

## THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE ROMANS

There is no other book or portion of Scripture that so completely or systematically sets forth the magnificent doctrinal teachings of the Christian faith as does Paul's Epistle to the Romans. To understand them is crucial to the understanding of the entire Bible. Concerning this, Dr. J. I. Packer wrote, "There is one book in the New Testament which links up with almost everything that the Bible contains: the Epistle to the Romans. In Romans, Paul brings together and sets out in systematic relation all the great themes of the Bible - sin, law, judgment, faith, works, grace, justification, sanctification, election, the plan of salvation, the work of Christ, the work of the Spirit, the Christian hope, the nature and life of the church, the place of Jew and Gentile in the purpose of God, the meaning and message of the Old Testament, the duties of Christian citizenship, and the principles of personal piety and ethics. From the vantage-point given by Romans, the whole landscape of the Bible is open to view, and the broad relation of the parts to the whole becomes plain. The study of Romans is the fittest starting-point for biblical interpretation and theology."

### SPECIFIC PURPOSE AND DESIGN

One of the specific purposes why Paul wrote this epistle was to address particular issues of concern that existed between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the Roman church. For instance, some of the questions Paul addressed were:

1. Can a person be right (or righteous) with God by means of obeying the law and commandments? (Romans 1:1--3:20)
2. What can be learned from Abraham, and is he the father of both Jewish and Gentile Christians? (Romans 4:1-25)
3. What role does the law play with reference to sin? (Romans 5:20; 7:1-25)
4. What does the salvation of Gentiles indicate about the future of Israel as God's people? (Romans 9:1--11:36)
5. Should Christians observe Old Testament food laws, and how should they relate to fellow believers on such matters? (Romans 14:1--15:13)

This focus on Jew-Gentile issues suggests that tensions existed between Jewish and Gentile Christians in that church and much of Paul's writing aims at clarifying doctrine and easing those tensions. The net result of writing the epistle to the Romans was the production of a monumental treatise on Christian doctrine that provides the most comprehensive expression of Paul's theology in the entire New Testament. It is widely regarded as Paul's *magnum opus* (his largest and most important written work). Romans is among the most beloved books in the Bible and, for many, it is their favorite one.

### KEY THEMES

Romans contains many important subjects and key themes among which are the following:

1. All people are sinners, therefore all, without exception, need to be saved from their sin. (1:18--3:20; 5:12-19)
2. The Mosaic law, though good and holy, cannot counteract the power of sin. (2:12-29; 3:9-20; 5:20; 7:1-25; 9:30--10:8)
3. Through the righteousness of God, sin is judged and salvation is provided. (3:21-26; 5:12-19; 6:1-10; 7:1-6; 8:1-4)
4. With the coming of Jesus Christ, the former age of redemptive history has passed away and the new age of redemptive history has begun. (1:1-7; 3:21-26; 5:1--8:39)
5. The atoning death of Jesus Christ is central to God's plan of salvation. (3:21-26; 4:23-25; 5:6-11,15-19; 6:1-10; 7:4-6; 8:1-4)
6. Justification is by faith alone. (1:16--4:25; 9:30--10:21)
7. There is a certain hope of future glory for those who are in Christ Jesus. (5:1--8:39)
8. Those who have died with Christ and who enjoy the work of the Holy Spirit are enabled to live a new life. (2:25-29; 6:1--7:6; 8:1-39)
9. God is sovereign in salvation; He works all things according to His plan. (9:1--11:36)
10. God fulfills His saving promises to both Jews and Gentiles. (1:18--4:25; 9:1--11:36; 15:8-13)
11. The grace of the gospel calls Christians to personal holiness, mutual service, good citizenship, and wholehearted neighbor-love in Christ. (12:1--13:14)

Source: Crossway ESV Study Bible, page 2154

## STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION

The book of Romans is a large epistle that consists of 16 chapters and 433 verses, but it naturally divides into only three major parts:

Part 1 consists of the theme of Justification by Faith and its Consequences in chapters 1-8.

Part 2 deals with The Temporary Rejection of the Jews and the Inclusion of the Gentiles as God's People in chapters 9-11.

Part 3 consists of Practical Exhortations and Personal Matters Directed to the Saints at Rome in chapters 12-16.

The following expanded outline reflects this threefold division defining the main contents of each major part.

### PART 1

#### **JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES (Chapters 1-8)**

##### I. PAUL'S INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER. 1:1-15

- A. Paul identifies himself as an apostle set apart to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. 1:1-7
- B. Paul expresses his thankfulness to God for the saints at Rome and acknowledges his obligation and his eagerness to preach the gospel to all men. 1:8-15

##### II. THE THEME OF THE LETTER - THE GOSPEL, THE GOOD NEWS THAT TELLS OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, WHICH HE FREELY GIVES TO EVERYONE WHO HAS FAITH (to Jews and Gentiles alike). 1:16-17

Verses 16 and 17 contain the two leading doctrines of the Roman letter:

- A. Salvation by faith alone.
- B. The free offer of salvation to all men without distinction.

- III. ALL MEN ARE UNDER THE POWER OF SIN AND CONSEQUENTLY ARE WITHOUT ANY RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THEIR OWN. THEREFORE NO ONE WILL BE JUSTIFIED BY WORKS OF THE LAW BECAUSE NO ONE HAS KEPT IT. 1:18--3:20
- A. The Gentiles are sinful and are without any personal righteousness. 1:18-32
  - B. The Jews are sinful and are without any personal righteousness. 2:1--3:8
  - C. Summary and Conclusion: All men are sinful and therefore no human being will be justified in God's sight by works of the law because no one has kept it. 3:9-20
- IV. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ESTABLISHED - SINNERS ARE JUSTIFIED ON THE GROUND OF THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST WHICH IS RECEIVED BY FAITH. 3:21--5:21
- A. The gospel method of justification by faith explained. 3:21-31
  - B. The case of Abraham cited as an illustration and proof of the gospel method of justification by faith apart from works. 4:1-25
  - C. Some of the blessings resulting from justification by faith. 5:1-11
  - D. The gospel method of justification illustrated through a comparison of the saving work of Christ with the condemning work of Adam. 5:12-21
- V. PAUL RESPONDS TO THE OBJECTION THAT BEING JUSTIFIED BY FAITH APART FROM PERSONAL MERIT LEADS TO LIVING A LIFE CHARACTERIZED BY SIN. ON THE CONTRARY, GOD'S GRACE IS THE SUPREME MOTIVE FOR OBEDIENCE AND INEVITABLY RESULTS IN HOLY LIVING. 6:1--7:6
- A. Those who are justified by faith cannot continue to live in sin, because, through their identification and union with Christ, they are dead to sin. 6:1-11
  - B. Because those who are justified by faith are not under law (or saved by keeping its commands), but are instead under grace (and saved by God's free mercy), they are, therefore, called upon to yield themselves to God as His obedient slaves. 6:12--7:6

VI. THE FUNCTION OF THE LAW, BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER JUSTIFICATION, IS TO REVEAL AND CONDEMN SIN, BUT IT DOES NOT AND CANNOT PRODUCE HOLINESS. 7:7-25

- A. Before Paul was converted (saved), the law made sin known to him and thus caused him to realize that he was spiritually dead. 7:7-13
- B. After Paul was converted (saved), he delighted in the law of God in his inmost self and served it with his mind, but found that sin still dwelt within him and caused him to do the very evil which, as a believer, he had come to hate. 7:14-25

VII. THE JUSTIFIED, THOUGH PLAGUED WITH SIN AND AFFLICTIONS WHILE IN THIS WORLD, ARE NEVERTHELESS SECURE "IN CHRIST." TO ALL WHO ARE INDWELT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, SALVATION IS CERTAIN BECAUSE THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN THEM IS PROOF OF THEIR HAVING BEEN PREDESTINED TO ETERNAL GLORY - NOTHING CAN SEPARATE THEM FROM GOD'S LOVE. 8:1-39

- A. Through their identification with Christ, believers (though they continue to commit sin), have been freed from the law and therefore cannot be condemned. Hence their salvation is certain. 8:1-4
- B. Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who has regenerated them, who is sanctifying them, and who in the last day will resurrect them. 8:5-11
- C. Believers (through adoption) are, in their present state, the children of God and, therefore, fellow heirs with Christ. 8:12-17
- D. Believers, though they must suffer various afflictions while in this life, are sustained through them all by the encouragement and help that comes from God. 8:18-28
- E. Believers are assured of final salvation, for they have been predestined to eternal glory. 8:29-30
- F. God is for believers, therefore, they are safe. He gave His own Son to die for them and thereby to secure their justification and salvation. 8:31-34
- G. God's love for His people is infinite and unchangeable, and nothing in all creation can separate believers from it. 8:35-39

## PART 2

### THE REJECTION OF THE JEWS AND THE INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES AS GOD'S PEOPLE (Chapters 9-11)

#### VIII. THE ULTIMATE OR ETERNAL REASON FOR THE REJECTION OF THE GREATER PART OF ISRAEL, AND THE CALLING OF THE GENTILES TO SALVATION IS GOD'S SOVEREIGN ELECTION. 9:1-29

- A. Before entering into the discussion of the rejection of the Jews, Paul expresses his deep concern and love for them and recognizes their national privileges. 9:1-5
- B. Paul next establishes God's absolute right to do with His fallen, sinful creatures as He pleases and shows that God has selected from among both the Jews and Gentiles particular individuals to save while passing over others. 9:6-24
- C. The apostle then appeals to several Old Testament Scriptures and shows that the salvation of the Gentiles and the rejection of the greater part of Israel had been predicted by the prophets. 9:25-29

#### IX. THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF ISRAEL'S REJECTION AND OF THE GENTILES' SALVATION WAS THE DIFFERENT MANNER IN WHICH THEY WERE RESPONDING TO THE GOSPEL (the good news that righteousness is obtained through faith in Jesus Christ). 9:30--10:21

- A. The Gentiles were receiving God's free gift of righteousness by faith and were being justified, whereas, the Jews (ignorant of God's gift of righteousness) were trying to work out a righteousness of their own and were perishing. 9:30--10:4
- B. The legal and gospel methods of justification are contrasted for the purpose of showing that the legal method is beyond the reach of sinful men, but that the gospel method is simple, easy and adapted to all men without distinction. 10:5-13
- C. The gospel of Christ is not only adapted to all men, but must be sent (preached) to all men if any are to be saved. 10:14-17
- D. The Old Testament prophets foretold of the universal spread of the gospel and of the inclusion of Gentiles as God's people as well as of the rejection of the gospel by Israel. 10:18-21

- X. THE REJECTION OF THE JEWS, AS TO NUMBER, IS NOT TOTAL; AS TO TIME, IS NOT FINAL. 11:1-36
- A. The rejection of the Jews as to number is not total. 11:1-10
  - B. The rejection of the Jews as to time is not final. 11:11-32
  - C. Paul ascribes adoring praise to the all-wise and almighty Sovereign God (whose resources, wisdom, decisions, and methods are beyond man's comprehension) who Himself is the Originator, Director, and Consummate End of all things. 11:33-36

### PART 3

#### **PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS AND PERSONAL MATTERS DIRECTED TO THE SAINTS AT ROME (Chapters 12-16)**

- XI. PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS. 12:1--15:13
- A. Duties to God and to the Church. 12:1-8
  - B. Duties to fellow believers and to the world. 12:9-21
  - C. Duties to civil authorities. 13:1-7
  - D. The duty to love one another which is the fulfillment of the law. 13:8-10
  - E. All these duties should be done in light of the fact that salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 13:11-14
  - F. Instructions concerning Christian liberty. 14:1--15:13
- XII. PERSONAL MATTERS. 15:14--16:23
- A. Paul explains his own feelings and relationship toward the saints at Rome. 15:14-33
  - B. Paul sends personal greetings to various individuals at Rome. 16:1-16
  - C. The apostle warns the saints to have nothing to do with those who cause dissensions and difficulties by opposing sound doctrine - such persons are false teachers; they are not true servants of Christ. 16:17-20
  - D. Paul conveys the greetings of his companions to the Roman saints. 16:21-23

### XIII. THE CONCLUDING DOXOLOGY. 16:25-27

Paul gives praise to the eternal, all-wise God who, through the prophetic Scriptures, has made known the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of salvation through faith freely offered to all men, Gentiles as well as Jews.

Source: Modified and adapted from Romans: An Interpretive Outline, by David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas.