

ROMANS

(Part 1)

by Lamar Bowman

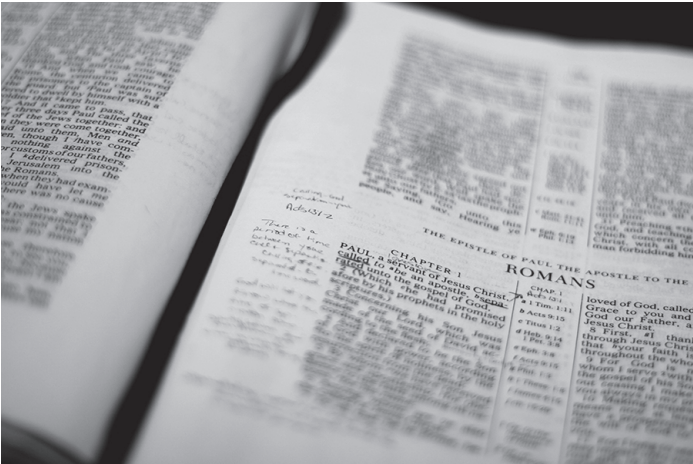


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Introduction

The apostle Paul was one of the best-educated writers of the New Testament. Not only was he trained by one of the leading Jewish scholars of his day, Gamaliel, he was also educated in the Greek language and culture. The Holy Spirit used and guided Paul's training and intellect to present the most complete explanation of God's gracious dealings with mankind.

Paul carefully proves that everyone is in need of a savior because all have sinned. In Christ we have peace with God, justification from our sins through obedient faith, and help for on-going spiritual growth through the Holy Spirit. He helps us discover all that we have in our "in Christ" relationship with God.

About the Author

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Lesson 1

Savior and King

Romans 1:1-17

WARM UP



Paul's call to evangelize the Gentiles had been completed in the eastern portion of the Roman Empire. His missionary journeys had taken him through major cities in Achaia, Macedonia, and Asia Minor. His eyes then turned westward, toward Spain. He mentions this desire to expand his ministry in that direction in Romans 15:19-29. The most logical stopping point was Rome, but the church in Rome did not have its beginning with his ministry, and Paul was not one to build on another's work (Romans 15:20). His stop would be temporary. However, he did not want to show up without warning or support. The Book of Romans is his introduction to the church and his way of obtaining support for his ministry in Spain. The epistle of Romans was written most likely from Corinth during his stay in Greece (Acts 20:3) sometime in the mid-50s.

The church in Rome was not without its problems, and the letter to the Romans hints at what those problems were. Rome had a large Jewish community, numbering somewhere around 50,000. We know that Acts 2 mentions that some of the Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost were from this area (Acts 2:10). The church is likely to have developed from this source and would have originally been made up of Jews and Gentile proselytes. We also know from history that

sometime around 49 AD many of the Jews were expelled from Rome over what was probably a dispute over Jesus. This would have left the church in Rome predominately Gentile. As the Jews migrated back to their homes over the next decade or so, they would have found the church quite different from how they had left it. The Gentiles would have reshaped the church without Jewish influence and ignored many of the Jewish traditions. Problems between the two groups arose, and the church faced the same difficulties not unlike those churches under Paul's care. Yet, the problem could well be reversed in Rome. The Jews were the minority and the Gentiles the aggressors. Paul would not let this problem go without mentioning it in his letter. This gave Paul the opportunity to delve into the subjects of grace, faith, works, Law, the Spirit, and many others central to the church's beliefs. Despite not founding the church and not wanting to build on another's work, Paul, moved by the Spirit, would not let this opportunity to proclaim the message of the cross and address the problems in Rome pass him by.

WORK OUT



Paul begins his letter with a traditional salutation filled with descriptive qualifiers of his position. His service is to his master Jesus Christ who called him to a ministry of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. From the beginning, Paul lets his readers know his message carries with it divinely given apostolic authority, and his message is firmly rooted in the work of God and character of Christ. Christ is the Messianic King born in David's lineage and the Son God, proven by His resurrection from the dead through the power of the Spirit (Romans 1:3-4). This qualifies Him as Lord and Savior, which is the source of Paul's authority. This is a call to every

reader to pay close attention to his words. They are God's, not his, and they proclaim the Lordship of Jesus. His words are to develop both faith and understanding in the person of God in Christ and submission to our heavenly King (Romans 1:5).

Paul begins with a prayer for the church in Rome. Despite having never visited Rome, Paul deeply and genuinely cares for this church. Why? It is because they confess the name of Christ. For Paul, that is enough to motivate him to care. He has heard of their faith and is moved by that. Paul's concern for them is rooted in his relationship with Christ, and not because of friendship, social standing, or profession. It is Jesus and His power to unite that matters to Paul. The spiritual gifts he longs to impart are not likely the spiritual gifts they already possessed (Romans 1:11; 12:3-8), but the gift is that of sharing the message of Christ to establish and strengthen them and the knowledge that he, too, will be strengthened by their love and acceptance (Romans 1:12-15). It is the gift of fellowship.

Paul ends this message with what could be seen as a summary of the entire letter (Romans 1:16-17). Salvation for all humanity is the gospel message. No other message contains life and salvation. It is in this message we see how we are to live and how God works out His will. It was preached to the Jew first because God had prepared them to receive it and then proclaim it to the world. It is a message that reveals the righteousness of God and passes from one person of faith to another. It is a righteousness that demands a life lived by faith. It is a message that demands faith! In verse 17, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4. In Habakkuk, the prophet witnesses the atrocities committed by his own people, God's covenant people, and asks God how long He would let them continue without intervening (Habakkuk 2:2-4). God's response to him comes as shock. God tells Habakkuk He was sending Babylon to punish them (Habakkuk 2:6). Habakkuk responds in disbelief. How could God punish corrupt Judah with a people more corrupt and deserving of punishment than they (Habakkuk

2:12-17)? The Lord's reply is to have faith. Trust that the Lord is doing what needs to be done. Here, trust and righteousness are intimately linked. When God reveals Himself in His Son to those who believe, salvation and righteousness are the results.

COOL DOWN



We must keep in mind that the epistle to the Romans is a complex book. Any commentary or study written about it will fail to do it justice. We must always allow the letter of Romans to be the primary source of this study. Keeping with that thought, we must remember that this, as well as all other New Testament books, is not the same as other writings. This letter carries with it apostolic authority. Paul appeals to this reality in the first verse of the epistle. Jesus is not just his Savior, but also his master. Jesus is both our Savior and King. It is too easy to focus on the first and ignore the last of these descriptive qualities of Christ. Everyone wants a gracious Savior, but few want a King with absolute authority. For Paul, it is his submission to his Lord and King that gives his mission and life validity.

Paul's letter to the Romans is a powerful testimony of God's work in Christ to save humanity and reconcile all things to God not only to the original recipients, but also to us today. We are privileged to have this work. We can rest assured that Paul would be just as concerned for our welfare and desire fellowship with us as much as he did for the early Roman church. We all share the bond of the Spirit of Christ. We, too, are called to listen to his words and understand the authority that lay behind each one. What Paul says to the Roman Christians has just as much influence and relevance to us today; whether he discusses God's grace and wrath or the Christian's moral and ethical

obligations to God and society. But the book needs to be taken as a whole. Despite some passages meaning more to us than others, the book is to be taken as one unit. God's work in Christ must be seen against the backdrop of humanity's corruption. God's call for us to be subject to the government or our obligation to give up our freedoms for the weaker brother cannot be ignored simply because we want to stop reading after Romans 8. The grace of God must be understood in the context of the wrath of God. We must understand the demands that accompany God's grace. It must be transformative. Faith must be put into action. It has to be a living and true faith that trusts in God and trusts enough to do what He commands. Only with an understanding of these issues can we say we are beginning to understand the book of Romans.

Quick Note on the Righteousness of God

What is the *righteousness of God* (Romans 1:17)? It could be God's righteous character or the righteousness that comes from God. Both are possible. The first would emphasize God's faithfulness in keeping His covenant promises. God's power to save is grounded in the work of Christ. His promises of salvation and deliverance become a reality in Christ and His covenant commitment vindicated. The second meaning focuses on our standing before God. It is like a defendant being claimed right or innocent by a judge. Our right standing is made possible by God's work through Jesus' sacrifice. We are justified or declared right because we share in Christ's status; His righteousness becomes our righteousness. Ambiguity may be intentional. Both meanings may well be Paul's intention. As we read through the book of Romans, keep this discussion in mind.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your impression of the book of Romans? Why do

you think Paul wrote it? How has this book affected your understanding of God and His relationship with you? Keep this in mind as you progress through the study and see if your idea of the book changes.

2. How does Paul understand his relationship with Jesus? How did he view his ministry? What implication does that have for us and how we study the epistle?
3. Paul expresses his thankfulness to the Roman Christians for their reputation. This was a church he had never visited. Do we express thankfulness for God's church universally? What is our role as a church as part of a larger body of believers? How often do we pray for and support other congregations?
4. What is the spiritual gift Paul wanted to impart to the Roman church? In what way do we impart this spiritual gift to one another?
5. What was Paul's calling? Is this our calling as well? What do we mean when we say "our calling"? What are the implications of our calling in how we live?
6. If Paul did not want to build upon another person's work and the Romans were already faithful believers, why does Paul feel the need to proclaim the gospel to them? What is the gospel message and why do Christians need to continue to hear it?
7. What does it mean to be righteous? What is the relationship between faith and righteousness? We will discuss this further, but we need to begin to lay the groundwork here.