

General Introduction to the Letter written to the Christians in Rome and a profile of Paul who wrote the letter

When Paul wrote this letter to the church at Rome, neither he nor the other church leaders had yet been to Rome.

Most likely, the Roman church had been established by believers who had been at Jerusalem for Pentecost.

Acts 2:10 [NIV] *“Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome.”*

Or travellers who had heard the Gospel Message in other places and had brought it back to Rome, for example, Priscilla and Aquila.

Acts 18:1-2 [NIV] *“After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them.”*

Forced out of Rome by rulers.

Romans 16:3-5 [NIV] *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.”*

Risked their lives or imprisonment by going back to Rome.

Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church during his ministry in Corinth, just before returning to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey.

Acts 20:3 [NIV] *“where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia.”*

Romans 15:25 [NIV] *“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.”*

The letter was written to encourage the believers and to express his desire to visit them some day. This he did in under three years time.

The Roman church had no New Testament because the gospels were not yet being circulated in their final written form.

Therefore this letter may well have been the first piece of Christian literature the Roman believers had seen. Written to both Jewish and Gentile Christians, the letter to the church at Rome is a systematic presentation of the Christian faith.

The Main Themes in Romans

Sin

Sin means refusing to do God's Will or failing to do all God wants us to do.

Since Adam's rebellion against God, our nature is to disobey Him.

Our sin cuts us off from God.

Sin causes us to live our own way rather than God's way.

Since God is morally perfect, just and fair, He has the right to condemn sin.

Every person has sinned, either by rebelling against God's Will or ignoring God's Will, [the sin of omission, for example ignoring God's command in **Matthew 28:18-20**].

No matter what our background or how hard we try to live a "*good life*" we cannot earn salvation from the penalty of sin nor remove our sins. Only Christ can do this and save us from eternal death.

Salvation

Our sin points out our need to be forgiven and cleansed of sin.

Although we don't deserve it, God, in His kindness, reaches out to us in love and forgives us. He provides a way to be saved from the penalty of sin.

Christ's death paid the penalty of our sin.

It is good news that God saves us from the result of our sin, death, but we must believe in Jesus Christ's sacrifice in order to enter into a relationship with our Creator God.

Growth

By God's power, received through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, believers are sanctified [made Holy – set apart].

This means we are set apart from sin to enable us to obey Christ and become more like Him.

When we are growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, it frees us from the demands of the Old Covenant laws and from the fear of judgement.

Because we are free from sin's control, the Old Covenant laws demands and the fear of God's punishment, we can grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

By trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and allowing Him to help us, we can overcome sin and temptation.

Sovereignty

God oversees and cares about His people's past, present and future.

God's way of dealing with people is always just and because God is in charge of all His creation He can save whomever He wills in His own timescale.

Because of God's mercy, both Jews [those who know of God's existence, and have His Word] and Gentiles [those who do not know the God of the Christian Bible] can be saved.

We all must respond to God's mercy and humbly accept His gracious offer of forgiveness.

Because God is sovereign we must let Him reign in our lives.

Service

Only when the purpose of our Christian service is to give God total credit for His love, power and perfection in all we do, can we serve Him properly.

Serving God unifies all believers and enables them to show love and sensitivity to others.

None of us can be fully Christ-like by ourselves.

It takes the entire body of Christ to express Christ fully.

By actively and vigorously building up other believers, Christians can become a "*symphony*" of service for God.

Paul's letter to the Christians at Rome is probably the single most important letter ever written by a Christian.

As an explanation of the Christian faith, it is arguably the most important Christian document of all time.

The letter to the Christians at Rome played a crucial role in forming and shaping the faith of the first Christians, no doubt from the first day it was read to them.

The letter to the church at Rome became the core around which the other letters of Paul were collected to become the fundamental part of the emerging New Testament Christianity.

The letter is the basis for creeds and confessions down through the centuries and the deep foundation of Christian theology.

Countless individuals have acknowledged their debt to Romans including Augustine, Luther and Wesley, who also traced their entry into faith to the words of the letter of Paul to the Christians at Rome.

To be able to spend time studying Paul's letter to the church at Rome is a privilege to be cherished.

Paul the author of the letter to the Church at Rome

No person, apart from Jesus Christ Himself, shaped the history of Christianity like the apostle Paul. Even before he became a believer, his actions were significant.

Paul's frenzied persecution of Christians following Stephen's death, motivated the church to obey Christ's final command to take the gospel message worldwide.

Paul's personal encounter with Jesus Christ dramatically changed the direction of Paul's life but He never lost his fierce intensity.

Paul's training under Gamaliel was the finest available.

Paul's intentions and efforts were sincere.

Paul was a good Pharisee, who knew the scriptures well and sincerely believed that the Christian movement was dangerous to Judaism. Thus Paul hated the Christian faith and persecuted Christians without mercy.

But God stopped Paul in his hurried tracks on the Damascus road.

Paul personally met Jesus Christ and his life was never again the same.

Until Paul's conversion little had been done about carrying the gospel message to non-Jews.

The thorny issue of whether Gentile believers had to obey Jewish Old Covenant laws before they could become Christians caused many problems in the early church.

Paul worked hard to convince the Jews that Gentiles were acceptable to God without accepting Jewish customs and rituals.

Paul's strengths and accomplishments

- Transformed by God from a persecutor of Christians to a preacher for Christ.
- Preached for Christ throughout the Roman Empire on three missionary journeys.
- Wrote letters to various churches, which became part of the New Testament.
- Was never afraid to face an issue head-on and deal with it.
- Was sensitive to God's leading and despite his strong personality always did as God directed through the Holy Spirit.
- Is often called the apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul's weaknesses and mistakes

- Witnessed and approved of Stephen's stoning.
- Set out to destroy Christianity by persecuting Christians.

Lessons we can learn from Paul's life and teaching

- The good news is that forgiveness and eternal life are a gift of God's grace received through faith in Jesus Christ and available to all people.
- Obedience is the result of a relationship with God, but obedience alone will never create or earn a relationship with God.
- Real freedom doesn't come until we no longer have to prove our freedom by obedience to laws.
- God does not waste our time, He will use our past and present life so we may serve Him in the future.

Key verses that depict the motivation of Paul's life.

Philippians 1:21-24 [NIV] *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.”*