

ROMANS

This lesson begins our study of the book of Romans. As I indicated previously,, anyone who knows me at all knows that Romans Chapter 12 is my favorite chapter in the Bible. If anyone ever asks me how to live the Christian life I tell him or her to read, and apply, all that's contained in Chapter 12.

Martin Luther wrote: "[Romans] is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes."

As you will see in the lesson ahead that a lot of exciting, life changing, revelations are included within Romans, perhaps the best letter ever written by Paul.

In terms of background and helping our understanding of Paul, his approach to his ministry, and his excitement about spreading the gospel, we need to understand one of the basic differences between the Old Testament and New Testament.

During the early days of the Jewish people, God made it clear His desire was for them to become a Nation of Priests (Exodus 19:6). They were to become a beacon drawing other nations to them, and to God. The Queen of Sheba was an excellent example of a non-Hebrew being drawn to the Nation of Israel and visiting King Solomon, because of all she had heard about his God. We see in the Old Testament the concept of people and nations coming to Israel; whereas in the New Testament, we see the opposite approach. Christ, in His Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), commands the Church to go and make disciples, traveling from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the outer most parts of the earth. The Church of the New Testament carries the Gospel to the lost world— it doesn't wait for the lost world to come to it. We call this being evangelistic—spreading the Good News.

Paul, being born, raised, and highly educated as a Jew came to realize this "mystery" as a part of his conversion. He realized the paradigm shift, i.e., that the model that Christ would use to build His Church was radically different than the one God had used to build the Nation of Israel. Realizing this, and realizing that Christ was indeed the Messiah who came to save both the Jew and the Gentile, Paul's heartfelt desire at all times was to carry the Gospel outward to the far ends of the earth.

He began in Antioch with three missionary journeys that covered the Mediterranean, then Rome, and finally he set his sights on Spain, as we will see in Romans Chapter 15. Knowing these things, we can begin to understand his excitement about this new approach to building a church, his role in spreading the Good News to everyone—not just the Jews, and his desire to build a strong church at Rome. Rome, as the center of the known world, would be used as a launching pad for missionary journeys to Spain and the northern reaches of the Roman Empire.

It will also help our understanding to know that this letter was written in approximately 57 AD, which means that some 27 or so years have passed since Christ's death and resurrection; and, furthermore, 20 years or so since Paul's Damascus Road conversion. This means that Paul has had twenty years of experience in addressing the concerns of the Jews, winning the confidence of the converted Jews (whom he use to persecute), and in starting and building churches made up of both Jews and Gentiles. This experience is evident in the depth and breadth of the content that Paul pours into the Roman Epistle.

In summary, the book of Romans will cover the righteousness of God, the reality of sin, the depravity of man, the means of salvation, law versus grace, flesh versus Spirit, the sovereignty of God, the security of the believer, the place of Israel in God's redemptive plan, Christian liberty, and life and love in the body of Christ. But, at the heart of it, Paul is writing to prepare a body of believers to be co-laborers in spreading the Good News. He is writing to us.

For this lesson, read Romans Chapter 1 and answer the following:

1. Why do you suppose that the passage in Romans 1:16-17 is called the "theme", or summary, of the entire letter?
 - a. ANSWER: Clearly, this is the mission of Paul—this is the very reason for his passion to share the gospel, first to the Jew and then the Gentile. The Gospel Message, i.e., the good news of salvation, was to be shared with everyone, and Paul knew it. The theme that Jesus is the true Messiah and came to save us all, runs throughout the entire book of Romans. Finding the lost and proclaiming the Gospel to them; this was Paul's passion, and it should also be ours.
2. In Romans 1:1, Paul refers to himself as a servant, or bond-slave. Can you find out what that means? What made someone a "bond-slave" in those days? Determining the answer to this question may reveal to you a new dimension regarding your relationship with Christ.
 - a. ANSWER: In Mosaic law, being a bond-servant meant to "voluntarily" become the slave or servant to the master. See Exodus 21:5-6. Men such as Abraham, Joshua, David, and Isaiah were all "servants"—the term meaning humble nobility. Paul voluntarily became God's servant, as one who serves the king. All of us should have this same, humble, servant's heart.
3. In Romans 1:3-7, Paul tells us that we are the called of Christ through his death and resurrection. In verse 4, what validates that Christ is who he says he is, i.e., the Messiah?
 - a. ANSWER: Jesus was resurrected from the dead; this validates that he is indeed the Messiah, the anointed one, sent to save the world.
4. What is Paul saying to the Roman Christians in Romans 1:8-15? Why does he want to come to them?
 - a. ANSWER: He says that he wants to come to them to "impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong," in verse 11, to be strengthened by them in verse 12; and, in verse 13, "in order that I might have a harvest among you."
5. Romans 1:16-17 is a pivotal passage with respect to understanding much of what Paul is trying to say in the entire letter. What are some of the important things that Paul conveys in each of these two verses? (There are several in each verse.)
 - a. Romans 1:16
 - i. ANSWER 1: We are not to be ashamed of the Gospel; it is nothing to be ashamed of. After all, it's good news!
 - ii. ANSWER 2: Salvation is available to everyone who believes...everyone—no exceptions!
 - iii. ANSWER 3: The Gospel was always presented first to the Jews—they clearly have priority; then, as they rejected Paul, it was presented to the Gentiles.
 - b. Romans 1:17
 - i. ANSWER 1: In addition to providing for our salvation, the Gospel also makes clear God's righteousness.
 - ii. ANSWER 2: We see in God's righteousness that we are to live by faith. As a result of living by faith, we receive the righteousness of God and inherit eternal life. What "good news" as Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4. See also Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38.
6. In Romans 1:17, God revealed His righteousness. What does He reveal in Romans 1:18?
 - a. ANSWER: In this verse, God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness.
7. What does Romans 1:19-20 indicate to us about knowing God, and about proving that God exists?
 - a. ANSWER: Paul tells us that God has made it plain to mankind who He is. He tells us that through God's creation, we can see the invisible qualities of God. John 4:24 tell us God is Spirit. Therefore, He is invisible to us; but through the physical world that He created, He is revealing Himself to all mankind, so that we are all without excuse. God is real. He does exist, and He sent his only son Jesus to save His very creation.

8. The verses in Romans 1:21-32 were addressed to the people of the day, both in Rome and throughout the known world at the time. Do they apply today? In the space below, can you cite some examples around these scriptures that we see around us today? (Isn't this an indication that man needs Christ today more than ever?)
- a. Romans 1:21-23
 - i. ANSWER: Clearly today we can see this in the world's false religions and religious cults. They all appear "wise" and "tolerant", i.e., "there are many paths to God", etc.; but, in fact, "their foolish hearts are darkened."
 - b. Romans 1:24-25
 - i. ANSWER: The truths in these verses are as evident today as ever before. Both in the perversion of sexual activities (spanning a wide range of activities) to those who worship things created by man, rather than by God. We rush to put our faith in mere mortals and the things they create, but not in God who created everything. Proverbs 11: 7 states, "Hope placed in mortals dies with them; all the promise of their power comes to nothing." Today we see this all around us as the world seeks for something that they can believe in; and it continually chooses to put its faith in man, and things created by man, instead of God.
 - c. Romans 1:26-27
 - i. ANSWER: Could there ever be two more powerful verses for today?! Is what we see happening around us not exactly what Paul prophesied about in this first chapter some twenty-one hundred years ago? God's Word is perfect and keeps us grounded in truth, so that we are not persuaded to compromise, and so that we are not confused regarding what is truth. John 8:31-32 reads, "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"
 - d. Romans 1:28-31
 - i. ANSWER: Sadly, this is exactly what we see around us today—both in our country and around the world. Evil, wickedness, the lack of love and compassion, and all manner of violence have all become a common daily walk of life for millions. They know the teachings of God, but they choose to ignore Him.
 - e. Romans 1:32
 - i. ANSWER: This, too, is sadly true today; as people who do wicked and evil things also lift up those who also practice them. The world, it appears, is upside down. The truth of the Gospel is taught as a lie and not to be believed; rather, violence, hatred, envy, malice, etc., are lifted up as the only solution; and the followers of Christ are pointed out as trouble makers and evil. Clearly, none of this was or is a surprise to God, who had Paul write these words around 57 AD. The wicked think that they are succeeding, but God is not fooled; and we need to be careful that we are not fooled as well. This is one of the purposes for Paul's writings in Romans.
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I pray that this study of Romans will deepen your faith, strengthen your walk, and resolve any lingering doubts or questions that you may have about your salvation. Before we can begin to spread the Good News, we need to understand what it is, and we need to have it in our hearts. Then we can have the same zeal and boldness as Paul regarding our calling as one of Christ's own.

May He richly bless you this week, as you study His Holy Word with us.

In Christ,

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