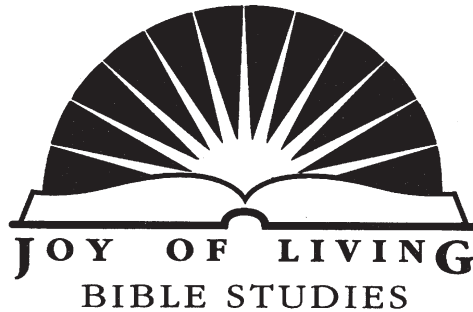


Romans Lesson 1



Introduction

Saint Augustine was a great church leader of the fourth century. But as a young man before his conversion to Christianity, Augustine struggled with God and with the temptation to sin. He tried to live a morally upright life in his own strength, but he would inevitably fail.

In his autobiography, *The Confessions*, he wrote that on one occasion he felt so much guilt, shame, and condemnation for his sins that he flung himself down under a fig tree and wept a flood of tears. “God, why can’t I live a righteous life?” he prayed. “I want to stop sinning, but I can’t!”

Just then, he heard a child, chanting in a sing-song voice, “Take up and read, take up and read!” He interpreted those words as a message from God. But what did the message mean—“take up and read”? Read what? Then Augustine remembered the scroll he had left with his friend, Alypius—a scroll of Paul’s letter to the Christians at Rome.

Augustine jumped up, went to his friend, and found the scroll. He decided to read the first passage his eyes fell upon:

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:13-14)

Instantly, a sense of peace came over him. His struggle with God was over. Though he could not resist temptation in his own power, he could “clothe [himself] with the Lord Jesus Christ” and allow the Lord to live through him. At that moment, Augustine was a changed man. His transformation had begun with two sentences from the book of Romans.

Paul’s letter to the Romans is his greatest. In fact, I believe it is the most powerful document ever written. Of all the New Testament letters, Romans is the broadest in scope and deepest in insight. No other document has affected and transformed more human lives. Here are just a few stories of lives it has changed:

Eleven centuries after St. Augustine, a German theologian named Martin Luther was meditating on this great phrase from Romans 1:17: “The righteous will live by faith.” As he contemplated those words, Luther realized that he had completely missed the point of the Christian gospel! True Christianity is not a matter of rites and rituals and ceremo-

nies. The essence of Christianity is faith, not works! Those words from the book of Romans lit a fire in Luther’s soul, a fire that would become the great Protestant Reformation.

The seventeenth-century Puritan preacher John Bunyan spent twelve years in jail in Bedford, England. His crime? He left the Church of England and sought to worship God according to his own conscience. While studying Romans in his jail cell, Bunyan was inspired by the themes of Romans to write an allegorical novel, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Today, that novel—which illustrates how Christians should relate to God and the world around them—is still a widely read classic.

Another whose life was transformed by the message of Romans was a young Anglican minister, John Wesley. In 1735, Wesley went to America, where he had served a brief stint as a pastor to British colonists in Savannah, Georgia. There he was spurned by the woman he loved and rejected by his congregation. He returned to England in February 1738, embittered and dejected, feeling like a complete failure.

For the next few weeks, Wesley tried to live a righteous life, but he continually battled temptation. “I was indeed fighting continually, but not conquering,” he later recalled. “I fell and rose, and fell again.” During this time, he often doubted God and his own faith.

On May 14 of that year, Wesley went to a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London. There, a man was reading to the congregation from Martin Luther’s preface to the book of Romans. Wesley wrote in his journal that as he listened, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation.”

As a result of his encounter with the book of Romans, John Wesley’s life was transformed. He became one of the leaders of the Great Evangelical Awakening that brought thousands of people to faith in Jesus Christ.

That is the power of this amazing book. Embedded in the pages of Paul’s letter to the Romans is the power to change individual lives and entire societies. It is a power that we all long to experience as followers of Jesus Christ.

Every Christian should study and master the book of Romans. I hope that, by the time you have completed this study, you will be able to outline the great themes of Romans from memory. I pray that you will develop such a love for this life-changing New Testament letter that you will return to it again and again, and that you will live daily in its truths. If you do, I guarantee that it will change your life, just as it has changed thousands of lives through the centuries.

The Central Truth of Romans: Jesus Is Lord

The theme of Romans could be expressed as “From Guilt to Glory.” In other words, this letter deals with how God, through Jesus Christ, has enabled human beings to move from a place of condemnation and sin to a place of reconciliation and righteousness. The sixteen chapters of Romans divide into three main sections with a number of subsections (see “The Structure of Romans” below).

Paul’s letter to the Romans was written around A.D. 56 to 58 while he was in the Greek city of Corinth on his third missionary journey. As you read this letter, you can catch glimpses of the social and spiritual

condition of Corinth at that time. Corinth was located at the crossroads of trade in the Roman Empire, much like New York or San Francisco in our own time. And like those modern cities, Corinth was notorious for its godlessness and its atmosphere of bold, blatant immorality. Paul characterizes that godlessness in his letter to the Romans.

Paul wrote less than thirty years after the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The impact of the life of Jesus was sharply etched in the minds of Christians throughout the Roman Empire. Paul wrote Romans to instruct them and remind them of these profound events that had shaken the first-century world.

The Structure of Romans

Part 1: Reconciliation and Righteousness — Explained by Paul

Romans 1:1-17	Paul’s introductory remarks to the Christians in Rome
Romans 1:18-32	God’s diagnosis of the human condition; the wrath of God
Romans 2	The guilt problem: why rites, rituals, and religion fail
Romans 3	The world is dead in sin, but now a righteousness from God is revealed.
Romans 4	Abraham illustrates God’s grace; he was justified by faith, not works.
Romans 5	Rejoicing in our hope, in our suffering, in God our Friend
Romans 6	How to live by grace instead of law; slaves to righteousness, not sin
Romans 7	Our struggle against “the flesh” (our sinful nature)
Romans 8:1-17	There is now no condemnation for believers; other themes he will return to repeatedly
Romans 8:18-39	The privilege of suffering for Christ; God works all things together for good.

Part 2: Reconciliation and Righteousness — Exhibited in the History of the Nation of Israel

Romans 9	God’s sovereignty demonstrated in the life of Israel
Romans 10	How to be saved — and what about those who have never heard the gospel?
Romans 11	The hope of Israel and the hope of the church

Part 3: Reconciliation and Righteousness — Experienced in Everyday Living

Romans 12	Our identity as living sacrifices; spiritual gifts; Christian love
Romans 13:1-7	Our Christian duty toward the government
Romans 13:8-14	How to authentically love one another
Romans 14:1—15:13	Christian liberty; building up and accepting one another in the church
Romans 15:14—16:27	Paul’s postscript: Greetings and concluding remarks

Study Questions

Before you begin your study this week:

- ☞ Pray and ask God to speak to you through His Holy Spirit.
- ☞ Use only the Bible for your answers.
- ☞ Write down your answers and the verses you used.
- ☞ Answer the “Challenge” questions if you have the time and want to do them.
- ☞ Share your answers to the “Personal” questions with the class only if you want to share them.

First Day: Read the Introduction to Romans.

1. What meaningful or new thought did you find in the Introduction to Romans or from your teacher's lecture? What personal application did you choose to apply to your life?

2. Look for a verse in the lesson to memorize this week. Write it down, carry it with you, or post it in a prominent place. Make a real effort to learn the verse and its “address” (reference of where it is found in the Bible).

Second Day: Read Romans 1:1-17, concentrating on verse 1.

1. a. How does Paul refer to himself in Romans 1:1?

b. The Greek term translated “servant” in Romans 1:1 has a twofold meaning: a “slave,” who completely belongs to his owner and has no freedom to leave, and a “servant,” who willingly chooses to serve his master.¹ How do the following verses help you understand how both these meanings apply to Paul?

Romans 1:9

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

1 Corinthians 9:16-17

1 Peter 1:18-19
2. The word translated “apostle” in Romans 1:1 means, “Envoy, ambassador, or messenger commissioned to carry out the instructions of the commissioning agent.”² How does Paul say he became an apostle? (Romans 1:1)
3. Read Philippians 3:5-6. How did Paul describe himself prior to God's call and his conversion?
4. a. Read Acts 9:1-20. The remainder of today's questions will be taken from this portion of Scripture. Prior to his conversion, Paul was referred to as Saul. Describe Paul's (Saul's) attitude and actions from Acts 9:1-2.

1. Kenneth Barker, editor. *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985).

2. Elwell, Walter A. “Entry for ‘Apostle’”. “Evangelical Dictionary of Theology”. <<http://www.biblestudytools.net>>. 1997.

b. What did Jesus say in Luke 24:25-27, 44-47 regarding Himself and the Old Testament Scriptures?

4. Challenge: The Old Testament is filled with prophecies regarding the coming of Jesus Christ. The following are just a few from the book of Isaiah, which was written about 700 years before Jesus was born. Write what you learn about Jesus Christ from these passages.

Isaiah 53:5

Isaiah 53:6

Isaiah 53:9

Isaiah 53:10

Isaiah 53:11

5. God promised, and then He fulfilled His promise. What do you learn about God's promises from the following verses?

Numbers 23:19

Titus 1:2

Hebrews 6:18

6. Personal: How do the Scriptures in the previous question encourage you in your walk and relationship with the Lord?

Fourth Day: Review Romans 1:1-17, concentrating on verses 3-4.

1. a. In this introduction to his letter to the Romans, Paul points out that Jesus is the One who was promised beforehand. He then presents Jesus to us in two unique ways. What does Paul say regarding Jesus' human nature in Romans 1:3?

b. Challenge: Read Psalm 89:3-4, which was written about 1,000 years before Jesus was born, and compare it to Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:30-33; and Acts 13:22-23. How do these passages confirm Paul's statement in Romans 1:3?

Sample lesson - may be duplicated.

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2. Paul then tells us that there is more to Jesus than mere humanity. From Romans 1:4, what does the Holy Spirit declare about Jesus Christ? What was the proof?

3. The phrase "Son of God" declares the deity of our Lord. He is God. What do the following verses say regarding this?

John 1:1-4,14

Colossians 1:16-17

4. The deity of Jesus is authenticated in His resurrection from the dead. What do the following verses say regarding His resurrection?

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Acts 2:24

5. a. Read Matthew 28:1-15. What happened on the first day of the week, and what plot did the chief priests devise in an attempt to hide the resurrection of Jesus?

b. How does 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 counter the lie spread by the chief priests?

6. Personal: We have the testimony of all these people that Jesus rose from the dead, that He is alive. Even greater than that, we have the testimony of God. Have you ever really stopped to consider that Jesus Christ lives, and not just as a spirit. He rose *bodily* from the dead and ascended to heaven in that same body. (See Luke 24:36-43; Acts 1:9-11). Think about this. What difference does it make to you?

Fifth Day: Review Romans 1:1-17, concentrating on verses 5-15.

1. a. Paul received grace and apostleship to call people from among the Gentiles (everyone who is not Jewish). From Romans 1:5-7, list what we are called to.

- b. The word “saint” comes from “sanctify,” which means to set something or someone apart for a specific purpose. Think of this—God has called us to belong to Jesus Christ, to walk in obedience to Him, and He has set us apart for His eternal purpose. We may have thought we were seeking God, but the truth is that He sought us. What do you learn about this from the following verses?

John 6:37

John 6:44-45

2. a. How does God feel about us? (Romans 1:7)

- b. What do you learn about this from 1 John 4:9-10?

3. a. What was being reported all over the world? (Romans 1:8)

- b. Where did this faith come from? Read Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 10:17.

4. What two things did Paul do for the Roman Christians? (Romans 1:9-10)

5. a. What reasons did Paul give for wanting to see the Roman Christians? (Romans 1:11-12)

- b. From the following verses, why does God give believers spiritual gifts?

Ephesians 4:10-13

1 Thessalonians 5:11

6. Personal: Paul had a great sense of obligation to those of his own Jewish culture as well as to those of other cultures. Paul had planned many times to visit Rome, to share with believers and to preach to the nonbelievers, but had been prevented (see Romans 1:13-15). What do you feel toward those who are unsaved? Can you think of ways you can share the gospel with those of your own culture as well as those of different cultures?

Sixth Day: Review Romans 1:1-17, concentrating on verses 16-17.

1. Why wasn't Paul ashamed of the gospel? (Romans 1:16)
2.
 - a. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, which expands on what Paul states in Romans 1:16. What does the message that Jesus died on the cross for our sins mean to those who are perishing? What does it mean to those who are being saved? (1 Corinthians 1:18)
 - b. What has God done to the "wisdom of the world"? (1 Corinthians 1:19-20)
 - c. From 1 Corinthians 1:22-24, what is the difference between the Jew and the Greek (the non-Jew)? What is the same?
 - d. Compare God's foolishness and weakness to man's wisdom and strength. (1 Corinthians 1:21,25)
3.
 - a. What is revealed in the gospel? (Romans 1:17a)
 - b. Describe this righteousness. (Romans 1:17b)
4. What does Romans 3:10 say regarding our own righteousness?
5.
 - a. Read Titus 3:5. Why are we saved?
 - b. Personal: Have you considered this? God says we are not righteous in and of ourselves. Our unrighteousness has separated us from God (see Isaiah 59:2). Yet in His mercy He is calling us, through the gospel, into an eternal relationship with Himself. It is not our works but His grace that makes this possible. Personalize John 17:3 by inserting your name.