

Romans, Part 1, Session #41

Romans is Paul's letter of introduction

Ever written to someone to tell who you are?

Paul was writing to a group of churches he had neither begun, nor ever visited. All other letters from Paul were to churches he founded or visited.

The impact of Romans on key Church leaders

By the 2nd century, Irenaeus, the great defender of Christian orthodoxy, was quoting frequently from Romans

Augustine, in the 4th century in 386, was reading Romans when he was converted to faith in Christ. Upon his conversion, he opened up his Bible to Romans 13:13-14.

Martin Luther, in the 16th century in 1516, was asked to teach on Romans and his study was key in shaping his thoughts that would become the Protestant Reformation.

John Wesley, in the 18th century in 1738, was struggling with spiritual depression and heard one of Luther's sermons on Romans being read and felt, "strangely warmed."

Karl Barth (around 1918) was transformed in his thinking about Paul after studying Romans. Through Romans he protested against the liberal theology of his day that was perverting the Gospel.

Who is the next person (among us or otherwise) that will be significantly impacted by Romans?

Chronology of Paul's Life

AD 36 Paul converted to faith in Christ (Acts 9)
AD 39 Visit to Jerusalem after Damascus
AD 40-44 In Cilicia
AD 44-45 At Antioch
AD 46-49 First Missionary journey
AD 49 Jerusalem conference
AD 50-52 Second Missionary journey
AD 54-58 Third Missionary journey

Chronology of Paul's Life (Continuation)

AD 57 Paul goes through Macedonia toward Corinth and then heads back to Jerusalem.
AD 58-60 Arrested in Jerusalem; imprisoned 2 years in Caesarea
AD 60-61 Sent to Rome
AD 61-63 Prisoner in Rome for 2 years
AD 64 Death while Nero in power



When was Romans written?

Most biblical scholars today believe Paul wrote Romans in AD 57 while he was spending the winter in Corinth, a leading city of Achaia (Acts 20:2-3).

What does this mean if this is the dating and place of the writing of Romans?

Paul wrote Romans more than 20 years after his conversion. Paul had spiritually matured through much hardship and trial.

Romans was written after Galatians. Some have suggested Paul develops themes he raised in Galatians more fully in Romans

The purpose of Romans (we'll go with 4 purposes)

Paul wants to introduce himself.

Paul wants the Roman Christians to pray for him as he goes to Jerusalem (15:30). Paul hoped for support from the Romans (place to stay, invitations to preach, food, financial gifts, etc.)

Paul wants to strengthen the Roman Christians by giving them some spiritual gift (1:11-12; 15:15-16).

- a. Central theological claim of Romans: There is one God, who in the person of Jesus Christ, has offered redemption for all people and for all of creation (see Romans 3:29-30).

Paul wants the Roman Christians to help him get to Spain as quickly as possible. This is only possible if he doesn't have to spend much time in Rome dealing with divisiveness and dissension 15:24).

Paul wants to visit Rome but circumstances have not allowed him to. So, his letter expresses his desire to come (1:10). See also 15:23-28. On his way to Spain, Paul plans to stop in Rome to see them.

Paul mostly wanted a secure theological base of operations and so he writes to the Romans about the basis for salvation – faith in Christ and not by works of the law.

Political & Church Context of Romans

In AD 49, the Roman Emperor Claudius apparently evicted Jewish Christians from Rome

Reason: apparently concerned that the Jews would cause problems in the city.

With Jewish Christians gone, the early church in Rome made up of Gentiles. Gentile Christians practiced their faith somewhat differently:

Common meal menus would have been different.

Worship practices would have interpreted the Old Testament differently than Jews would have.

Organization of the early church would probably have been different.

Claudius dies, Nero (AD 54) takes over and Jewish Christians are allowed to return to Rome. Nero's wife Poppaea was friendly to the Jews

Paul wants to make sure that there's a place for both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in the Church (Romans 15:7).

Paul's readers in Rome

They were Christians

Mix of Jewish and Gentile Christians (Romans 9-11 addresses the question of salvation of Jews and Gentiles and makes sense only if this were a mixed congregation)

The majority of the Christians were probably Gentile. Why?

(a) In Romans 16, most of the names mentioned are Gentile and ...

(b) Paul reminds the readers how much they owe the Jews spiritually (Romans 11:13, 17-18)

It could very easily be that there were 4 types of Christians in Rome at the time of Paul's writing

The 4 Types are...

#1 Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who insisted on the full observance of the Mosaic Law including circumcision.

#2 Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who did not insist on circumcision but did require some Jewish observance, such as observing the food laws

#3 Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who did not insist on circumcision and did not require observance of food laws.

#4 Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who did not insist on circumcision, observance of food laws, and who saw no value in Jewish feast observances.

Who began the church in Rome?

We don't know but it wasn't Paul

There were a number of small house churches scattered throughout Rome with no central unifying authority or governance. At least 5 churches are mentioned in Romans 16

Next Time:

October 20th.

We'll look in depth at some main passages in Romans.