



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Romans

Lesson 1: Introduction

One of the most terrifying moments of my life happened about eight years ago. Ironically, it began completely idyllic. To celebrate our tenth wedding anniversary my husband and I took a once in a lifetime trip to Hawaii. Even though I am an OK swimmer at best, I absolutely love the ocean! We were both determined to go snorkeling, but because we are cheap (or I prefer frugal) there was absolutely no way we were going to pay for someone to take us. So, like any brilliant 20-somethings, we decided to take off on our own. We hopped on a bus with absolutely no idea where we were headed, and got off when we found a beautiful little alcove of a beach where locals were telling us turtles liked to swim. It was perfect! We were having an amazing time watching the fish, completely awed by God's underwater creation. My husband is a fantastic swimmer and can stay in the water for hours and hours, but as he drifted further out I realized I was beginning to get tired, and should probably head back to the shore.

I started swimming at a leisurely pace, enjoying the beauty around me and feeling quite relaxed. Until I noticed that the shore wasn't getting any closer. I began to swim harder, and harder, and yet I was no closer to safety. I truly began to fight panic as I realized I was caught in a riptide. It was paralyzing to realize that I was caught, in the

water where I couldn't breathe, by a force that I had absolutely no control over! I thought back to obscure things I had heard and remembered, "Oh yeah, swim parallel to the shore!" So I changed direction and began to swim furiously, except that as a barely adequate swimmer, my "furiously" was still getting me nowhere.

I was beginning to feel well and truly exhausted, and it was taking all of my energy to barely keep my head above water. At this point I realized I needed help, but how humiliating! There were other people on the beach, people who would see the dumb country girl from a land-locked state who tried to go out on her own and had to be rescued. As my legs and arms were burning, and my face slipped steadily closer to the water, I began to think of never seeing my children again, for no other reason than because I was too prideful to ask for help, and finally gave a mighty push with my legs so I could wave my arms and scream for help. Thankfully a lifeguard came immediately and was able to pull me to safety. My pride is still in shreds over the situation, and I am still ashamed when I think of it, but I am safe. Once we got to the shore, the lifeguard told me that they had been watching me, but were not going to act until I called for help.



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Just as the beauty of the ocean was so captivating that it distracted me from the danger I was in, the book of Romans describes the distractions of this world, and the consequences of allowing those distractions into our lives. And just as I was humiliated by the situation I had gotten myself into, it can be humiliating to admit how far we have drifted from God. Yet if we will swallow our pride and call out for help, the true lifeguard is waiting to rescue us not from physical death, but from eternal, spiritual death (Romans 3:24-25). Romans is the beautiful story of God’s plan to rescue us from the dangers of this world, and through Jesus to Christ bring us back into a relationship with Him.

As terrifying as it was to feel the tide slowly pulling me further and further away from hope, this danger is one that all mankind will experience, as Paul tells us in Romans 3:23. However it is not the tide of the ocean dragging us to sea, but the powerful tide of sin that Satan uses to pull us away from the Almighty God. In Romans we find a terrifying description of the consequences of continuing to allow sin to drag us away from God, but also a beautiful description of God’s plan to redeem mankind from our sin and grant us eternal life through His Son.

Before you begin:

What do you currently believe about sin and salvation? What is sin? What must one do to accept the salvation Jesus provided on the cross? Write down your thoughts to

compare and contrast throughout this study.

Author

There is really no doubt that the Apostle Paul wrote Romans, as he identifies himself as the author from the very beginning, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God,” (1:1). While Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the author of Romans, the book was actually penned by Tertius which we see in 16:22.

Location of Writing

There is tremendous evidence that Romans was written during Paul’s three month stay in Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey. According to Acts 19:21-22 Paul planned to travel from Ephesus to Macedonia and Achaia, then on to Jerusalem and Rome. We know from Romans 15:25-26 that Paul had not yet been to Jerusalem when this letter was written, but had already gathered the contribution from Macedonia and Achaia. We know from Acts 20:3 that he spent three months in Corinth (Greece) and it was likely during this time that he wrote his letter to the Romans. He also mentions in



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Romans 16:23 that he was staying with Gaius, who was in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 1:14.) Also, in Romans 16:23 Paul mentions, “the city treasurer,” named Erastus. Erastus is a fascinating historical character, thanks to the discovery of the Erastus Stone in ancient Corinth in 1929. While the stone has been largely degraded over the centuries, the inscription honors a city official by the name of Erastus who paved roads in Corinth at his own expense. Most scholars believe that this Erastus was in fact the companion of Paul. Finally, in Romans 16:1-2 Paul commends Phoebe to the brethren at Rome. We know that Phoebe was from the church at Cenchræe, which was a seaport of Corinth.

Date of Writing

This information also helps us narrow down the date of the writing, which is almost certainly between 55-59 AD, most likely around 57 AD. In Acts 18:1-2 we read of the Edict of Claudius which forced all of the Jews to leave Rome. This happened in 49 AD, and remained in place until the death of Claudius in 54 AD. By the time Paul was writing to the Romans, Aquila and Priscilla had already returned to Rome (Acts 16:3) so this puts the date of Paul’s letter at 55 AD at the earliest, but most likely around 57 AD towards the end of Paul’s third missionary journey.

Audience

According to Romans 1:7, “To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.” We know that the church in Rome

was comprised of both Jews: 2:17, “But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God...” and Gentiles: 11:13, “Now I am speaking to you Gentiles.” Some scholars believe that the church in Rome began as a primarily Jewish congregation, however after Claudius commanded that all the Jews leave Rome (Acts 18:2) when the Jews returned eight years later it had become a Gentile congregation.

Purpose of the Book

Many people describe Romans as the single greatest treatise on the scheme of redemption we have in Scripture. I would have to agree with this statement; however, I don’t believe that an expansive writing on the Christian faith was Paul’s only purpose in writing his letter to Rome. From a practical standpoint, I believe one purpose of his writing was to commend his sister in the faith, Phoebe, to the brethren at Rome. In Romans 16:1 Paul writes, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchræe, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.” The idea of a letter of commendation to accompany Christians moving to a new congregation is actually quite common in the New Testament. For instance we see commendations for: Tychicus (Eph 6:21-22, Col 4:7-10), Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:15-18), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30), Timothy (Phil 2:29-24, 1 Cor. 4:17, 1 Thess 3:2), and in fact the entire book



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of Philemon is Paul's commendation of the new Christian Onesimus.

It appears that in the early church, a written commendation was common practice for anyone traveling from one congregation to another. I'm not sure why we have lost this practice over the years, but I believe it is one that we would do well to reconsider. I personally have known of situations where an individual living in sin would leave one congregation when confronted, and simply go to a new congregation where they could better hide the sin because they weren't known as well. I have known of false teachers destroying multiple congregations due to a lack of follow-up regarding why they left their previous work. I have known of divisive people who promote their own agendas rather than the cause of Christ wreaking havoc in congregation after congregation. I have also known of people coming in to a new congregation and stating that they are a Christian (because they believe they are) and elderships finding themselves in a pickle years down the road when they learn that the individual is, in fact, not a New Testament Christian. I believe that many of these terrible situations could be avoided by the biblical practice of accountability, if we were to return to the principle of commending sound brethren when they relocate.

Yet another purpose of Romans is clearly an in-depth description of the salvation brought to mankind through Christ Jesus. This letter is a beautiful, detailed description of the lost state of man, the salvation brought

to man through Jesus Christ, how we can accept that plan in obedience, and God's expectations of us once we become a Christian. This leads to a third purpose of Romans: to clarify the special place the Israelites had in God's plan from the beginning, while also emphasizing the equality of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. This certainly makes sense considering the historical context of the Jews having been banned from Rome for 8 years, and having recently returned at the writing of this letter.

Finally, Paul was writing to his Roman brethren because he longed to see them, and was delayed in his visit. Romans 1:11 tells us, "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you." He mentions his desire to visit them again in 15:22-24. While Paul had not been to Rome at this point, it is clear from his personal greetings in chapter 16 that he had many loved ones there that he longed to see. Part of the purpose of his letter was to let the Roman brethren know that he loved them and would come see them as soon as he was able.

Key Words/Phrases: Any time you are engaging in a textual study of God's word, it is important to note key words in your text. Typically, these are words that occur frequently, or are particularly emphasized in the text.



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Some keywords for Romans are:

- Sin - 56 times
- Live/Life - 41 times
- Die/Dead - 37 times
- Law - 83 times
- Believe/Faith - 66 times
- Grace - 24 times
- Righteousness - 56 times

Key Phrase: By no means!

Eight different times throughout this epistle Paul uses the phrase, “by no means.” He typically poses this as a dichotomy, where he is contrasting two opposing ideas, or as a rhetorical question to help his readers really think about what he is saying.

Read through Romans and mark the key words/phrases. If each word has its own color, it makes it possible to identify key thoughts of each passage quickly. Micron pens and colored pencils are both excellent for this.

Outline of the book

Many have outlined the book of Romans in various ways, from basic to very detailed. For the purposes of this study, a general outline will be used (Workshop in the Word):

- The sin of man (1:17-3:20)
- But the grace of God (3:21-8:39)
- For the Jew and the Gentile (9-11)
- Therefore the Christian ethic (12:1-15:13)

In preparation for this study, read through the book of Romans in one sitting. Pay special attention to Paul’s overall focus, and any themes he is emphasizing.