact #3 - Paul spent three months in Greece, and Corinth is in Greece. Acts 20:1-3

There are a couple of Greek manuscripts that say he wrote Romans in the three month period in Greece in Acts 20:2-3.

So our conclusion is that Paul wrote Romans while he was spending three months in Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey in AD 57-58.

Now here is the amazing thing about this. Corinth was a godless city and the Corinthian church was a carnal church. So one would logically think that the message you would want to communicate about the gospel would be one that would emphasize the responsibility and works of man. That is not what Paul does.

He develops a doctrine of pure grace apart from any works (Rom. 4:5).

Furthermore, he is writing this letter to send to Rome that was one of the most godless cities in the world. So Paul is writing a letter from a godless city in Greece that he will send to the most godless city in Italy and in the world. He stresses pure grace and not works.

The grace gospel has nothing to do with man's works or promises or commitments or obedience. The Gospel Paul presents in Romans is justification by faith alone in Christ alone and no matter how sinful the person or city and no matter how carnal a believer might be, he did not change that message.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTION #4 – Why did Paul write Romans?

There are personal things that show up in Romans that are important:

- 1) Paul wanted to build a good rapport with the Roman church before his visit. Rom. 15:24
- 2) Paul wanted to gain prayer support from the Roman church. Rom. 15:30-33
- 3) Paul wanted to give an accurate perspective of the Jew/Gentile program. Rom. 11:25-26

But I am not certain that really is what is driving this.

We certainly know from **verse 1** that Romans will reveal the Gospel of God. We also know from **Romans 1:7** that Romans is not written to the lost people, but to beloved believers.

So based on this we would conclude that the gospel in Romans was written for doctrinal development purposes for people who are believers. **The epistle to the Romans was not written to evangelize the lost, but to educate the saved.**

Paul wanted the believers to be well grounded in the Gospel. He wanted them to have an accurate understanding of the true doctrine of God's grace.

Paul wanted God's people to accurately understand the Gospel of the grace of God because there were many false doctrines and teachers who were teaching their works system of salvation and their religious law keeping and traditions of men systems of salvation (Rom. 16:17-18).

Romans was written by Paul to beloved believers so that they would carefully and accurately understand the gospel of the grace of God that had been directly revealed to him by Jesus Christ. He wanted them to understand the Grace Gospel that he was taking to the entire Gentile world.

As we travel through this Epistle, you will clearly see you cannot be justified by your works. Justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. The righteousness we need to go to heaven is not ours; it is God's and that righteousness is found in one Person, Jesus Christ. If any person will believe in Jesus Christ, he will be saved apart from any works. That is the Gospel of God that Paul will develop in Romans.