

The Teaching of Paul: A Series of Fifteen Studies

Paul Study 1 – Introduction to Paul

taken from

Bible Studies for Enquirers and New Believers

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Introduction

Paul's letter to the Romans is the most important of his letters because it includes a theological summary of the good news from God. William Tyndale, a sixteenth century Bible translator, said about it that it shone "a light on the whole Bible". A little later, John Calvin, the Swiss theologian, called it "an open door to the understanding of all the treasures of Scripture". Martin Luther called it "the chief book of the New Testament". J.B. Phillips in our own century called it "the gospel according to Paul".

Many people's lives have been changed through reading and studying Romans. In North Africa in 386 A.D. Augustine was converted as the Holy Spirit convicted him when he studied Romans 13:13-14. In Germany in 1513 A.D. Martin Luther's life was changed through reading Romans 1:17. Luther's Preface to Romans was instrumental in John Wesley's conversion to Christ in England in 1738; and in Japan in 1914, Tai'sei Michihata came to know Christ personally through a spiritual understanding of Romans 8:32. Besides these famous people, God through his Holy Spirit, has illumined the message of Romans to countless little known people of many lands and they have come to know God in a personal way through Jesus Christ.

The title, "To the Romans", is found in Aleph ABC, the oldest Greek manuscript for the letter. We do not know if Paul gave it any title at all. Later manuscripts added The Epistle of Paul to the Romans. However, titles are not part of the inspired scripture itself. The epistle is put first in the manuscripts because it is the most important of all Paul's epistles. Its theme is the righteousness of God. Romans contains Paul's reinterpretation of the Old Testament in a unified, constructive and positive way. Paul sees clearly that the Jewish interpretation of the Law is mistaken. The Rabbinic interpretation makes the Law a way of salvation. The unity of the letter may be summed up in its concern for the righteousness of God. By using this formula Paul achieves the most direct confrontation of his new understanding of the Old Testament with that which he earlier maintained as a Pharisee. It helps to read the letter in its first century setting of conflict between the tradition of the elders and the early church's interpretation of the Old Testament, and to relate it to Paul's own experience of reorientation from synagogue to church, from zeal for the tradition of the elders to faith in Jesus Christ the Messiah.

Before we start our study of this letter we need to note a few things about the writer himself. Many biographies have been written about Saul, a native of Tarsus, (now a city in Turkey), who became Paul the Apostle after his dramatic conversion on the main road near Damascus. He was traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus with instructions from the religious authorities in Jerusalem to arrest the followers of Jesus Christ. Suddenly Jesus

revealed himself to him and he became his follower. Although he had never seen Jesus in the flesh he was recognized as an apostle. The account of Paul's missionary journeys can be found in the book which precedes Romans – the Acts of the Apostles, sometimes called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. It is the record of the establishment of the early church. Now we turn to the text of the letter to the Romans to see what Paul says about himself and also to study his teaching.

Paul's letter to the believers in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, was sent by the hand of Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, the port for Corinth (Romans 16:1). Paul wrote it in contemporary Greek. The key verses of the letter are Romans 1:16-17. These should be learned by heart. The key word is righteousness.

- Chapters 1-5 deal with God's righteousness in relation to JUSTIFICATION
- Chapters 6-8 deal with God's righteousness in relation to SANCTIFICATION
- Chapters 9-11 deal with God's righteousness in relation to ELECTION
- Chapters 12-16 deal with God's righteousness in relation to CONDUCT

It would be good to read the whole letter through at one time. That is how we normally read letters. Romans 1:1-17 is the introduction to the letter. Write the answers to these questions on Romans 1:1-17:

1. What three things does Paul write about himself? (Romans 1:1)
2. What three things does Paul write about the gospel? (Romans 1:2-3)
3. What three things does Paul write about the believers in Rome? (Romans 1:6-7)