



## Romans

Romans is the longest of all Paul's writings and is widely regarded as one of the most important letters that he wrote. It is written to the Christians in Rome and is unusual in that Rome was one of the few communities that Paul had not founded, making Romans Paul's first communication with the community there. The letter announces his intention to come to Rome and to be sent onwards by them to Spain (15.23-24). By way of introduction, Paul laid out his theology in great detail, explaining the good news that he proclaimed (chapters 1-11) and the consequences that he believed this should have in the lives of the Christian community (12-16). We do not, as a rule, know what Paul said when he first arrived in a new place proclaiming the gospel. Most letters, written as they are to communities that Paul had founded, are the second or third communication to the community not the first. Romans is one of the closest accounts we have of what Paul might have said initially to a community, when he first arrived.



### How long will it take?

**Reading time:** 1 hour  
**Short of time?** Just read 1.1-17; 5.1-8.39;  
 12.1-8; 15.14-33



### Genre

Epistle



### Anything tricky?

Well... the whole letter. Romans is one of the most complex and challenging pieces of theology in the whole of the New Testament. If you find it hard to understand, you are in excellent company!



### Inspiring quotes

...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (*Romans 3.23*)

<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (*Romans 8.26-27*)

<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (*Romans 8.38-39*)

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. (*Romans 12.1-2*)



## About the Author

The author of Romans is named as Paul alone and is not said to have been written with anyone else, unlike many of Paul's letters.

Another unusual feature of Romans is that the scribe (the person who wrote it down) identified himself as Tertius – 16.22.

### *What do we know about him?*

**Paul** is probably the best known of all the early Christians. Before encountering Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he was a zealous Pharisee who sought to maintain the purity of Judaism.

After his experience on the Damascus road, he turned his zeal to proclaiming Jesus Christ among the Gentiles. This brought him into conflict with some other early Christians, not least Peter, who thought that followers of Jesus Christ should convert to Judaism. He travelled around the Roman Empire (though primarily in Asia Minor – modern-day Turkey – and Greece) proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and founding communities of Christians as he went. He also wrote a large number of letters, 13 of which are preserved in the New Testament. Romans is regarded by many as being the most important of these.



## About the times

Romans is thought to have been written in the late ad 50s (somewhere between ad 55 and 58). This was probably while he was in Greece, for three months, as mentioned in Acts 20.3.

### *What were people feeling?*

As Paul didn't know the Roman Christians, it is hard to read anything about how they were feeling from the letter he wrote.



## What kind of Book is it?

An Epistle, or letter – Romans is the most theological of all the epistles. Some have called it 'a compendium of theology'.



## How is it structured?

1.1-17	Opening and greetings
1.18-3.20	The revelation of the wrath of God
3.21-4.25	The revelation of the righteousness of God
5.1-8.39	The nature of new life in Christ
9.1-11.36	The place of Israel in God's plan
12.1-21	What this new life means in terms of behaviour
15.14-33	Paul's encouragement and travel plans
16.1-27	Paul's greetings to those in Rome he already knows



## Look out for...

Paul has much to say in Romans about our relationship with Christ (it comes about not by birth or circumcision but by faith). Look out for this theme as you read and ask yourself what difference it does (or doesn't) make to your own faith today.

Paul talks about the Spirit a lot (though using different phrases to do so e.g. Spirit of God; Spirit of Christ; Spirit of holiness etc...) keep an eye open for Paul's language about the Spirit and notice the different ways he talks about it.

Bear in mind that Paul is addressing a very specific situation, in which some Jewish Christians were arguing that the Gentile followers of Christ were not acceptable and needed to become Jewish to be 'proper' Christians. Today this is no longer a live issue. As you read, reflect on what barriers we put in place today that are similar to this one.



## What could this mean for me?

The striking thing about Romans is that Paul lays out his theology carefully in chapters 1-11 but then goes on in 12-16 to talk about how this theology affects our lives now. How much of what he says in 12-16 is still relevant today?



## Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Discuss Paul's language of 'justification by faith' – what do you think he means by it? Is this an idea that you find helpful today or something that you find difficult?
- In 8.26-27 Paul talks about prayer like this: *'Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.'* <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God'
 

Discuss this description of prayer, do you find it inspiring? Depressing? Confusing? If we bear this in mind when we pray, would we do anything different?
- In 12.1-8, Paul talks about presenting our bodies to God as living sacrifice. What do you imagine Paul had in mind here? What would it look like in practice if we did this?
- In chapter 15, Paul talks about how the strong and the weak relate to each other. Who do you think the strong are today? And who are the weak? Is there anything we can learn from chapter 15 about our relationships together?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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