

Theologue: An Introduction to Romans

Vital Statistics

Who was the author?

The Apostle Paul. Paul was a missionary who traveled from region to region planting churches in the urban center of each region. Once a church was established Paul did the hard work of training qualified leaders who loved Jesus, loved their family, and loved their city who would, in turn, lead and instructed the churches to do the same.

Who was Romans written to?

The letter of Romans was written to the Christian church in Rome around 57 AD. The church in Rome, which likely gathered in many different venues around the city, had already been established and was already known 'all over the world' as a church that loved Jesus and had great faith. The Christians in Rome were a widely diverse group including people of Jewish, Greek, Roman, and barbarian ancestry from all different socioeconomic classes. This, much like today, caused all types of division and tension with issues centering around race, sexual orientation, food, religious rules and rites, alcohol, worship, the authority of the government, and the supremacy of Jesus Christ over sin and death.

What is the major theme and purpose of Romans?

Romans is a very complex book full of technical points on ancient Jewish law, the process of Christian salvation, sin, grace, and many other theological issues that will keep us busy for the next 9-months. However, *Paul's primary motivation in writing the book of Romans was for the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Paul spent many years traveling and planting churches in all of the major urban centers of Asia Minor and, with his work completed, Paul now set his missionary sights on Europe. His first target was Spain and, in order to do this, Paul needed a church that would support him in prayer, in finance, and that would serve as a home base for all of Paul's operations. Paul chose the church in Rome for its geographical proximity to Spain, its reputation for being a good church, and for Rome's cultural, political, and military prominence in the western world. This would be a good fit.

Paul, however, had never been to Rome and was personally known to only a few members of the Roman church. In order for Paul to use the Roman church as a base for his missionary operations he felt compelled to write them a letter introducing himself, introducing his vision for church planting in Spain, and to introduce and explain the theology he had been preaching for the last 20 years. Paul sent his teaching and theology ahead of himself so that the church could digest it and, once Paul and the church were on the same page theologically, they could together move forward in the church planting/missionary effort in Spain.

Why will we study Romans for the next nine months?

Our church, much like the church in Rome, is a diverse gathering of people who live in a growing urban context surrounded by 1.7 million people, most of whom do not know Jesus. Though we are a small gathering of young adults meeting in various locations on

various nights we continue to have influence on many churches, youth ministries, and young adult ministries across BC and the nation. Our prayer is that we will not only have influence on other churches but that we would have a great and lasting influence on our city as we preach Jesus, study the Bible, worship together, and live lives that are culturally relevant and honoring to Jesus. To do this we, like the Roman church, need to be theologically aligned so that we can together, as one church and one body, have effective witness and mission in our city.

Our endeavor as we study Romans will be to learn correct theology and then correct living. The formal vibe of this work brings attention to two things; doctrine and life – in that order. And so, this will be the order we study Romans; doctrine and life.

Welcome to Romans.

Romans 1:1-17

Paul, in the opening verses of Romans, spends considerable amounts of time and space introducing himself. He uses words like *I, me, or my* over twenty times suggesting that Paul was rather anxious to have his readers, most of whom he had never met personally, know him quickly and intimately. The introduction can be broken down into three sections:

1. Paul and the Gospel

Paul begins by giving a point by point summary of the origin, purpose, and substance of the gospel by which he preaches.

- Romans is a book about the *gospel of God* (vs.1) which is God's own good news for a lost world. That good news is the story and life of Jesus which is the most basic conviction that should motivate all authentic evangelism.
- This gospel was *promised beforehand* (vs. 2) through Scripture which all points to Jesus. Luther, a prominent theologian in commenting on this sections says, "*Here the door is thrown wide open for the understanding of Holy Scripture, that is, that everything must be understood in relation to Christ.*"¹
- Paul, in speaking about this salvation through Jesus, assures us that the gospel is for everyone (vs. 5-6); each one of us, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic distinction can all experience Jesus without exception because *you also are among those called to belong to Jesus* (vs. 6).
- Why? *For the sake of Jesus' name* (vs. 5). "*The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the great commission nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing, but rather zeal – burning and passionate zeal – for the glory of Jesus Christ.*"²

2. Paul and the Romans

Upon describing himself and the gospel he preaches, Paul then moves on to address the church in Rome. First, he reminds the church that *God loves them*. Second, Paul calls them saints which, in its broader biblical context, points to the major Old Testament theme *calling people to be holy*. Third, Paul emphasizes as he does in many of his letters, that *God's people are recipients of God's free gift of grace and*

¹ Luther (1515) pg. 4

² John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, pg. 53

peace. Each of these three issues continue to be major themes through out the book of Romans and will be explored in depth as we move along.

3. Paul and Evangelism

Verses 14, 15, & 16 all point to what I believe seems to be lacking in many churches today: a great urgency to preach the gospel, tell the story of Jesus, and to involve itself in missionary/evangelism work locally, nationally, and internationally.

14 – “I am obligated...”

15 – “I am so eager...”

16 – “I am not ashamed...”

Often people tend to regard evangelism/missional living as an optional extra.

Evangelism, to many people, is like the ‘super-size fries’ option to a Christian life that you can choose to do or not do. This simply is not the case. Telling the story of Jesus, preaching Jesus, and living like Jesus are paramount in our Christian living and should be thought of so. Many of us, in a rare moment of honesty, would be forced to admit that we are actually ashamed of the gospel, ashamed of Jesus, and have no motivation to change that.

My prayer for our gathering(s) of young adults is that we would know and proclaim the gospel of Jesus and that we would, like the Roman church, wrestle through the deep theological issues of salvation so as to join together in a unified and unashamed effort to tell people about Jesus. In so doing, our prayer should be that people would experience Jesus, become more like Jesus, and that we would be able to give all honor, worship, and glory to Jesus.

Optional Small Group Questions:

1. What does it mean to be a servant of Jesus Christ? (vs. 1)
2. How often do you study Scripture? How do you study? Do you have a study partner? (vs. 2)
3. How do we live life solely for ‘the sake of the name of Jesus?’ What does this mean? (vs. 5)
4. If the faith of our church was reported all over the world, what would they be saying about our faith and church? (vs. 8)
5. What does it mean to ‘be holy’? (vs. 7)
6. What could your small group do to unashamedly promote, preach, and share the gospel of Jesus in both word and action? (vs. 14-17)

Next Week: Romans 1:18-32