

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE CHRISTIAN'S FAVORITE ROAD

ROMANS

If we asked the question, “What book of the Bible could be described as The Christian’s Favorite Road?” It really wouldn’t take long for someone to shout back, “The Romans Road!”

Yes, the Romans Road. The Book of Romans is the most full and comprehensive letter that exists when it comes to the great work of God’s redemption. From start to finish the letter to the Romans gives us a look inside and out of the work of salvation and what this means for sinners, what it means for Christians, and what it means for the nation of Israel.

In this letter, God used Paul to chronicle for us what happened when man fell away from God and what God did to bring us back to him. That is why people talk about using the “Romans Road” in their witnessing life. Because as you walk down this road, if it is truly considered by the hearer, you can let them take a stroll past why they are condemned before God. You can point out to them God’s justification for sin. Then, you can march them straight to the Savior where they will find everlasting life and unending glory.

At the time this letter was delivered, Paul was in the sea coastal city of Corinth (Acts 20:1-3), and wanted to come visit these people, but just could not make it happen at the moment. So instead of standing in a pulpit— Paul gave them the next best thing— he picked up his pen and gave them a few instructions for them to follow.

This is the purpose of this book— to provide instruction. Since Paul could not physically be there, he sent them a letter with everything they needed to get them started.

Paul first wanted to prepare them for his arrival in case he was able to come (Romans 1:10)— he wanted them to be on the lookout for him. He also wanted to instruct them in the basic teachings of the Christian faith. Then, Paul answers some questions about the relationship between Israel and the Christian Church. Paul then concludes the letter by giving them some practical application about how to respond to their identity in Christ.

Step by step Paul walked these people through every major doctrine and makes the case for its validity all along the way. And from this point on, Christians have found all the light and blessings that the Gospel brings by traveling on this exact same road. Names like Augustin, Martin Luther, and John Wesley have had their salvation story begin right here on this Romans Road, and God is still using this book to change lives to this very day.

That said, what a joy this letter must have been to the Christians in Rome! As they unrolled this scroll for the first time and poured over every word written by the apostle, it must have been a glorious refreshment to know how their salvation was secured, and a heart-lifting peace to understand the victory and peace that can be had in this life over their sin.

Outside of this letter's teaching, another fascinating feature about Romans is to understand the significance of the letter's arrival. Since Paul could not deliver this letter himself, nor could he simply trust just anyone to get it to where it needed to go, Paul received some help from a precious lady named Phebe.

This wonderful woman carried the prominent letter of Romans about 600 miles to make sure this church received God's truth. We read about her near the end of this book in chapter 16. Verses 1 and 2 tell us "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer (helper) of man, and of myself also."

From the great truth presented in this letter to the great trust needed to deliver this letter, Romans, from start to finish is filled with essential doctrine, fine-tuned truth, and great encouragement everywhere you turn.

How to Think About Romans

Think of the book of Romans as a little field guide for theology. The best thing you can do for young Christians is to teach them all about their Christian faith and Romans does this in full measure.

There are two major themes in this book, and that is 1) The Righteousness of God and 2) How sinners can have God's Righteousness and go to heaven when they day.

Let's lay out how this book works.

There are three main divisions inside the letter to the Romans once you get past the introduction. The introduction is found in Chapter 1 and moves from verse 1 to verse 17.

The Doctrinal Division (Chapters 1-8)— This first section of Paul's letter covers every portion of teaching from the fall of man, to the fix of redemption, to the future of God's people.

The Doctrine of Sin (Chapter 1:18- Chapter 3:20): This is where Paul begins to build his arguments that the entire world is guilty before God. Chapter 1 centers on the guilt of the pagan world. In chapter 2 Paul makes it clear that the nation of Israel is guilty before God as well, and that there is no such thing as being saved by one's heritage. Then, once you get to chapter 3, Paul gives the argument that the entire world is responsible for God because of sin.

The Doctrine of Salvation (Chapter 3:21- 5:21): This is where Paul tells humanity that all are doomed, but how God gave us provision through Christ. This is where we learn what it means to be justified by faith.

The Doctrine of Sanctification (Chapters 6- 8): Chapter 6 begins by explaining to us the new walk of the Christian faith we should have. Christians should never want to go back to an old life that was bought and paid for by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Once you get into chapter 7, we see that though we shouldn't want to actively engage in sin, we still have real, and heavy desires to sin. Because of Christ's righteousness in us, we want to do good, but because our flesh is still active in us, we still perform evil. By the end of chapter 7, you can not only identify with Paul, but you start to feel pretty terrible about yourself until you get to verse 25, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God: but with the flesh the law of sin." Then, we get into chapter 8, and Paul provides us with the inner workings of victory we possess because of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Chapter 8, is the solution to sanctification.

All of this is the sanctification of the believer. It is progressive growth in righteousness and chapters 6-8 show us how God accomplishes this in us.

The Dispensational Division (Chapters 9-11)— In most of Paul's letters he follows a pattern of 'belief' and 'behavior' as he is writing the different churches. First, he'll tell the people about their belief, and then he'll tell them how to behave in light of who they are in Christ. Well, in Romans, Paul gives the belief portion in the first eight chapters, but then presses the pause button on the behavior portion and starts in on how the nation of Israel fits into the equation of redemption.

This is the purpose for describing this section as the "Dispensational Division." A dispensation is a frame of time, and Paul describes the different ways God has dealt with His nation in times past and how God will deal with His nation in the future.

God's Past Dealings with Israel (Chapter 9): Paul explains what God did in the past to create the nation of Israel. But despite all of His provisions, they ultimately rejected His truth, choosing to live by their own truth.

God's Present Dealings with Israel (Chapter 10): Paul makes it clear that right now, at this very moment, there is no other means of salvation for the Jews. They are saved just like everyone else— by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

God's Promised Dealings with Israel (Chapter 11): When God made a promise to Israel, it was an everlasting promise. Paul makes it clear that God is not done with His nation; there's still work to do. By chapter 11 you see the future restoration of the nation and that there will be a national remnant that will receive God's righteousness.

The Practical Division (Chapter 12- Chapter 16)— With the question of Israel answered Paul moves to how a Christian should live and operate in this world and how we should live and operate among each other.

Christian Life in the World (Chapter 12:1- Chapter 13:7): To make it in this world— to battle all of its influences, to guard against sorry attitudes, to keep our hearts from reactions that are less than Christ-like— we have to have a complete renewal of our minds. Our love has to be different. Our reactions have to be different. The way we understand and respond to our government has to be different. But this means that you're going to have to allow God to change your mind and your thinking. Don't conform... be transformed!

Christian Love Toward Each Other (Chapter 13:8- Chapter 16): These chapters have to do with how we treat each other. It's been said that you are messy, and other people are messy, therefore, in relationships, expect messiness. Anyone can avoid people that are hard to get along with. Anyone can blow up at someone who upsets them. Anyone can seclude themselves because they don't like being around people. Anyone can make hurtful judgmental comments or want to retaliate for wrongs to them. But please know, these kinds of attitudes have absolutely no place in the life of a Christian, especially not toward each other. Love is hard— God has shown us that. But God calls us to love like He loves.

What to Look for in Romans

Because this letter is so rich in theological presentation, there are several things that you need to be on the lookout for as you make it through Romans.

Old Testament References— It would be difficult to get a good grasp on the book of Romans period without understanding the Old Testament references listed in this book. Paul uses more quotes from the Old Testament in this one letter than all of the other New Testament books combined. There are a total of 70 Old Testament references, and the reason why is because Paul wants his readers to know how the Old Testament ties into the New Testament.

Key Words— There are several words repeated over and over again to let us know how to understand God's work of redemption.

Law— This word occurs 78 times.

All— Such as in, "... 'all' have sinned..." happens a total of 71 times.

Righteousness— You'll read this word 66 times.

Faith— This word is used 62 times.

Sin— This word is used in three different settings. Paul uses it to describe our state in separation from God, our physical state once our body dies, and our eternal state if we leave this life without Christ. Paul uses this word 60 times.

Death— Paul reminds us of our physical and spiritual condition 42 times.

In Christ— A favorite of Paul, and a favorite phrase of Christians in general. You'll find this phrase used 33 times.

Flesh— Paul uses this word 20 times.

Impute— We see this word 19 times.

What to Gain from Romans

Paul gives us irrefutable evidence that all men are guilty before God, and why exactly there is rebellion against Him despite our sinful condition. Paul also cites that all people are accountable and face the seriousness of His eternal judgment.

But Paul then moved to what God did to change our eternal destiny by providing a Savior who would pay for our sins. Paul began to explain justification by faith and the imputed (transferred) righteousness of God the Son so that we could have peace with God the Father. And once Paul takes us on the journey to understand what God has done, he then explains the depths of what it means God has you in His grasp through faith in Christ.

Once God Has You, He Helps You— A primary theme in Romans, because in Christ we have peace with God, there is every benefit of prayer and leadership of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 tells us that our relationship to God is radically altered and in Christ, God the Father adopts us as children. We know can call on God as a child would their own father. Romans 8 also tells us that the Holy Spirit makes groanings and utterings on our behalf when we don't know what to say to God.

Once God Has You, He Shapes You— It is in the book of Romans that we find answers to some of life's greatest questions. We may not know presently how to answer some of the confusion in our lives, but we do know how to answer ultimately.

For example, a famous verse to be quoted in times of trouble is Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Many people stop right there when they really shouldn't. Because to use this verse correctly, you have to know the "Good" that all things work together for." What is the "Good?" Well, that is found in the very next verse, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Ah, there it is. The "Good" that all things work together for is for God's children to be made to look just like Jesus. That is to say, everything that enters our lives while inside the will of God, is used for the expressed purpose of making you look more like Christ. God is the Supreme Artist who can take a heap full of ashes from our lives, and make them beautiful.

Once God Has You, He Keeps You— This is where the theology of Romans shines. You may have heard someone talk about salvation in three tenses: That there was a time when you were saved (past tense), the fact that you're being saved now

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(present tense) and that there will be a time when you be finally and fully saved with your physical resurrection from the dead (You're saved, you're being saved, and you will be saved).

Or, you may have heard it another way. You may have heard that when a person trusts in Christ, there is salvation, as they walk by His Spirit there is sanctification, and as God completes His purpose there will be ultimate glorification.

Both of these explanations are exactly correct in terms of explaining God's work of salvation. And both of these explanations flow out beautifully from the book of Romans.

That said, the truth that emerges from the teachings of this letter is that once God has you, He keeps you.



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