

## [Introduction to Paul's Epistle to the Romans]

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~ Our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God does not outline the books of the Bible as traditional studies of the Word of God normally do. We do not consider the Bible from a theological or doctrinal aspect; in fact, I *purposely* avoid teaching that way. What we are after is the spiritual perspective of the Lord Jesus Christ towards man. When we seek Him on every page of Scripture, we're trying to see things His way, for a change. That's one reason this so-called safari ministry is so wildly unpopular. Men do not desire to hear from God today. Teaching His commands and precepts is a difficult, daunting task – as we just witnessed first-hand in the books of Samuel and Kings.

However, the first eight chapters of this epistle are purely doctrinal; justification and salvation by faith will be the subject. So, we'll be required to consider it that way if we desire to approach this book correctly. In chapters nine, ten and eleven, we have a dispensational section dealing with the nation Israel; past, present and future, respectively. Then, in chapters twelve through sixteen, the subject is the duty of the believer who has been justified by faith. Believers have a very definite duty, and we are going to break down these sections into microbes. I believe this epistle is a living organism. It's going to get under the skin and affect our health in very real ways; so, we're going to have to examine it with our spiritual microscope. The total depravity of the human heart is not a popular subject today. Most people don't really mind too much if we talk about self-improvement, self-esteem and successful living; but when we insist the Lord Jesus Christ is the only remedy for our sin, and that He is the one and only way to God – most people don't want to hear that message – particularly the religious self-professing believer.

There are two themes to consider thoroughly in our first report from Romans, and they are *the man* who wrote this epistle and *the city* to which he wrote it. As we progress, we'll develop the overall subject – which is the righteousness of God! Our expedition through the entire Word of God enters a whole other method of revelation at this time. God has used many

different ways to communicate to mankind in times past. There was the Pentateuch; in which we learned the law from Moses. We have had the four Gospels and Acts, and the Old Testament historical books so far. Later in our safari, we will enter the poetic books of the Bible and the prophetic books after that. Those are all different ways in which God speaks to us today; but they are *all* in His Word! God *ONLY* speaks to us in His Word in this day in which we live.

This new section of New Testament Scripture following the Gospels contains the epistles. Some men have tried to distinguish the difference between epistles and letters Paul wrote. There is a ponderous poem written from the ancient east by a man who examined the papyrus writings found at Oxyrhynchus in central Egypt, and he attempted to form a division that competent fundamental conservative scholars consider false. I say all of that to simply say, Romans is an epistle – and it is a letter. This becomes personal, friends. The Lord Jesus Christ is going to speak directly to our hearts in each one of these very wonderful letters Paul wrote.

***Romans 15:15*** *Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, 16 That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit ~*

***Galatians 2:8*** *(For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles) 9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision ~*

Paul makes it clear he is the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul also makes it clear Simon Peter was the apostle to the nation Israel. It is important to understand Paul was the lone apostle reaching out to the Gentiles. When we read the last chapter of Romans, and meet all the people Paul knew, we see the majority of them were Gentiles. The church in Rome was almost one hundred percent Gentile – with few exceptions.

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Paul also makes it clear that if others had founded the church in Rome, and had preached the Gospel ahead of him there, that he would not have gone to Rome. He wanted to go to Rome to preach the Gospel, as we saw in the twenty-sixth chapter of the Book of Acts at verse seventeen; but not to contradict any others who may have established a church. Paul would have written to that church if that were the case; but it would have been altogether different in doctrine and form. Remember, the Lord appeared Personally to Paul as he gave a tremendous message to King Agrippa; and the Lord told Paul He was sending him to the Gentiles to open their eyes – to turn them from darkness to light – from the power of Satan unto God! That was done so the Gentiles might receive forgiveness from sins and have an inheritance amongst them which were sanctified by faith!

***Romans 15:20*** *Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation ~*

See, Paul wouldn't go where another apostle had preached the Gospel before him. So, we can know very definitely that no one had been to Rome preaching the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ when Paul wrote this letter epistle. It may seem a bit unusual he was the man who founded the church in Rome; but he did – and he founded it by radar! Some people may know they didn't have radar systems in Paul's day, so they might question me on this. Well, Rome was a tremendous city to which Paul had never visited prior to being taken there as a prisoner. In spite of that, a church came into existence because of him. See, as Paul moved throughout the Roman Empire, he was winning men and women to Christ. Rome had a strong central drawing power; and many of the people in Rome had run across Paul out there in the vast reaches of the empire. We can know this very definitely, too.

***Acts 18:1*** *After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; 2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome) and came unto them. 3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers ~*

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Remember, Aquila and Priscilla were from Rome, but had to leave quickly when another wave of anti-Semitism broke out. We learned how they went with Paul to Athens in Acts, and we saw them become true witnesses for Christ! By the time Paul wrote this epistle, they had returned to Rome, and Paul sends them greetings! Paul knew the others, too, so he had obviously met them somewhere – and Paul led them ALL to Christ, friends. That makes Paul the founder of the church in Rome via long distance radar! They all gravitated to Rome after their conversions.

The following is an excerpt from a booklet by my Bible teacher, Dr. J Vernon McGee, entitled **One Hour in Romans**: *“Paul knew Rome although he had not been inside her city limits at the time of the writing of the epistle to the Romans. Rome was like a great ship passing in the night casting up waves that broke on distant shores. Her influence was like a radio broadcast that penetrated every corner and crevice of the empire. Paul had visited Roman colonies such as Philippi and Thessalonica where he had seen Roman customs, laws, language, styles and culture on exhibit. Paul walked on Roman roads and met Roman soldiers on Roman highways and in the marketplaces; and he had certainly slept in many Roman jails. Paul had appeared before Roman magistrates, and he enjoyed the benefits of Roman citizenship. Paul knew all about Rome long before he ever visited the city physically. From the vantage point of the worlds capital, he was destined to preach the global Gospel to a lost and dying world that God loved so much that He had given His only begotten Son to die for upon the cross; that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish but have eternal life. Rome was a magnet that attracted men and women from the ends of the then known world to its center. As Paul and the other apostles criss-crossed the hinterlands of this colossal empire they brought multitudes to the foot of the cross. Churches were established in most of the cities within the Roman Empire. The saying that all roads lead to Rome was much more than a simple bromide in that day. As Christians congregated in the great metropolis a visible church emerged into existence. Probably no other man began a church in Rome; certainly, Peter never established a church in Rome, and Peter never had ANYTHING to do with the formation of a church in Rome, friends. The sermon at Pentecost and all subsequent sermons by Peter were given in Israel and directed to Israelites and Israelites*

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*exclusively! It was not until the conversion of Cornelius that Peter had been convinced Gentiles were even included in the body of believers!”*

The most successful modern church in this world is labeled Catholicism. Their ilk simply could not be more wrong about literally every single tenet and teaching they espouse. Again, the theme of this epistle is the righteousness of God – and that’s why I feel totally and completely inadequate to present it to you; but I am going to try after *MUCH* prayer that the Holy Spirit will speak to you through my *OWN* letter called the Spiritual Safari / Romans. I have been writing this letter to you for decades now, friends – attempting to proclaim the Word of God properly, correctly and completely. My letter – or book – my message – whatever you want to call this endeavor – is one that the world as a whole simply does not want and refuses to hear and accept. But not because they reject me. No, friends, they’re not interested in hearing from God. Period.

This world wants to hear about the glory of mankind. Man loves to exalt himself – *NOT* God! I am thoroughly convinced in my own thinking that any ministry being attempted today which does not present the total depravity of the human heart and does not *STRESS* the point that mankind is totally corrupt – and is a ruined creature – those teachers not only do not lift man’s hopes up, but they offer no remedy for the current state of hopelessness, either; and their theology of willful omission is straight from the pits of hell. The only remedy we have for sin today is a perfect remedy in Christ Whom God hath provided to a totally lost race in a dying world crippled by sin! That is the great and profound message of the Epistle to the Romans Paul wrote.

So, I want to take a moment and illustrate this in a personal way. Recently, a man who was connected to my church died of cancer. I never met him, but I did meet and know his wife. That man had, apparently, played fast and loose with his salvation throughout his lifetime – if he had ever honestly accepted Christ at all. Personally, I don’t think he did; I say that because he did not come to church one single time with his lovely wife that I know about. However, he had known about the Lord Jesus because his wife knew Christ. I do know he had several weeks in his final days in the hospital – with his wife by his side every moment – to lay there and think

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about this. If he repented and turned to Christ in those final moments here on earth, then he was saved, and went to be with the Lord. Saved so as by fire. I don't want to be that, friends.

The Lord Jesus said, *"those who come to Me I will in no wise cast out."* Remember, the thief on the cross only turned and repented a few hours before he died! The Roman Empire deemed that thief unfit to live in their society, but Christ told him he would be with Him in Paradise. See, God takes lost sinners like *YOU* – and *ME* – and brings us into the family of God; making us a son of God! That is only possible due to the death of Christ upon the cross. It has absolutely *NOTHING* to do with us, our goodness or our righteousness – because we don't have any of those things.

That, my friends, is the message of the epistle Paul wrote to the Romans! A Swiss commentator once said, *".... the reformation was certainly the result of the epistle to the Romans and to the Galatians. It is probable that every great spiritual renovation in the history of the church will always be linked, both in cause and in effect, to a deeper knowledge of these two writings from the apostle Paul."* Martin Luther wrote, *".... the epistle to the Romans is the true masterpiece of the New Testament and the most pure Gospel; well deserving that the Christian man should not only learn it by heart, word for word, but that he should also daily deal with it as the daily bread of man's souls. It can never be too well read or too well studied. The more it is handled the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes."*

One of the early church fathers had this epistle read to him twice each week. Another great expositor of the Word of God has said this is the most profound writing in existence today! Michael Faraday, that great scientist, turned to this book and found his very real faith in it! Faraday was asked on his deathbed what his speculations were now. He said, *".... I have no speculation – my faith is firmly fixed in Christ my Savior Who died for me and made a way for me to go to Heaven!"*

This is the epistle that turned a Bedford tinker named John Bunyan into a great Christian writer who wrote Pilgrims Progress. Bunyan was certainly no intellectual giant, and he was no poet. However, only one book has ever exceeded Pilgrims Progress in sales – even to this day – and that other book

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is the Bible! It's a book of a sinner saved by grace – and that sinner was himself! The record reveals Bunyan just happened to have read and studied the epistle to the Romans! Bunyan told the profound story of Romans in his own life's account. That book is a story of a pilgrim who came to the cross of Christ and his sins rolled off of him; beginning his journey to the celestial city!

That summarizes the epistle we are going to consider carefully in our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God. This preface was important, so we don't rush headlong and headstrong into something we're not sure about. In our next report, we'll take up the first few verses of chapter one with all of their infinite profundity. I urge you to do something that will pay you amazing dividends: read chapter one before our next report. Read it twice – and then read it again. We're going to spend a whole lot of time in this epistle together. I hope you will stay with me ~