

Paul's Letter to the ROMANS BIBLE CLASS #12

INTRODUCTION:

The Epistle to the Romans or Letter to the Romans, often shortened to Romans, is the sixth book in the New Testament.

AUTHORSHIP:

The scholarly consensus is that Paul authored the Epistle to the Romans. Paul composed his letter to the Christians of Rome in the winter of 57/58AD and was most probably written while Paul was in Corinth toward the end of Paul's third missionary journey, just before he left for Jerusalem.



WHEN AND WAS IT WRITTEN WHERE (AND CONTEXT):

Paul was writing to the citizens of a city which enjoyed the status of being the capital of the Roman Empire. According to Irenaeus, a 2nd-century Church Father, the church at Rome was founded directly by the apostles Peter and Paul. Peter is considered to have laid the foundation of the Church in Rome, firmly establishing this faith community in about the year 42 AD. At this time, the Jews made up a substantial number in Rome, and their synagogues, frequented by many, enabled the Gentiles to become acquainted with the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Consequently, churches composed of both Jews and Gentiles were formed at Rome. Christians and Jews were expelled from Rome during the reign of the Emperor Claudius in 49 AD (see Acts 18:1-2; Suetonius, Life of Claudius 25.4) over antagonisms over a certain "*Crestus*". According to Acts 18:2, Aquila and Priscilla (or Prisca, as in Romans 16:3) were among those driven out; from them, in Corinth, Paul may have learned about conditions in the church at Rome.

Emperor Nero, allowed the Jews back into Rome, but then, after the Great Fire of Rome of 64, Christians were persecuted. Both Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome on 67 AD.

Paul was aware that there is some conflict between Gentile and Jewish Christians in the Roman church, and he addressed those concerns (chapters thirteen and the first half of fourteen). While the Roman church was presumably founded by Jewish Christians, the exile of Jews from Rome in AD 49 by Claudius resulted in Gentile Christians taking leadership positions.



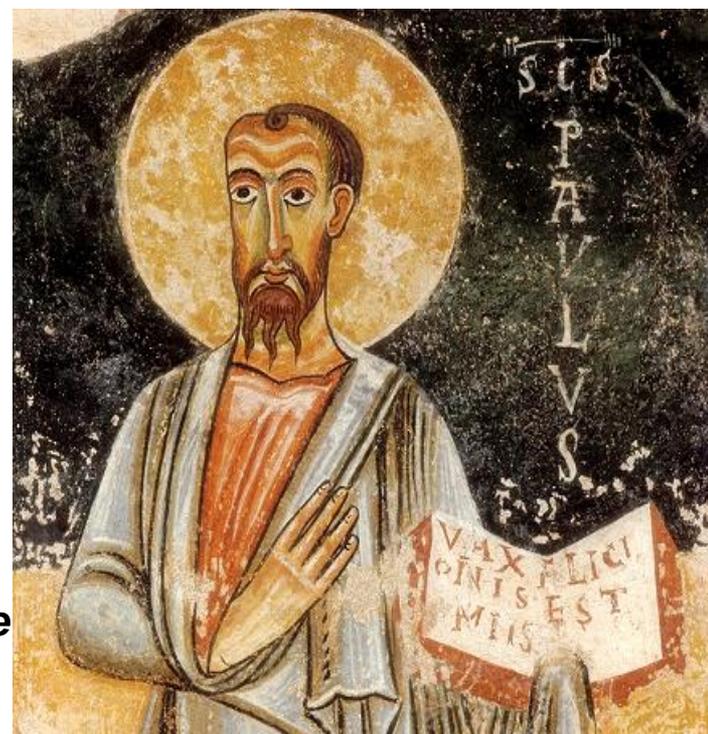
Rome was the prefect center for missionary activity into the Roman provinces of Europe. In Romans 15:23 Paul writes to the Christians of Rome, “I hope, after longing for many years past to visit you, to see you when I am on the way to Spain—and after enjoying at least something of your company, to be sent on my way with your support.” Such a journey had long been on his mind (Rom 1:9–13; 15:23). Now, with much missionary preaching successfully accomplished in the East (Rom 15:19), he sought new opportunities in the West

(Romans 15:20–21), in order to complete the divine plan of evangelization in the Roman world. Yet he recognized that the visit to Jerusalem would be hazardous (Rom 15:30–32), and we know from Acts that Paul was arrested there and came to Rome only in chains, as a prisoner (Acts 21–28, especially Acts 21:30–33 and Acts 28:14, 30–31). Paul, as a Roman citizen exercised his right to appeal to the emperor, and to him he was sent.

OVERVIEW:

The immediate external occasion for the composition of the Epistle is given by the author himself; he wishes to announce his arrival to the community and to prepare them for the event (Romans 1: 11-12). With the exception of the four Gospels, no other document has had greater influence on Christianity than Paul's letter to the Romans. Touching all aspects of Christianity's major theological themes, this letter speaks as powerfully to Christian men and women today as it did when Paul first wrote it to the 1st century AD Christians of Rome. Of all the letters of Paul, that to the Christians at Rome has long held pride of place. It is most systematic unfolding of the apostle's thought, expounding the gospel of God's righteousness that saves all who believe (Rom 1:16–17); it reflects a universal outlook, with special implications for Israel's relation to the church (Romans 9–11). Along with 1st Corinthians, is also the longest.

We Catholics accept the necessity of faith for salvation but also point to Romans 2: 5–11 for the necessity of living a virtuous life as well: *“By your stubbornness and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself for the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, who will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works, but wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness. Yes, affliction and distress will come upon every human being who does evil, Jew first and then Greek. But there will be glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good, Jew first and then Greek. There is no partiality with God”.*



Among Paul's letters to seven different Christian communities which are part of the fourteen letters ascribed to him in the New Testament canon, St. Paul's letter to the Church is Rome is unique on several different levels:

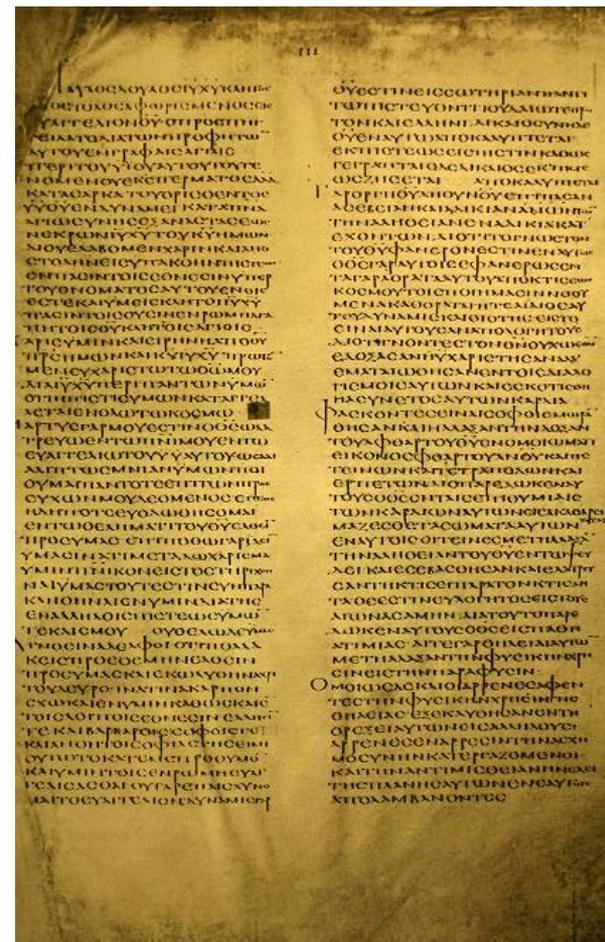
1. It is the only letter written to a community which he did not found.
2. It is written to a community which he had never previously visited.
3. It is the longest of Paul's letters.
4. It is St Paul's most deeply theological letter, touching on almost every different aspect of Christianity's major theological themes making his message as powerful and relevant to Christians today as it was to the men and woman of the universal Church in Roman in the first century AD.

Paul's Letter to the Romans is a powerful exposition of the doctrine of the supremacy of Christ and of faith in Christ as the source of salvation. It is an implicit plea to the Christians at Rome, and to all Christians, to hold fast to that faith. They are to resist any pressure put on them to

accept a doctrine of salvation through works of the law (Romans 10:4). At the same time they are not to exaggerate Christian freedom as an abdication of responsibility for others (Romans 12:1–2) or as a repudiation of God's law and will (see notes on Romans 3:9–26; 3:31; 7:7–12, 13–25).

It is curious to note that Saint Augustine was converted (in 386 AD) after hearing

Romans 13:13-14.

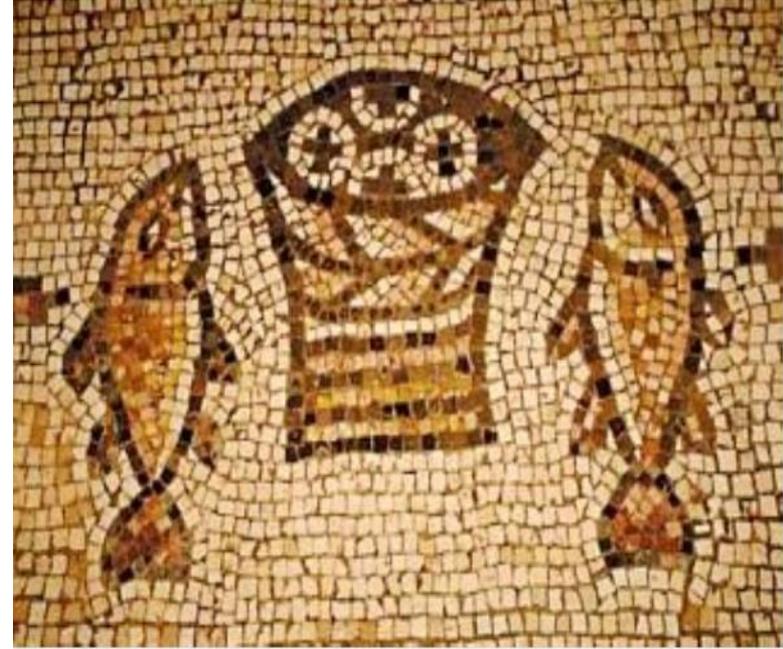


As the outline below shows, Paul (see Romans 16:25) finds its center in salvation and justification through faith in Christ (Romans 1:16–17). Humanity is lost without the Gospel of Christ. While God’s wrath is revealed against all sin and wickedness of Gentile and Jew alike (Romans 1:18–3:20), God’s power to save by divine righteous or justifying action in Christ is also revealed (Romans 1:16–17), thru Justification through Faith in Christ (Romans 3:21–5:21).

The consequences and implications for those who believe are set forth in Justification and the Christian Life (Romans 6:1–8:39), as are results for those in Israel, Jews and Gentiles are both part of God’s Plan (Romans 9–11) who, to Paul’s great sorrow (Romans 9:1–5), disbelieve. The apostle’s hope is that, just as rejection of the gospel by some in Israel has led to a ministry of salvation for non-Jews, so one day, in God’s mercy, “all Israel” will be saved (Romans 11:11–15, 25–29, 30–32).

The fuller ethical response of believers is also drawn out in the Duties of Christians, both with reference to life in Christ’s body (Romans 12) and with regard to the world (Romans 13:1–7), on the basis of the eschatological situation (Romans 13:11–14) and conditions in the community (Romans 14:1–15:13).

Paul concludes singling out and commending Phoebe, minister-deaconess (diakonos in the original Greek) *“I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is also a diakonos of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well.”* (Romans 16: 1-2). Paul then goes through the long list of greetings, warns against factions, dissensions and obstacles (Romans 16: 17-20), and closes with a doxology.



CONTENT OF ROMANS:

- I. Address (1:1–15)
- II. Humanity Lost without the Gospel (1:16–3:20)
- III. Justification through Faith in Christ (3:21–5:21)
- IV. Justification and the Christian Life (6:1–8:39)
- V. Jews and Gentiles in God's Plan (9:1–11:36)
- VI. The Duties of Christians (12:1–15:13)
- VII. Conclusion (15:14–16:27)

RESOURCES USED AND RECOMENDED:

- NAB Bible, at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>
- Agape Bible Study at: http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Agape_Bible_Studies_Menu.php
- Agape Bible Study Lessons for the Letter of Paul to the Romans
At: http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Romans/Romans_Menu.php
- Pauline Chronology: The Life and Missionary Work of St. Paul of Tarsus. Material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J. at: http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline_Chronology.htm
- New Testament Letter Structure, from Catholic Resources by Felix Just, S.J.
At: http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT_Letters.htm#Edited
- Jesuit Theology Library – Spring Hill College, on line, at: <http://theolibrary.shc.edu/>

Scripture and/or texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C.

**FOR I AM PERSUADED THAT
NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE,
NOR ANGELS NOR PRINCIPALITIES
NOR POWERS, NOR THINGS PRESENT
NOR THINGS TO COME,
NOR HEIGHT NOR DEPTH,
NOR ANY OTHER CREATED THING,
SHALL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US
FROM THE LOVE OF GOD
WHICH IS IN
CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.**

ROMANS 8:38-39