

BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

Paul's Letter to the Romans
Waltham Presbyterian Church

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Preface

The Book of Romans has, without a doubt, been one of the most influential resources for the Reformed tradition and for Christianity as a whole. It is through the study of this marvelous message written by Paul that the early reformers came to understand their faith in a new and exciting way. With the bountiful weight of guilt set upon him, Martin Luther wandered through life wondering how such a wonderful God could love such a sinner as himself. Luther spent year after year secluded in the monastery because of the guilt he felt and his belief that he could not survive out there. He believed that the highest calling one could have was to live secluded in order to pray and study. Ultimately, Luther's battle seems to be the battle of being **IN** the world, but not **OF** the world.

After much prayer and study, Luther encountered his first taste of freedom while reading about salvation by grace through the faith in Christ. What has become a rather rote saying to church in 2002 was a new understanding and a new discovery to Luther. Strengthened by this realization inspired by the Spirit, Luther began the Reformation – but wasn't intending to do so. Through the debates of the Theses, Luther stood firmly on his faith as he proclaimed to the world what the Spirit had spoken to him.

Luther's discovery also became one of the essential beliefs (tenets) of the entire Reformed tradition – of which Presbyterians are a part. John Calvin affirmed Luther's understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Both men preached this Good News to the people in hopes of helping them come to a new understanding of what faith was all about. Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers challenged the notion that only those within the "true church" would be saved by God. The Reformers went head to head with the Catholic Church who, at that time, was filled with unethical, greedy, and manipulative clergy who abused their positions in order to obtain money and property for themselves and the church.

The rest of the story is, as we say, history. Founded up the notion of salvation by grace through faith in Christ, the new denominations were born. Led by the power of the Holy Spirit, the early Reformers laid a groundwork for us that began in the reading of Romans.

As we encounter together this marvelous piece of Scripture, let us hold firmly to the faith of our forefathers. Let us delve into it each and every day. Let us humble ourselves enough to allow the Holy Spirit to plant yet another seed within us. Most of all, let us eagerly explore our faith in which we hope in those things we cannot see.

This study of Romans is designed to follow the **Outline of Romans** provided in this study. I have divided Romans into several sections, beginning with the Introduction and ending with the Conclusion. These divisions are not set in stone and you can find many other Outlines of Romans in other studies. We will attempt to cover this course in about 18 weeks, but we shall always allow space for the role of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we shall not rush through the material at the expense of investigating the Word and allowing God to water the seed which He has already sown with us. So please take the schedule with a grain of salt and remember that it is always subject to change.

I encourage you to begin each study in prayer. Ask for God to silence in you anything that may prevent you from learning about His awesome Word. Ask for God to instill within you the desire to follow the Holy Spirit wherever he may lead you. After a time of prayer, read the passage that we will be studying during the lesson. Read it through once, and then go back and read it again paying close attention to those words or phrases that “speak” to you. If you use a **Concordance**, it would greatly enhance this study. A concordance is a book which lists the words used in the Bible and then shows you where a particular word is used throughout the Bible. The benefit of a concordance is that it will allow you to “research” words to see how Paul uses them in other letters he wrote. I would also suggest that you utilize some sort of interlinear Bible if you have one.

I pray that you find this study helpful and that you will share your comments /suggestions /ideas with me on how I can improve it. Just as the Spirit is never finished teaching us new things, so too does the Spirit always call us to improve upon that which we’ve already done. Blessings upon you as you encounter, once again, your faith.

Larry

Background Information on Romans

Author: The Apostle Paul
Audience: Jews and Gentiles in Rome
When: Between 56-57 AD¹

Unlike the other letters of Paul, Romans is not written to a church he has planted. Indeed it is quite the opposite: Paul has never even been to Rome! Unlike the other letters of Paul, Romans is not written to put an end to any specific squabbling or fighting. Rather, Paul's letter to the Romans is a statement of faith which seeks to outline what he believes about faith and what his faith calls him to do. That being said, it is very safe to assume that the church in Rome knew very little about Paul and his mission.

So why the letter? Why would Paul write a letter to a church he did not plant, and to a church that is not having any inner squabbling going on? The answer comes toward the end of the letter: "But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for so many years, to come to you when I go to Spain" (15:23). Paul is letting them know he's on his way to see them. He's letting the church of Rome know of his plans to continue planting churches and converting people in Spain. But on the way to Spain he'll need a place to stay and a place to rest. If we continue with Romans 15, we'll also see another reason for the letter: "For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while" (v. 24). So not only does Paul need a place to stay, but also to be "sent on" by them. Paul is looking for missional support!

Throughout his letter to the church of Rome, Paul uses something called a diatribe – a literary function of asking a question and then providing the correct answer. For example, if we look at 13:1-2: "Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?" These are the questions he's asking of them. Because they could come up with some other answer, Paul provides them with his answer, which he believes is the correct one: "Much in every way. For in the first place the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God." Paul uses these diatribes throughout the letter as a method which allows him to fully explain his understanding of the Gospel message.

There are two models of salvation that Paul employs in Romans: The Judicial Model and The Participationist Model. These will be discussed throughout the study, so I won't go into them right now. Suffice it to say that if you take a few moments to think about them you should be able to get some understanding of what they are about.

¹ Dating of scripture is never a conclusive science; rather it is based upon the evidence contained within the Scriptures. However, most scholars believe this book to have been written between 56-57 AD, and no later than 59AD.

Outline of Romans²

Introduction	1:1 – 17
1) We're all dirty in God's view	1:18 – 3:20
a) The Gentiles	1:18 – 32
b) The Jews	2:1 – 3:8
• The religious standing before God (2:1-16)	
• Jews before God (2:17-29)	
• The objections (3:1-8)	
c) Scriptural proof	3:9 – 20
2) God makes us clean and righteous	3:21 – 5:21
a) Death of Jesus	3:21 – 31
b) God prefers faith to righteousness	4:1 – 25
i) Abraham and David	4:1-17
ii) Jesus	4:18 – 25
c) Our peace comes only through Christ	5:1-11
d) The curse is turned around	5:12 – 21
3) Faith leads to living a righteous life	6:1 – 39
a) Unites us with Christ	6:1-23
b) We can't keep the law	7:1-25
c) Holy Spirit gives us power and strength	8:1-17
d) Leads us to eternal life	8:18 – 39
4) God maintains His righteousness	9:1 – 11:36
a) Setting Israel aside	9:1 – 10:21
b) God will maintain His promises	11:1 – 36
5) The call of Christians	12:1 – 15:13
a) As members of the body	12:1 – 21
b) Members IN the world	13:1 – 14
c) Glorifying God	14:1 – 15:13
Closing	15:14 – 16:27

² Outline is based off of the outlines found in A Study Guide to Paul's Letter to the Romans by Scott Gambril Sinclair, 2000, The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings by Bart D. Ehrman, 1997, and The Bible: God's Word for the Biblically Inept by Larry Richards, 1998.