

Introduction to the Book of Romans
Part 1
Rick Edwards

Whenever you begin a study of an entire book of the Bible, you should ask five questions:

1. Who wrote it?

Paul was the author. Tertius wrote down the book of Romans. 16:22 He was Paul's secretary. Paul did not write the letter down personally, but dictated it. The letter was written from Corinth by Paul from the house of Gaius 16:23

- Religiously, or by race and religion, Paul was a Hebrew. Philippians 3:4
- Paul, by culture, was Greek. He was born and raised in Tarsus
- Politically, Paul was a Roman citizen Acts 16:35-37

2. To whom was it written?

The Bible says Paul wrote this letter to the Christians who were in Rome. 1:7

3. When was it written?

His third missionary trip. Acts 20:1-3

4. Why was it written?

- **There was a personal reason.** ch. 1:11-13, 15. To introduce himself to the Romans.
- **There was an educational reason** -- to review and clarify the meaning and basis of Christian living. He wants to clarify the meaning of salvation. 15:15
- **There was a financial reason.** This is a fund raising letter in one sense. Paul wrote Romans to enlist support to his trip to Spain. 15:22

5. What's the main message?

The message is the gospel. The theme of Romans is 1:16-17

God gives His righteousness to the person who believes in faith. The good news has the power to change lives. It's the power of the Gospel that I'm not ashamed of. The word power is the word from which we get our word dynamite.

These are statements every Christian should be able to say about himself. He said,

- *"I am a servant, I'm a slave of Christ, I belong to Him."*
- *"I'm sent out..."* called to go. All of us are called to go
- Paul says I have a gift, *"I am an apostle."*

You have a gift. God wants you to use that gift to bless others. As we get into the passages in Romans that deal with spiritual gifts we'll understand how to discover and develop and use our gifts in the way God wants us to use them.

"Righteousness" is used 34 times in the book of Romans. It is used 92 times in the New Testament and it's key to the book of Romans. It means "a right relationship to God". "God" is used 153 times "Law" is used 72 times. "Christ" is used 65 times. "Sin" is used 48 times. "Faith" is used 40 times.

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If I were to ask you, What's the most important letter you have ever read? I wonder what you'd say. A proposal? About the birth of a baby? Get drafted? About an audit by the IRS? Letters can be very good or very bad. Maybe you got a job offer, a chance to move.

Tonight, we're going to begin a study on what I consider to be the greatest letter ever written. It was written by Paul and we cannot overestimate the influence of this one letter. Quotes from different people I've read:

Richard Halbertson: "In a very basic sense, western civilization is a by-product of Paul's letter to the Romans. Nothing was written by man that had a greater impact on modern history."

Baxter: "It's Paul's magnum opus."

Samuel Coleridge: "The most profound writing in existence of all time."

John Calvin: "If a man understands Romans he has a sure road open to help him understand the entire Bible."

It's the basic handbook for Christianity. I

It has influenced hundreds of thousands, millions of people. **It's changed history.**

- Martin Luther started the Reformation because of the book of Romans.
- John Wesley started the Wesleyan revivals –
- Methodism began out of that. Augustine became a Christian because of the book of Romans.

All throughout history, God has used the book of Romans to influence people's lives in ways you cannot imagine.

The best way to approach the book of Romans is to start by seeing it as a letter to you. I want us to pause right here at the start and ask God to give us some insight as we look into this book.

When you study a book, you always want to ask at least five questions: Who wrote it? To whom was it written? When was it written? Why was it written? What's the main message?

Tonight, I want to give you an introduction to this book, the basic overview of the book. We can't understand the book without understanding these basic things.

Who wrote the book? **Paul.** The ancient Greeks had an idea that I don't know why we don't take advantage of. In the old times of Greek culture when you wrote a letter, you wrote who it was from first. When we write a letter today, we sign on the opposite end. Yet when you get a letter, what's the first thing you look for? Who's it from. You ought to find out who it's from so then you know where they're coming from.

The ancient Greeks always started out up front telling you who it's from and who it's to. Like a memo. From Paul to you. We know it was written from Paul.

Tertius wrote the book of Romans. 16:22 He was Paul's secretary. Paul did not write the letter down personally, but dictated it.

This is helpful for you to understand, because sometimes Paul gets long, long sentences and they're very complex and seem to go on and on . . . A run on sentence. Why? Paul was not setting there thinking about each word, taking his time to think out the construction but, I imagine, he walked back and forth dictating this letter. **Tertius is probably writing it down as quickly as he can, trying to polish each sentence as he wrote, putting periods in.**

Where was it written, "*Gaius whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, send you his greetings.*" 16:23

That tells us where the letter was written from. Gaius was a Christian business man and he lived in Corinth. So the letter was written from Corinth by Paul (actually by Tertius, dictated by Paul). Paul is pouring out his heart.

1. WHO IS PAUL?

Paul was probably the greatest man who lived since Jesus Christ, the most influential man. There are over a billion Christians today in the world because Paul was the one who single handedly took the gospel all across the Roman empire and started churches all around the Mediterranean. **He was the most influential man in history since Jesus Christ.**

He is a product of three different cultures.

1) **Religiously, or by race and religion, he was a Hebrew.** Philippians 3:4ff Paul gives a testimony, "*Though I myself have reason for such confidence, if anyone thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. In regard to the law, a Pharisee. As for zeal persecuting the church. As for legalistic righteousness, faultless.*"

As much as you can say about a Jew, Paul says he was the ultimate Jew. A Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee -- the strictest religious sect. They were so strict that if their garment touched anyone else who was not a Pharisee, particularly a Gentile, they considered themselves unclean.

They were set apart. They were the most rigid legalistic group of Jews possible. Paul was a devout Hebrew Jew. He was the most unlikely person to be a Christian.

Before he became a Christian he was a persecutor. He was persecuting the church and stood by while Stephen was stoned -- one of the first martyrs of the church.

Yet in Acts 9, he was on the road to Damascus, getting ready to go persecute the Christians, and God spoke to him in a blinding light. The Lord said, "*Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" Saul, who's name was later changed to Paul, said, "*Lord, what do you want me to do?*" At that point Paul was converted.

This is encouraging. Do you know anybody that when you share the gospel with them they get irritated at you or violent and uptight? If that's so, that's good news. They are reacting.

And oftentimes reacting simply means God has them under conviction. Often we can see the people who are rejecting the gospel violently are really a lot more close to becoming a Christian than those who are apathetic. People who are apathetic are often not even phased by it. If a person gets mad at you for sharing the Gospel, it means they care.

2) Paul, by culture, was Greek. He was born and raised in Tarsus. Tarsus is a seaport on the coast of Turkey. On a map find Rome -- that's where Paul wrote the letter to. When he wrote the letter he was in Corinth. Corinth is a sea port on the coast of Greece. Paul was born in Tarsus in Turkey, right where there is a bend before you get down into Syria.

What was Tarsus? Tarsus was a great university center. It rivaled Athens. It had one of the greatest libraries of the world. Paul was a highly educated man. He spoke Greek fluently. Greek was the universal language at this time. Even though it was the Roman empire, not everybody spoke Latin, they spoke Greek, regardless of what country you were in. He spoke Greek fluently and that meant he could travel internationally and speak in several different countries.

3) Politically, Paul was a Roman citizen. This is important to understand because being a Roman citizen gave you a pass to the empire that, if you were not a citizen, you didn't have those privileges. Only about one in five people in the Roman empire were actually citizens of the empire. (It's like in Russia. A very small percentage of Russians are members of the Communist party. Most of them are not members of the party and are not privileged to be a member of the party.) Paul was a Roman citizen.

You could get a Roman citizenship by birth, or if you were wealthy enough, you could buy a Roman citizenship. Acts 16:35 Paul and Silas had been put in prison. The prison guards did not know they were Roman citizens. *"When it was daylight the magistrates sent their officers to the jailor with the order 'Release those men'. The jailor told Paul, 'The magistrates ordered that you and Silas can be released. Now you can go.' But Paul said to the officers, 'They beat us without a trial. [which was against the law if you were a Roman citizen. They were in big trouble!] even though we are Roman citizens and threw us into prison. Now do they want to get rid of us quietly? Let them come themselves and escort us out."* Picture: the mayor of the town has had Paul and Silas thrown into prison, thinking they were just poor Jews, which had no status in the Roman empire. Then he said they could go. Paul pulls his ace from his sleeve and says, "By the way, we're Roman citizens. If you want us to leave, you get the mayor to come down here and personally let us leave because they beat us without a trial."

v. 38 *"When the officer reported this to the magistrate that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens they were alarmed."* They were terrified. The mayor himself was likely not a Roman citizen. It would be like in Nazi Germany hurting a Nazi and not knowing it. Paul was a Roman citizen. "... *They came to appease them and escorted them from prison, requesting them to leave the city."* Paul was a Roman citizen which came in very handy as he traveled around the Mediterranean Roman empire because it gave him access. Like a pass.

The point I want to make here: Paul had Hebrew background, Greek background, Roman background. As a result he was perfectly equipped to be an international minister to the different countries around the Roman empire. God often prepares us and equips us for the ministry He's going to give us.

2. TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN? Romans 1:7 *"To all who were in Rome, who are loved by God and called to be saints."*

What does it mean to be a saint? To be a saint simply means to be a Christian.

In the New Testament, people were rarely called Christians. The most common term for Christian, in the Bible, is saints. The Bible says if you're a Christian, you're a saint. **So the Bible says Paul wrote this letter to the Christians who were in Rome.**

Paul had never been to Rome at this time. It's different than other letters he wrote. In other letters, he started the church. But here he didn't know anybody -- actually a few. In chapter 16 he lists them. But how did the church in Rome get started? Most likely there were some converts of Paul from other cities who went to Rome.

When they got there they started some home Bible studies and began to grow and soon there was a church growing there. Paul writes to them.

At this time, Nero was the Caesar in Rome. Christians were not exactly well liked at this time. They were, in fact, lion food. It wasn't as bad as it got later on.

Paul is writing to the Christians at Rome. He has this overwhelming desire to go to Rome. v. 11 *"I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be strong."* v. 13 *"I don't want you to be unaware, brothers, that I tried three times to come to you but have been prevented from doing so until now in order that I might have a harvest among you just as I have had among the other Gentiles."*

He said, "I've been planning, dreaming, hoping -- my greatest dream is to go to Rome." Rome was the greatest city of the greatest empire of the world. It was the strategic center of civilization. He had started churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, all over Greece and Turkey and the Mediterranean, but he had never made it to Rome. v. 15 *"This is why I'm so eager to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome."* He had a strategy. He wanted to go to Rome but he wasn't able to go and so he wrote this letter.

3. WHEN DID HE WRITE IT?

Paul made three missionary journeys around the Mediterranean starting churches, each of them taking a number of years.

He'd go into an area and spend anywhere between six months and two years starting a church, get it growing, and then move on to a new area.

Paul, on his third journey, had made it all the way to Greece. He had started in Jerusalem, then he went to Tyre and Sidon and across the Balkan peninsula, and comes all the way down to Corinth. Acts 20:1ff *"When the uproar had ended Paul sent for the disciples and encouraged them. He said good bye and set out for Macedonia."*

Macedonia is the old word for Greece. Philip of Macedon was the founder of Greece. His son was Alexander the Great. Macedonia is named after Alexander the Great's father who was in Greece. *"Paul traveled through that area speaking many words of encouragement to the people and finally arrive in Greece where he stayed three months."*

Where? In Corinth.

In chapter 16:23 where we read about Gaius. Gaius was a wealthy business man in Corinth. Paul spent three months staying in the home of the business man Gaius in Corinth and while he was there he wrote the book of Romans.

Many of you may not realize the letters of the New Testament are not in order chronologically. Paul wrote thirteen different letters to thirteen different people and churches. The first letter he wrote was actually I Thessalonians and then II Thessalonians. Then he wrote I and II Corinthians.

When he got to Rome, Romans was the fifth letter that Paul wrote, even though it comes first in your Bible. Paul was a very busy man building churches. Aren't you glad he took time to write letters? If he hadn't we wouldn't have thirteen books of the New Testament.

I encourage you to begin a letter writing ministry. Letters can have a strong effect on people. I write a number of letters a week just in pastoring and it's a great form of communication. What is great about a letter? A lot of times when you talk to people, one on one, they will argue with you. When you write a letter to them, they have to set there and read the whole thing. They put it down, pick it up, and it still says the same thing. There is a powerful affect in writing letters.

4. WHY DID PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER?

There are three purposes why Paul wrote the book of Romans. I think it's important to understand that this letter is different than many of his other letters. In the first place, he didn't start this church. Most of the letters Paul wrote, he wrote to churches he had started. In fact, he had never even been to Rome. Evidently he did know a good group of members there. In chapter 16 he mentions them by name and there's quite a long list of people he knew. As we read through the book of Romans we discover there are very few internal practical problems mentioned.

It's the exact opposite of his letter to the Corinthians where in every chapter he mentions a personal practical problem that they were having because he was intimately acquainted with the Corinthian church. But this is closer to a doctrinal statement.

It's more systematic, more organized than a number of others of Paul's letters.

Paul had three reasons for writing the letter:

1) There was a personal reason. ch. 1:11-13, 15. **The purpose was to introduce himself to the Romans. He was announcing his visit.** He intended to come. Simply as a courtesy statement he says, I want you to know that I'm coming. v. 11 *"I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong. That is that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith... That's why I am so eager to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome."* Don't you appreciate it when people write ahead and let you know they're coming? This is a personal reason he gave for writing this book.

2) **There was an educational reason -- to review and clarify the meaning and basis of Christian living. He wants to clarify the meaning of salvation. 15:15** *"I have written to you quite boldly on some points as if to remind you of them again because of the grace of God that God gave me."*

Romans has been called the Christian's constitution. How many of you have read the constitution of the United States? We believe it, we defend it, we'd die for it. Paul is writing the constitution of the Christian life and he's reminding us of basic doctrinal truths to know and understand.

3) **There was a financial reason. This is a fund raising letter in one sense. Paul wrote Romans to enlist support to his trip to Spain. 15:22** *"This is why I have often been hindered in coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions and since I've been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. When I go to Spain I hope to visit you and have you assist me on my journey there after I've enjoyed your company for a while."*

He's getting financial assistance from the Romans to go even farther to Spain where he wanted to spread the gospel. Did Paul ever make it to Spain? Probably not.

There's a possibility he did. We do know that he was killed in Rome. How did the letter get there?

16:1- 2 we find out how the letter got from Paul to the Roman church. *"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea and ask you to receive her in the Lord in the way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people including me."*

Evidently Phoebe was a wealthy widow that had some kind of personal business in Rome. So as she was coming, she handed this letter to the Roman church.

5. WHAT'S THE MESSAGE?

The message is the gospel. The theme of Romans is 1:16-17 *"I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew and then for the Gentile. For in the gospel, the righteousness from God is revealed, the righteousness that is by faith from first to last just as it is written `The righteous will live by faith.'"*

God gives His righteousness to the person who believes in faith. The good news has the power to change lives.

It's the power of the Gospel that I'm not ashamed of. The word power is the word from which we get our word dynamite.

Key words in Romans:

The key words in any book are often the key that unlocks the book. There are some words in 1:17 that will be repeated over and over.

"Righteousness" is used 34 times in the book of Romans. It is used 92 times in the New Testament and it's key to the book of Romans. It means "a right relationship to God".

"God" is used 153 times.

"Law" is used 72 times.

"Christ" is used 65 times.

"Sin" is used 48 times.

"Faith" is used 40 times.

An overview -- a bird's eye view -- of the book of Romans. There are five key divisions outside of the introduction (1:1-17) and then at the end of the book a conclusion (Romans 15:13-16:27). The main body of the book can be divided into five main divisions:

Sin. Romans 1:18-3:20. He starts with the bad news. Why do we need to be saved?

Salvation. Romans 3:21-5:21. The good news: How do you be saved? He talks about how do you become a believer, how do you become a child of God.

Sanctification. Romans 6:1-8:39. How do I live the Christians life? He talks about the new life of a believer and what happens after I'm saved.

Then there is a little parenthesis in 9:1-11:36 and talks about Sovereignty -- the sovereignty of God. Why God saves us. In particular we're going to look at the explanation of the relationship between nation of Israel and the church. Why God chose Israel as the chosen people.

Service. Romans 12:1-15:13. This is the practical part of Romans. It deals with what we're saved to do, our conduct and our character and how we are to serve God.

Just as Paul's other books are usually divided into a doctrinal section and a practical section, the same is true for the book of Romans. Part is very doctrinal and deals with basic Bible truths and teachings. Part of it is very practical, how we need to grow in the Christian life. It lists all kinds of subjects: like grace, sin, love, spiritual gifts, trials, struggles, Israel, getting along with each other, government, judging each other, sovereignty of God, judgement, the Holy Spirit, baptism, death, the gospel, heaven, repentance, growth. All of these are subjects that Paul deals with.

Conclusion:

Maybe some of you know some people who react violently to the gospel. You've talked to them about the Lord, but they were very forceful and maybe even you were persecuted a little -- put you down or criticized you. Be encouraged. That can be a sign that they're under conviction. If God can turn Paul around and He can turn Paul the persecutor into Paul the preacher, anything is possible.

Also, never underestimate the power of a letter. Paul wrote this letter to the church of the Romans and it's blessed Christians for the last 2000 years. Is there someone you could write a letter to? Who do you know that needs to know Christ? Maybe you could begin a ministry of letter writing, telling others about Christ and sharing the gospel by letter writing.

And the third application I believe we can apply is to realize there are three things Paul stated about himself. These are statements every Christian should be able to say about himself. He said,

"I am a servant, I'm a slave of Christ, I belong to Him." That's what we ought to be able to say as believers, that Christ is our master. Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 *"No one can serve two masters. He will either hate the one and love the other or hold to one and despise the other."* The characteristics of a servant are he's owned by that master, he's dependent upon that master and he's obligated to serve that master. That's what we can say as Christians, **that we are servants of Christ.**

"I'm sent out..." called to go. All of us are called to go. In Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission says that all of us are to go into the world and share the good news and make disciples and teach them to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us and He has promised to be with us always. All of us are sent to go. We go to the people we work with, live with, the people in our neighborhood.

Paul says I have a gift, *"I am an apostle."* You have a gift. God wants you to use that gift to bless others. As we get into the passages in Romans that deal with spiritual gifts we'll understand how to discover and develop and use our gifts in the way God wants us to use them.

Donald Barnhouse spent many years preaching through the book of Romans. He said that God has always used this book to renew and refresh and revitalize the church.