

Romans

Overview

Paul's letter to the Roman house churches has been preeminent among the New Testament writings for its theological and pastoral influence. It focuses on the doctrine of salvation, including the practical implications for believers as they live out the salvation given to them through Jesus Christ.

Circumstances of Writing

Author: Paul the apostle is the stated and indisputable author of the book of Romans. From the book of Acts and statements in Romans, we learn that Paul wrote this letter while he was in Corinth and on his way to Jerusalem in the spring of A.D. 57, to deliver an offering from the Gentile churches to poor Jewish Christians ([Ac 20:3](#); [Rm 15:25-29](#)).

Background: All of Paul's writings grew out of his missionary/pastoral work and were about the problems and needs of local churches. The book of Romans is also of this genre, but it is the least "local" in the sense that Paul had not yet been to Rome. This letter was his opportunity to expound the good news message (the gospel). He could discuss the essence of sin, the salvation accomplished on the cross, the union of the believer with Christ, how the Spirit works in the Christian to promote holiness, the place of the Jewish people in God's plan, future things, and Christian living or ethics. Though Paul did not write Romans as a systematic theology, his somewhat orderly exposition has been the fountain for the development of that discipline.

The origin of the Roman house churches is unknown. The founding of the Roman church likely goes back to the "visitors from Rome," "both Jews and proselytes" who came to Jerusalem at Pentecost ([Ac 2:10](#)). Many of these visitors converted to Christianity ([Ac 2:41](#)), some of whom very likely hailed from Rome. In [Acts 18:2](#) Luke mentioned Aquila and Priscilla, who left Rome because emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave the city (A.D. 49). This exodus was caused by strife among Jews over "Chrestus" (Christ). The remaining Christians in Rome would be from a Gentile background. The Jewish-Gentile tensions in Rome had a long history. These tensions are somewhat reflected throughout the letter, most specifically in chapters 2, 11, and 14-15.

Rome was the primary destination of this letter. Yet some manuscripts lack the phrase "in Rome" ([1:7](#)), giving some support to the conclusion that Paul intended a wider audience for the book of Romans and sent copies to other churches.

Message and Purpose

Paul's purpose in writing Romans can be identified from his direct statements in the text and inferred from the content. He expressly wrote that he wanted to impart spiritual strength to the believers at Rome ([1:11-12](#); [16:25-26](#)). He asked for prayer for the difficult task he was undertaking ([15:32](#)) and that he might be able to come and see them ([15:30](#)). He hoped to enlist the Roman churches to support a mission to the west ([15:23-29](#)). The content of the letter shows that the churches experienced tensions between believers from different backgrounds. Paul wanted them to be united and to avoid dissension and false teaching ([16:17-18](#)). The content also reveals his exposition of what is essential Christianity and what are matters of indifference.

Contribution to the Bible

What is the gospel? The word *gospel* means "good news." The good news is about Jesus and what He did for us. Most Bible students would say that the gospel is outlined in [1 Corinthians 15:3-5](#). Romans fills in that outline and clarifies the gospel in relation to the OT promises and the Mosaic law, the role of good works, and the gift of God's righteousness. Paul emphasized righteousness and justification in this letter to a depth and detail not found elsewhere in the Bible. Sin is traced to its core in our union with Adam and the imputation of original sin. Paul also mapped out the spread of human sin and its results in both believers and nonbelievers.

There are three passages in the NT (each one long sentence in the Greek text) that contain the most important theology of the NT: [John 1:14](#) on the incarnation; [Ephesians 1:3-14](#) about the triune purpose and glory of God; and [Romans 3:21-26](#) on justification, redemption, and propitiation. If a Christian understands these three sentences, he has a solid foundation for faith.

Paul in [Romans 6-8](#) gave the most comprehensive development of our union with Christ and the Spirit's work in us. [Romans 9-11](#) (on the role of Israel in God's plan) has been called the key to understanding the Bible. [Romans 13](#) is the classic NT passage on the Christian's relation to and duties to the state. [Romans 14-15](#) covers how Christians can relate to one another yet have different opinions and convictions on nonessential religious matters.

Structure

Paul wrote 13 of the 21 letters (or "epistles") contained in the NT. The four Gospels, the book of Acts, and the book of Revelation are not classified as letters. Romans is the longest of Paul's letters, and it contains the elements found in a standard letter at that time: salutation ([1:1-7](#)); thanksgiving ([1:8-17](#)); the main body ([1:18-16:18](#)); and a farewell ([16:19-24](#)). Some scholars refer to Romans as a tractate (a formal treatise). But it bears all the marks of a real letter, although it is a finely tuned literary composition.

Outline

- I. Introduction ([1:1-15](#))
 - A. Author and recipients ([1:1-7](#))
 - B. Paul and the Roman church ([1:8-15](#))
- II. The Universal Need of Righteousness ([1:16-3:20](#))
 - A. Guilt of the Gentile world ([1:18-32](#))
 - B. Guilt of the Jews ([2:1-3:20](#))
- III. Justification: The Imputation of Righteousness ([3:21-5:21](#))
 - A. The righteousness of God in justification ([3:21-26](#))
 - B. Justification by faith excludes boasting ([3:27-31](#))
 - C. Justification and the OT ([4:1-25](#))
 - D. Justification involves reconciliation ([5:1-11](#))
 - E. The Christ-Adam analogy ([5:12-21](#))
- IV. The New Life in Christ ([6:1-8:39](#))
 - A. The old man/new man and sin's dominion ([6:1-23](#))
 - B. The old man/new man and the Mosaic law ([7:1-25](#))
 - C. The old man/new man and the Holy Spirit ([8:1-39](#))
- V. The Mystery of Israel ([9:1-11:36](#))
 - A. Israel's unbelief and the gospel ([9:1-29](#))
 - B. Israel responsible for its blindness ([9:30-10:21](#))
 - C. Israel's rejection is not final ([11:1-36](#))
- VI. Exhortations about the Christian Life ([12:1-15:13](#))
 - A. The living sacrifice ([12:1-2](#))
 - B. Spiritual gifts in the body of Christ ([12:3-8](#))
 - C. Christians and non-Christians ([12:9-21](#))
 - D. The believer's obligation to the state ([13:1-7](#))
 - E. The Christian's motivations ([13:8-14](#))
 - F. The strong and the weak in the church ([14:1-15:13](#))
- VII. Epilogue: Greetings and Travel Plans ([15:14-16:27](#))
 - A. Paul's missionary ambitions ([15:14-33](#))
 - B. Personal greetings ([16:1-24](#))
 - C. Concluding benediction ([16:25-27](#))

Lesson Title: Living Sacrifice
January 15, 2019
Romans 12:1-8 (Background Passage)
Romans 12:1-3 (Lesson Passage)

Theological Principle: To worship God is to joyfully sacrifice our personal desires for God's glory and the benefit of others.

Introduction:

- **What is the biggest sacrifice you have ever made?**

- **What are some sacrifices you make in your everyday life?**

In our day-to-day lives there are moments when we “bite the bullet” and sacrifice ourselves for the good of others. Sacrifice for God will transform us into new people who live out the gospel. Sacrifice is how we worship God and let God transform us into the likeness of Christ.

Understanding

Let us read Romans 12:1.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

What did Paul plead for with his fellow believers? What is the basis of his plea?

What did Paul say to give up? What were they to give their bodies up for? How is this worship?

What does it look like practically to offer yourselves as a living sacrifice each day?

Romans 12:1 notes the first effect of salvation is that believers are to present themselves to God. Such presentation pleases God as an act of worship. Paul pleaded to his fellow believers to give their bodies to God. The reason that Paul gave for this action was that God had done so much for them. Their response should be giving their daily lives to serving Him in all they do.

Let us read Romans 12:2-3.

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. ³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Romans 12:2-3 notes a second effect of salvation in the minds of believers as they are to seek transformation in how they think. Such renewed thinking inevitably will result in believers' knowing and experiencing the will of God as well as worshiping God.

- **Why is it so easy to conform to the behavior of the world? In what area of your life do you find it most difficult to fight conformity? Why?**

- **Who is responsible for the transformation? How is this accomplished?**

- **How did Paul describe God's will for us?**
- **Have you experienced a season when God's will did not seem good, pleasing, and perfect, yet turned out to be so?**

It can be easy to try and fit in, people want to be seen as a part of the group. The desire to fit in can pull people away from God and make the world the place of greatest importance. One cannot be a part of a sacrifice to God and be conformed to the world. Paul instead wanted the Roman believers to be transformed by God. His will is that we would become new people who daily sacrifice our lives to follow His will. God's will is good and pleasing and perfect. Many times it does not feel that way, but in the end God wants what is best for us, even if we don't see it at the time. Living transformed comes from God and His changing of our minds and hearts from the old self into a new being who gives everything for Him.

Application

- **After studying this passage, how do you answer the question, What is worship? How much of your life involves worship?**
- **What evidence can people see that God has transformed you? Why is it important for Christians to stand out from the rest of the world?**