

The Just Shall Live By Faith

Biblical Studies From
Paul's Epistle To The Romans

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Lesson 1 – General Introduction

Overview

There may not be anything more frustrating than trying to read something you know is important but it is difficult or tedious. Perhaps the information is poorly organized. Perhaps it is written with “jargon” & other technical terms you struggle to comprehend. Perhaps the problem lies with you... you know reading this information is necessary, but you really aren't that enthused about it.

Take, for example, an owner's manual or instructions to assemble something you've purchased. Many people have often complained that some assembly instructions are hard to follow. Many wind up sticking the book in some drawer and attempt to figure the process out for themselves. Yet, what invariably happens is they are forced to dig the manual back out and try again because their own efforts have failed.

Believe it or not, this can also describe trying to study one of the Scripture's most profound books... Paul's epistle to the church at Rome. If you've ever been frustrated in trying to study this “giant of a book,” rest assured – you're not alone. To say that **Romans** can be a difficult book to study and learn is to state the obvious. It contains grand themes that are at the very heart of all the Scripture:

- ◆ A *complete* presentation of sin and its effects upon *all* men
- ◆ The foolishness of men attempting to justify themselves
- ◆ What it means to be justified by grace through faith
- ◆ *Practical* instruction on how to live as one who has been justified by grace through faith
 - Not conforming to a sinful world
 - Living in good conscience to civil rule...even when rulers are evil
 - Living peaceably with other justified believers when there are disagreements

Amidst these majestic passages can be found some trying and difficult verses that may very well require hours of thought and prayer. On one occasion the apostle Peter characterized some of Paul's teachings as “hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:15b-16) [NASV]. We believe some of these “hard to understand” sayings can definitely be found in **Romans**. Despite this, we also state with absolute assurance that one cannot become a child of God and faithfully serve Him without coming face to face with what **Romans** teaches. Just because the book may be more challenging than other epistles is no excuse to ignore it or be afraid to study it.

- ◆ If we are to understand God, we must understand the message of **Romans**
- ◆ If we understand **Romans**, we understand God's salvation plan on His terms
- ◆ When we grasp God's salvation plan, we will know the unending joy of God's “free gift” (6:23)

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Possibly no other N.T. book depicts the overall message of the Scripture more than **Romans**. Man is lost in sin...there is no human that is exempt from such an awful indictment (**3:23**). Despite this, God seeks to justify us, or pronounce us free of guilt. This will not happen because of anything we can do on our own. It can only occur when we seek God on the basis of obedient faith. Having been justified by God's grace through faith, we now as His children must live in ways that demonstrate this justification. This is the message of **Romans**.

Theme

The theme is simple and stated very early in the letter: "...*the just shall live by faith*" (**1:17**). Such faith comes from righteousness that can only be found in 1 source: the gospel of Christ. God uses the good news of His Son as the "power" (*Greek word "dunamis" = origin of our word dynamite..."explosive power"*) to save man from sin (**1:16**). In **1:17**, Paul quotes the O.T. prophet Habakkuk. The prophet was told this very thing when he questioned God's use of the more-wicked Chaldeans to judge wicked Judah (**Hab. 2:4**).

God's answer then is His answer today. If we ever have doubts as to how God will bring about order after we have tainted ourselves with sin, we must have enough faith to trust Him and do what He tells us to do... even if it doesn't make sense to us. We can only survive eternally by faith. Everything else is up to God and His grace (**Eph. 2:8**).

Authorship

As the epistle's beginning clearly states, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus...to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints:..." (**1:1, 7**). We later read in **16:22**, "I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord." Apparently Tertius served as a scribe as Paul dictated the letter. Of course, as with any Biblical book, God is the ultimate Author (**2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:6-13**).

Place & Time Of Writing

We believe there is enough information to know when and from where Paul wrote **Romans**. We feel strongly it was written from Corinth while Paul was on his 3rd missionary journey (**Acts 20:3**). It would have been the winter of *A.D. 57*.

- ◆ One of the primary tasks of this journey was collecting the funds for the needy saints in Jerusalem
 - Something he mentions in **15:25-27**
- ◆ After passing through Macedonia, Paul came to Greece (**Acts 20:2**)
 - Corinth, not Athens, was the principal city of Achaia
- ◆ He spent the 3 winter months there, then planned to sail back to Syria (**Acts 20:3**)
 - He had previously written the Corinthians about wintering with them (**1 Cor. 16:5-6**)
- ◆ He commends Phoebe to the Christians in Rome (**16:1**)
 - She was a servant of the church in Cenchrea, a harbor port for Corinth
- ◆ His "host" where he was staying was Gaius (**16:23**)
 - Most likely, this was the same Gaius he had baptized while in Corinth (**1 Cor. 1:14**)

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- ◆ From his closing remarks, we learn Aquila & Priscilla are back in Rome (16:3-5a)
 - Expelled earlier, they had met Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3)
 - They left Corinth with Paul and went to Ephesus (Acts 18:18)
 - They were still in Ephesus when he wrote his first letter to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:19)
 - They stayed behind in Ephesus when Paul left for Jerusalem (Acts 18:19-21)

Purpose

It appears the primary purpose for Paul penning this epistle was because he was hindered in coming to them (1:11-13). After his journeys were completed, Paul intended to go to Spain. He also planned to stop in Rome and be helped on that journey (15:22-24, 28; Acts 19:21).

Judging from some of Paul's comments about the Roman brethren, these were Christians who were long established in the faith. It was not a young church. Consider the following:

- ◆ Their faith was "being proclaimed throughout the whole world" (1:8)
- ◆ Their obedience had "reached to all" (16:19)
- ◆ Paul states, "I have had for many years a longing to come" to them (15:23)

Why does Paul want to go to Rome? Simply put, he was "eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (1:15). This desire burned within Paul, for he saw himself as a debtor to all men (1:14) to impart the powerful message that can save anyone who believes it (1:16).

Outline

One can read 10 human works about **Romans** and get 10 different outlines. While we admit ours offered in this material will not be inherently better than others, it is the outline we will follow. We believe the outline offered on the next page best follows the text of the book, illustrating Paul's indictment of all men as guilty of sin and how God justifies man who is guilty of sin.

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Outline Of Paul's Epistle To The Romans

- I. **Introduction (1:1-17)**
 - Greetings (vv. 1-7)
 - Thankfulness for the Roman saints (vv. 8-15)
 - Thematic statement (vv. 16-17)
- II. **Indictment Of & Remedy For Man's Sin (1:18 - 5:21)**
 - Indictment #1 → Gentiles are guilty (1:18-32)
 - Indictment #2 → Jews are guilty (2:1-29)
 - Conclusion → All are guilty of sin (3:1-23)
 - God's remedy → Justification through God's grace & man's faith (3:24 - 5:21)
 - Salvation comes for all through faith, not through law keeping (3:24-31)
 - Case study: Abraham (4:1-22)
 - Application: We must follow Abraham's example (4:23 - 5:11)
 - Illustration of God's power over sin (5:12-21)
- III. **Anticipated Questions About Justification By Grace Through Faith (6:1 - 11:36)**
 - Shall we continue in sin that grace might increase? (6:1-14)
 - Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? (6:15 - 7:6)
 - Is the law sin? (7:7-23)
 - Who will set me free from this body of death? (7:24 - 8:30)
 - If God is for us, who can be against us? (8:31-39)
 - Is there unrighteousness with God? (9:1- 10:21)
 - Has God cast away His people? (11:1-36)
- IV. **Living A Life Justified By Grace Through Faith (12:1 - 15:13)**
 - Refusing to conform to the world around us (12:1-2)
 - Serving others with humility (12:3-16)
 - Refusing to return evil on others who mistreat us (12:17-21)
 - Submitting to civil rule (13:1-7)
 - Being diligent in loving others and serving the cause of Christ (13:8-14)
 - Getting along with brethren when we differ over matters of opinion (14:1 - 15:13)
- V. **Final Exhortations, Personal Plans, & Greetings (15:14 - 16:27)**