

The Epistle to the Romans

Ch. 1

Apostle/tentmaker Paul's writing springs from real life, and is inspired by God. Born Jewish in Turkey, schooled in Palestine, this ex-Pharisee is a citizen of Rome.

The Empire is home to barbaric tribes, scholars, rich traders, farmers and 60 million slaves! Chariots race at Circus Maximus. Philosophers imitate sunbathing seals at Aristotle's Lyceum. Sculptors are rock stars. Its roads and bridges still used millennia later. Palatial villas adorn seven hills while the masses afoot ebb and flow like driftwood at the mercy of the tide.

"Now the news: Brutus and Cassius knock off Julius Caesar. Antony and Cleopatra...double suicide. Caligula assassinated. Nero murders his mom, barbecues Rome, blames Christians, uses them as human torches, *kicks* wife to death, takes his life, his successor Galba is killed. Now let's check traffic and weather ...

Using his Jewish name, Saul torments Christ's followers. His religious pogrom ceases when he's transformed by the risen Christ (Acts 9). Switching to his Gentile name, Paul becomes a Roman candle for Christ, illuminating the Mediterranean with Gospel light.

It's thirty years after the son of a Jewish carpenter had claimed to be God's Son. From A.D. 47-57 Paul, God's envoy to Gentiles, tours the eastern Mediterranean, announcing that God has accepted His Son's sacrificial death as payment-in-full for all the world's sins! When we embrace this truth, Jesus sends His Spirit to live in us. As Paul says, "Christ is in you; therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory" (Colossians 1:27).

Into Rome's chaos comes this letter in A.D. 57. Coleridge dubs it "the profoundest book in existence." Ray Stedman adds, "Probably the most powerful human document ever penned."

It's addressed to believers who are (1) Jews with a long history of living under God's laws and (2) Gentiles who'd worshipped idols. Paul reminds them that performance-driven religion has been replaced by God's new, once-for-all Sacrifice for sin, namely their crucified and risen Messiah, Jesus (Acts 13:38-39).

The first believers in Rome were probably Jews who'd seen or heard of Jesus while in Jerusalem, embraced Him as God's Son, were then persecuted by legalistic Jews and

forced to flee to Rome. As Gentiles joined Jewish converts there, they were pressured to mingle works-oriented religion with Paul's grace-and-faith-only Gospel (Galatians 1:11-12, 2:7). Peter and John had relayed Jesus' offer to return to establish His kingdom on earth if the Jews would repent of denying His Messiahship. That was rejected (Acts 2:16-20). So God put His kingdom plans on hold through our present day (Ephesians 3:2-3).

Paul writes this letter to insist that God accepts us by faith alone. Salvation is not for sale; grace cannot be earned. **Let's read Paul's groundbreaking words in Romans 1:1-32 (MSG p. 318).**

DISCUSS:

Good to Great Romans 1:1-7

As "Christ's *bond-servant*" Paul was devoted to his Master whose deity was proven by (1) His miracles, (2) His Father's voice from heaven at His baptism and (3) His resurrection. To emphasize His grace, God chose His bitterest human enemy, Saul, to announce Christ's liberating news to Gentiles (Acts 9:1-19; Romans 11:13).

BEFORE the cross, animals sacrificed to God allowed sins to be forgiven up to a point. That was "GOOD." But **AFTER** the cross, God the Father permanently forgave the sins of all humanity. That's "GREAT," this "gospel of the grace of God" (2 Corinthians 5:19). The only sin that sends anyone to hell is refusing God's forgiveness. Paul's "Grace and peace" greeting means that because God does ALL the saving and keeping, we can live in peace. Good works are good but earn us none of God's grace and mercy (Romans 3:21, 22).

DISCUSS: Why isn't living a good life enough to satisfy God?

Postcard from the Edge Romans 1:8-15

Historian Tacitus writes, "Into Rome flow all things vile and abominable!" Paul's Job #1 was telling denizens of this immoral cesspool that God loves and welcomes sinners! "His (God's) Deal" is His offer to take all our sins and give us His everlasting pardon.

DISCUSS: What about the Gospel is often misunderstood?

What's In A Name? Romans 1:16-17

Paul was “not *ashamed* of” his life-changing message; it *alone* plugs the very power of God into your life! Paul’s conduct B.C. (before Christ) was grossly shameful, but he could not be quiet about his new life “in Christ.” The Gospel says we’re broken, unable to fix ourselves. But when God makes us new, we can’t want to tell others.

Some people gag on His name, opting to speak of “the big Guy,” “the Man upstairs,” “Mother Nature,” or use “Jesus” as an exclamation, and the overworked “OMG!” Could it be there’s no higher power to lend force to our cursing? His name is above all names. God Himself cautions, “Do not use my name irreverently” (Exodus 20:7).

DISCUSS: What’s an appropriate response when someone defames the name of a person you hold dear?

Paul’s theme is locked in by Stedman: “The power of God heals the hurts of men and gives us freedom from the bondage of evil ... despair and guilt” (Galatians 2:21, Philippians 3:9). Paul’s game-changer verse says, in effect, “Those who live in right standing before God do so by faith, not by human effort” (Habakkuk 2:4).

DISCUSS: How do we try to earn God’s favor and why?

Welcome to Sinnerama! ***Romans 1:18-32***

Nowhere is our spiritual dilemma expressed more clearly than here through ch. 3:20. A superlawyer by trade, Paul builds an airtight case for our dire need for God, else we suffer His wrath for ages to come (Genesis 3:17-19; Psalm 90:9-11). When people pretend God doesn’t exist, that “godlessness” creates a power vacuum filled by man’s so-called “wisdom” which suppresses Truth (1 Corinthians 3:19). That triggers “wickedness,” making us devalue each other.

Next, sexual immorality vainly seeks intimacy with someone other than God (Leviticus 18:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We buy lies about God and worship images of creatures instead of our Creator. That done, God lifts all restraints, turning us over to our sins, allowing us to call bad good and good bad (Judges 17:6). This breeds animosity and hatred. And this is how civilizations collapse.

Before breaking the Good News, Paul unloads the Bad: ALL are born as sinners in God’s eyes (John 3:36; Romans 3:23, 6:23). We all deserve being separated from Him forever. But because Christ died in our place, God has granted forgiveness for all sin, regardless of race, social status, gender, etc. We can never *earn* His forgiveness; it’s only *received* by faith (Ephesians 1:4, 2:8-9)!

Since Adam, God has broadcast His existence using creation as Exhibit A, giving each person time to see the orderly, intelligent work of our Master Designer/Creator (Psalm 8:3-4; 19:1-4). God is not hiding; He desires that every person knows Him (2 Peter 3:9). An ancient Old Testament voice advises, “Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6)

DISCUSS: Compare “the God we want” with “the God who is.” Why do we try to define Him rather than letting Him define us?

In Christ Alone

In Christ alone my hope is found;
He is my light, my strength, my song.
This Cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace.
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease,
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save.
*‘Til on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied.
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain.
Then bursting forth in glorious Day,
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
**Sin’s curse has lost its grip on me.
For I am His and He is mine,
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.**

No guilt in life, no fear in death.
This is the power of Christ in me.
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand.
'Til He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

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You're Being Paged to Whosoever 'Will Call'

God is offering us "No guilt in life, no fear in death; this is the power of Christ in me."
Why not take this very moment to tell Him: ...**"God, I admit I'm a sinner. By faith I believe that Your Son Jesus completely paid for all my sins on the cross once and for all. I don't know why You'd love me so much that You'd let Your Son die for me. I can only say, 'Thank You, God. Here's my life. It's yours. I'm Your man.' Amen."**

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