

# Truth For Today!

Romans: An introduction

## Introducing the Introduction to Romans

For the last eleven years in our church, we have attempted to study through the entire Bible. We are not even halfway through yet. We have been alternating between Old Testament and New Testament books. In the Old Testament, we began with the book of Beginnings, or Genesis, and have thus far, studied through the escapades of Esther. In the New Testament, we began with the gospel by Matthew and have thus far, completed the adventures of the apostles in the book of Acts.

Today, we begin our journey through the book of Romans. At first glance, I decided to discuss the first paragraph of chapter 1. Upon further study, I decided time would limit us, so I would just begin with an exposition of the first verse. As I studied further, I realized that we would only have enough time to cover the first word. And then, as I studied further still, I decided we did not have enough time to do any of that. We have just enough time today, to simply introduce this letter that was written to the Roman believers.

I hope that when we are through with the introduction today, the question you will have in your mind will not be, "Why should we study the book of Romans?" but rather, "How in the world did we think we could ever survive without an understanding of the book of Romans?"

Several centuries ago, the study of the book of Romans, caused Martin Luther, the reformer, to write,

*Romans is the true masterpiece of the New Testament, which is well worthy and deserving that a Christian should not only learn it by heart, but also that he should daily deal with it as the daily bread of his soul. The more it is handled, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.*

The truth was, the believers in Rome were starving for this bread; they were hungry for spiritual direction from God. They were wondering about everything from the security of their salvation to the way believers were to act in church. They were confused about Israel's part in God's historical plan and they did not know if Gentiles and Jews were to

remain distinct or to become one. They had questions about divorce and remarriage. They even wondered about paying taxes to political leaders who were dishonest and immoral. Many believed that paying taxes to a corrupt government was inconsistent with Christianity. And, God, through Paul's letter, would answer their questions.

The believers in Rome were struggling, perhaps more than anything else, with the corruption of their culture and how they were to live when surrounded by wickedness. The Roman historian, Seneca, referred to Rome, during the days of Paul, as a "cesspool of iniquity".

The immorality of Rome, especially among the upper class, was beyond description. Roman women in the upper class, were said to number their years by the names of their husbands, that they changed as often as they changed their calendars to a new year. The political leadership merely reflected the morals of this kingdom.

In the days of Paul, homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, and bestiality were considered within acceptable societal boundaries. There were Roman philosophers, in the first century, who actually mocked a man and a woman who were married in a heterosexual union and had fidelity in that union.

Perhaps the greatest tragedies were committed against children. Pre-born and newborn children were at great risk in the days of Paul. Abortion was commonplace and killing even the newborn baby was an acceptable way to get rid of an unwanted or sickly child.

One Roman writer, living during the first century, wrote,

*We, in Rome, slaughter a fierce ox. We strangle a mad dog. And the child who is born weak and deformed, we drown without legal recourse.*

A Roman letter was discovered that dates to a few years before the ministry of the apostle Paul. It was from a man to his wife and included these unthinkable words,

*To Hilarian, my wife, heartiest greetings. Know that we are still, even now, in Alexandria. Do not worry if, when all others return, I remain in Alexandria, and as soon as*

*I receive wages, I will send them to you. If you have our child while I am away and it is a boy, let it live. If it is a girl, expose it and let it die.*

We know, from history, that many of these children were left outside the home at night and then, picked up by child prostitution rings that raised the children for their purposes. During the days of Paul, child prostitution proliferated, as children, abandoned by parents who did not want them, fell into the clutches of evil men and women. We also know, from church history, that it became the ministry of the early church to go out at night and pick up these babies from the homes that had simply set them outside to die of exposure to the elements or to wild animals, or to be picked up by prostitution rings.

In addition to sexual vice, drug addiction was rampant. In fact, we know of a revival that took place, during the ministry of Paul, where the new converts brought their “pharmakia,” the Greek word for “drugs,” and piled them in the street.

In addition, religious superstition abounded. The people could simply choose their god, and most chose several that made them feel comfortable and gave them a sense of security. The most popular religions, of Paul’s day, were those that included sexual elements and the worship of the body within their religious practices.

Furthermore, and perhaps it goes without saying, in the days of Rome, life was cheap. By the time the book of Romans had been written, the lower class people had already formed labor unions, not to receive better working conditions, but to ensure a decent burial.

To the Romans, man was just another animal. To act like an animal and to treat each other like animals was common. In actuality, to be an animal meant better treatment, at times, than being human.

If there was ever a time when believers needed to learn rock solid truths about their Sovereign God, and about the dignity of humanity in Jesus Christ, it was then – and it is now. The Bible is not just truth for yesterday; it is truth for today.

Today, as in the days of Rome, life is cheap. Animals are, in many ways, more protected than humans. For example, in America today, there is a legal penalty for destroying the egg of an eagle, but you can dismember a child within the womb and be protected by the law.

The National Organization of Women has proudly defended the Chinese policy of allowing only

one child per couple. This policy has led to infanticide and abortion on such an incredible scale that today, China has reaped a problem that is not widely reported. Due to this policy, most Chinese couples abort, or expose until death, female babies, but keep male babies, who can carry on the family name and care for the parents in their old age. After years of the abortion and infanticide of females, one news service reported some time ago, that there are now approximately seven hundred single men for every one hundred single women in China.

Abortion has also impacted America. I read recently, the incredible news that the Governor of Iowa is begging for people to immigrate to his state. Why? Because at the same time unemployment is less than three percent, the population of his state is slowly shrinking. Is anybody connecting the dots?

Furthermore, today, as in Rome, the destruction of the definition of a family seems in its final phase. Already the *Family Law Quarterly*, under the guidance of Georgetown University Law Center, proposed that, in America, we ought to move to have licensed parents or caregivers. It actually suggested that parents whose ideas, “of child rearing and family life are not in line with community standards,” should be required to give their children to those who will rear them according to community standards.

A commercial that aired during a recent Olympics, revealed yet another symptom of our inability to define a family in the way God’s Word defines a family. It showed two women holding a baby that had just been adopted by them. One of the women looked at the camera and said, “We are a family.”

To say anything against a lesbian couple adopting a baby and calling themselves a family would be considered politically incorrect. I have actually thought of entitling our study of Romans with those words, “Politically Incorrect”. So much of what we will learn, in just the first chapter, goes against the current of what is considered sophisticated, mature, normal, and acceptable.

Since life is cheap and a moral guideline has all but disappeared, medical ethics are now more confused than ever. Not long ago, I read of a father who was dying of kidney failure. He had his sixteen-year-old daughter artificially inseminated, with the help of physicians. Seven months into her pregnancy, the baby was taken by C-section. Its kidneys were removed and transplanted into the father and the infant was left to die of uremic poisoning.

We have lost the definition and value of life, because we have lost the definition revealed in the Bible. We have become more like Rome than ever before. And the more we become like Rome, the more we need the book of Romans. It is truth for today!

## **Introducing the Author of Romans**

Before you even finish the first chapter of Romans, Paul is introduced to us. He was a man who was called by God while he was still in the womb, as he wrote in the first chapter of his letter to the Galatians. Thus, the value of life begins in the womb.

The story of Paul's dramatic conversion is in Acts, chapter 9, verses 1 through 9. Read that to learn of Paul's calling by God.

## **Acknowledging the Theme of Romans**

Before you finish even the first chapter of Romans as well, you discover human relationships that are defined by what God considers to be correct, holy, and fulfilling.

It is in the first chapter alone, that you discover the creative genius of God and the fact that mankind has dignity and honor as His chief creation and calling. When you deny the biblically revealed authority of God, you condemn yourself to confusion and, ultimately, barbaric acts upon other human beings. That is because, to you, human beings no longer have dignity and honor within God's creation. Thus, an eagle egg in a nest has more value than a baby in a womb. We have come so far now, as to expect animals to be treated like humans and humans to treat each other like animals.

The book of Romans was a letter sent to penetrate the darkness of a immoral, pagan, superstitious, hungry, needy, lonely, searching society. I cannot think of anything that describes our culture any better than that of Rome.

## **Outlining the Letter of Romans**

Well, I need to stop and get to the outline of this book of Romans, or we will not even get the introduction finished today.

### **Introduction – Romans 1:1-17**

The introduction of the letter takes place in chapter 1, verses 1 through 17. I have been introducing the introduction thus far in our discussion today.

### **Division One – Romans 1:18-3:20**

#### **“Is the whole world really lost?”**

1. The first division is chapter 1, verse 18, through chapter 3, verse 20. This division asks and answers the question, “Is the whole world really lost?”

Perhaps you have been asked, “What about all the heathen who have never heard the gospel – are they condemned to hell when they die?”

The answer is, “Yes,” and, in this first division of Romans, Paul explains why that is so.

The key word is “condemnation”. In this division, we will discover the wrath of God revealed against sinful, depraved mankind.

### **Division Two – Romans 3:21-8:39**

#### **“Just how does God save sinners?”**

2. The second division is chapter 3, verse 21, through chapter 8, verse 39. This division asks and answers the question, “Just how does God save sinners?”

The key word is “salvation”. In this division, we will discover the righteousness of God revealed to man.

### **Division Three – Romans 9:1-11:36**

#### **“Whatever happened to Israel?”**

3. The third division is chapter 9 through the end of chapter 11, at verse 36. This division asks and answers the question, “Whatever happened to Israel?”

Other questions are also addressed, in this division; such as, “Are Israel and the church one and the same? Is the church a continuation in the same covenant between God and the Jew? Does baptism then, correspond to circumcision, and are infants to be baptized into the community of believers?”

My reformed friends would say, “Yes,” but I believe that Paul says, “No.”

The key word is “vindication”. In this division, we will discover the wisdom of God revealed to man.

## Division Four – Romans 12:1-15:33

### “What difference does all of this make in my life?”

4. The fourth, and final, division, in the book of Romans, is chapter 12 through the end of chapter 15, at verse 33. This division asks and answers the question, “What difference does all of this make in my own life?”

Another way to word the key question of this division is, “How should I live as a result of studying the book of Romans?”

The key word is “exhortation”. In this division, we will discover the will of God revealed for mankind.

### Conclusion – Romans 16:1-27

The conclusion of the letter is chapter 16. Paul ends his letter to the Romans with personal remarks and greetings.

## Surveying Key Doctrines in Romans

Many years ago, an author, by the last name Godet, wrote these provocative words, “There has never been, and probably never will be, an important spiritual movement in the history of the church that cannot be connected to the book of Romans.”

That is true. Throughout the history of the church, there have been episodes of revival and reformation within and through the church. However, upon closer observation, the people who were revived and the sinners who were converted, already had, for the most part, a belief in the existence of God, as described in Scripture, a respect for the authenticity and authority of Holy Scripture, as well as a guilty conscience over personal sin. In other words, they had a basic understanding of the doctrines found in Romans.

I personally believe that revival cannot occur in our generation as in the past, because today, there is not a belief in the existence of the biblical God, there is not a respect for Scripture as authoritative, and there is little or no guilt over sinful acts, or even over a sinful nature. Revival cannot and will not occur *unless*, first of all, we, as the people of God, are again exposed to and are submissive to the truth of God’s Word.

So, if Godet was right, and I believe he was, then there is an answer to Christian leaders around us, who are lamenting and pleading, “We need a return

to the days of revival. Oh, we need revival. We need to pray for revival.”

Someone needs to stand up and say, “What we really need is a return to the truth of Romans and, if we return to an understanding of this truth, revival may well come.”

What are some of these truths that pave the way to revival? There are several key doctrines taught throughout the book of Romans. Let me give these to you.

### Romans pronounces the total depravity of mankind

1. First, the book of Romans pronounces the total depravity of mankind.

In other words, we are not lightly sinful – we are totally, entirely sinful. And, we are sinners, not because we sin – we sin, because we are sinners.

Consider the fact that you never had to teach your son how to lie. Then, where did he learn how? Instead, you had to teach him how to tell the truth. Why? Because lying came naturally, but honesty had to be developed. And, you never had to teach your daughter how to manipulate you into giving her something that she wanted. Where do you think she learned that? Her mother?!

No! The truth, according to God’s Word, is that we were all born, knowing intuitively, how to do all the bad things. Jesus Christ is in the process of refining, transforming, and revolutionizing our character, so that periodically, we do holy, righteous, and selfless things.

Our penchant for running after sin, rather than sin having to run after us, is best summarized in the story about a kindergarten girl, who was at home after school one day. At the dinner table, she announced, very calmly, that Billy had actually kissed her on the lips during recess. “How did that happen?” her mother gasped.

The little girl responded, “Well, it wasn’t easy, but three of my friends helped me catch him.”

The truth is, sin does not run to catch us, as much as we, most often, run to catch sin.

### Romans promises the future damnation of all unbelievers

2. Secondly, the book of Romans promises the future damnation of all unbelievers.

This is an unpopular message today. Yet, the book of Romans declares, without apology, in chapter 6, verse 23a,

*... the wages of sin is death ...*

What bothers me, ladies and gentlemen, is not so much that our society is ignoring the warning of the Bible, but that the so-called church is ignoring the warning of the Bible. It is not so much that society has rejected the God of the Bible, but that the modern church has rejected the God of the Bible.

A man in our church gave me an article from the local *News and Observer*. One column, in the newspaper, is dedicated to interviewing different pastors from local churches. A church in Raleigh was featured and it espouses nothing less than the religious superstition of Rome.

“What are you known for,” the reporter asked the pastor.

The pastor responded, “We have a positive spiritual message, so that we can feel better when we leave than when we come in.”

The reporter then asked, “What would you say to someone who is thinking about giving your church a try?”

“They would be welcome, regardless of who they are and regardless of their belief system,” the pastor said, “we don’t try to convert anybody.”

Then he went on to say, “We need to stop being so religious and be more spiritual. We need to practice more spirituality.”

This is so disturbing to me, because it highlights the fact that, at the very time our culture is dying of thirst, the church has become a well without water. At the very time our society is starving for the bread of truth, many churches have stopped baking it.

I want you to know that in this church, we believe that pleasing God is better than feeling good. Sometimes truth hurts before it heals. And while this Raleigh church, and many like it, has announced that it is not attempting to convert anybody, I want to make an announcement, “We are attempting to convert everybody!”

Why? Because the book of Romans tells us of a coming judgment day; that the payment for sin, depravity, and unbelief is death – an eternity in hell, instead of in heaven.

## **Romans proclaims the only deliverance of humanity**

3. Thirdly, the book of Romans proclaims the only deliverance of humanity.

Let us finish reading verse 23 of Romans, chapter 6,

*... the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Then, according to Romans, chapter 10, verses 9 through 10,

*that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.*

In chapter 8 alone, Paul shouts with the joy of one who has been delivered. He is, in:

- verses 1-4 – delivered by the Son of God;
- verses 5-13 – delivered by the Spirit of God;
- verses 14-23 – delivered into the family of God;
- verses 24-25 – delivered through the promises of God;
- verses 26-27 – delivered in the prayer of God;
- verse 28 – delivered by the providence of God;
- verses 29-30 – delivered for the purposes of God;
- verses 31-34 – delivered by the power of God;
- verses 35-39 – delivered by the unstoppable love of God.

Entirely depraved people can be entirely delivered!

## **Romans prescribes the holy development of the believer**

4. Fourthly, the book of Romans prescribes the holy development of the believer.

If it is indeed true that revival cannot come to the believer apart from an understanding of Romans, then you cannot walk in holy living without an understanding of the truths found herein. These truths answer the questions:

- What does it mean to be a living sacrifice?
- What does it mean to have our minds transformed?
- What does it mean to love one another?

I would like to tell you something about my own desire. By the time I finish preaching and teaching through this book of Romans, I want to be a different man. I want to dream differently – with eternity more in view. I want to be enamored more than ever in my affections for Christ. I want to think cleaner and wiser. I want to despise sin and shun temptation more intensely. I want to be a more godly example to my family at home. I want to love and serve Christ’s church with greater fervency.

We are indeed, about to begin, as one man wrote of Romans, “to climb the heights of Mount Everest where we can catch a more brilliant, life changing glimpse of our great and sovereign, exalted Savior.”

### **Romans parades an awesome display of God’s attributes**

5. That leads me to my final point that the book of Romans parades, before us, an awesome display of God’s attributes.

We are about to study, not just a letter from Paul to some Christians in Rome, but a revelation about God Himself! We will study of God:

- Who He is,
- What He has done,
- How He thinks,
- What He plans to do,
- How He redeems,
- How He loves.

The church, in our generation, has become bigger than ever, while our God has become smaller than ever. The book of Romans will restore our vision of the magnificent, holy, sovereign, gracious God.

It is no wonder that Martin Luther wrote, centuries ago, “I studied Romans and it was as if the doors of paradise had swung open.”

The question is not, “Should we study the book of Romans?” but, “How can we afford not to?” Without a doubt, ladies and gentlemen, this letter to the believers living in Rome, is truth we desperately need for today.