

To the Saints at Rome

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Today, we will begin a study of Paul's epistle to the saints at Rome. This letter is Paul's masterpiece epistle. There is no other book quite like Romans in the Bible. Paul explains how Jesus was the Messiah and the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham. He uses key texts and historic events to demonstrate these points. To put it another way, he takes the Old Testament and interprets it through the Cross.

The apostle Peter once wrote about some of Paul's writings were hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16). Romans certainly fits Peter's assessment. Romans is challenging for several reasons. Mainly, Paul uses many Old Testament references throughout his writing. His citations are not "proof texts." They highlight a broader context that illustrates a given point in the letter. The citations demand readers consult the Old Testament for a better understanding of Paul's arguments. This takes a great deal of work.

Some have complained that Paul "rambles" in Romans. Paul was a trained Jewish rabbi. Today, he would be considered a highly credentialed theologian. Paul does not ramble! He makes cogent arguments that demonstrate his breadth of understanding regarding the Torah.

In this study, we will do our best to meet the challenges of understanding Romans. The goal is to capture the big picture. Getting bogged down in the weeds is a danger in this letter. Once readers can recognize key ideas, repeated studies of Romans will lead to a richer understanding and stronger faith in what God did for us through Jesus. In the meantime, here are some helpful tips to remember when studying Romans.

Three Themes of Paul's Writings

There are three dominant themes in Paul's letters. The themes are connected. Recognizing the themes will help us make important connections to what Paul is wanting to convey.

1). Monotheism. There is one God. The word "god" is a general term signifying a super-human deity. When Paul references God, he is referring to the one Creator. As presented in the Bible, monotheism is about what the one Creator accomplished through the Messiah and the Spirit. In Romans, Paul explains the news of what the Creator did for the world by Jesus (Rom. 1:1-6).

Monotheism was not just some random concept that interested Paul. There was a reason why monotheism was the starting point for teaching the Gentiles. The Gentiles were polytheistic, idolaters. They did not believe in one Creator. Before Paul could tell Gentiles about the Messiah, he first had to tell them about the one Creator who sent the Messiah.

2). Election. There are one people of God. With whom has the Creator decided to have a relationship? The Creator has elected to have a relationship with humans. Humans are the

pinnacle of God's creation because they bear His image (Gen. 1:27). Yet, we turn to idols and live in sin. Our image is stained and our relationship is broken. What can be done to restore our image and reconcile our relationship? Essentially, we must believe what the Creator accomplished through the Messiah and the Spirit. Of course, belief is multifaceted; yet, becoming part of God's elect is just this simple.

In Romans, Paul explains how God's elect is not just the biological family of Abraham. The impact of what God accomplished through the Messiah, the Gospel, is that everyone can become part of God's family by faith (Rom. 1:16-17). In chapter eight, Paul explains how the Creator predetermined to call humanity into His family through the Messiah. Those who answered the call through faith were justified or brought into the family of God. The good news of the Gospel is that anyone who answers this call can become part of God's elect. Through loyalty to God's family, Paul declares nothing can be done to harm God's elect (Rom. 8:29-39).

3). Destiny. The goal of the one people of God. The theological term for this is eschatology; however, the word destiny is a bit less intimidating. What are the Creator's plans for those who have been elected into His family through faith? What is the future of the Creator's elect? The destiny of the Creator's elect is eternal life. This hopeful destiny is to impact how the Creator's elect live. Our morality and ethics are to be transformed by the hope of eternal life.

4 Key Texts in Romans

1). Romans 1:1-4: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."

In the opening verses of the letter, Paul declares the good news of God: the Gospel. The news is the events surrounding Jesus. Faith is built on factual events, not myths, legends, or sage advice.

2). Romans 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

This passage identifies the effect of the Gospel. Everyone can be saved by faith. The Gospel is for everyone. Also, this text states that the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God. The Gospel is not just about us and our relationship with God. The Gospel reveals the nature of the Creator.

3). Romans 2:29: "But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God."

This statement relates to the personal transformation that is to take place in our hearts. Character of the heart is the identifying mark of the one people of God. While this scripture is brief, its meaning is profound.

4). Romans 15:5-6: “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This text serves as a conclusion for Paul’s epistle. The Gospel seeks to unite the human family in the Messiah. The purpose of the one people of God is to praise and reflect the glory of God in the world.

Conclusion

Romans divides itself into four main sections: 1-4, 5-8, 9-11, and 12-15. I highly recommend reading the letter straight through in a single sitting. Also, there are a series of articles I have written that are available on our website (www.fryroad.org). If you spend a few minutes each week in preparation, our Bible classes will be productive in gaining better insight and fortifying faith.