

## Introduction to Romans

The focus of this introduction is not just the times, places and peoples of Romans. No. Today, look at the people whose lives were impacted throughout history by the study of the book of Romans. In particular, what caused Martin Luther such anguish before he studied Romans and then the joy of discovery while studying Romans? Perhaps he did not realize at first that he was looking for a personal relationship with God. Martin Luther was not the first to challenge the Catholic Church. But, there was a confluence of events that caused him to be thrown into the limelight of history. Because of him, thoughts that could not be proclaimed openly for fear of being executed like Wycliffe and Jan Hus, were now openly debated. This caused a split in the church. It led to the reformation. The book of Romans was key for Martin Luther.

Leon Morris wrote in the introduction to his commentary on Romans:

“It is commonly agreed that the Epistle to the Romans is one of the greatest Christian writings. Its power has been demonstrated again and again at critical points in the history of the Christian church. Augustine of Hippo, for example, was converted through reading a passage from this letter, and thus began a period of the greatest importance for the church. It is not too much to say that at a later time Martin Luther's spiritual experience was shaped by his coming to grips with what Paul says in this epistle. The Reformation may be regarded as the unleashing of new spiritual life as a result of a renewed understanding of the teaching of Romans. Again, John Wesley's conversion was triggered by hearing Luther's Preface to Romans read, a Preface, of course, inspired by the epistle. Nearer to our own day it was Karl Barth's coming to grips with the message of the book that ended an era of sterile liberalism and ushered in a more fruitful period of biblical theology. But Romans is not

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for great minds only. The humble believer also finds inspiration and direction in these pages. Romans is not an easy book. But it has always yielded rich dividends to anyone who has taken the time to study it seriously, and it does so still.<sup>1</sup>

Luther wrote a “preface” to his commentary on Romans. That is what Leon Morris referred to. The Preface starts:

“1. This epistle is in truth the chief part of the New Testament and the purest Gospel. It would be quite proper for a Christian, not only to know it by heart word for word, but also to study it daily, for it is the soul’s daily bread. It can never be read or meditated too much and too well. The more thoroughly it is treated, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.”

Augustine of Hippo, who when he was a youth, lived a life of hedonistic pleasures for a while. There was a passage in Romans that convicted his conscience.

**Romans 13:13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.**

**Romans 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.**

Both Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther had great impact on the history and theology of the Church. Both were dramatically impacted by Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. How will you approach this epistle? Will you be impacted? Will it change your life in some way?

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, Grand Rapids:Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1988. page 1

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There is a helpful description of Martin Luther's life in *The Story of Christianity* by Justo L. Gonzalez. I will not include all the text here, but I will read from it. Below are some pertinent quotes from it.

“Ultimately, however, Luther was led to the monastery by a concern for his own salvation. The theme of salvation and damnation permeated the atmosphere in which he lived.”

My understanding is that the Catholic Church emphasized the need for salvation, but identified the Catholic Church as the source of that salvation.

The gospel coalition has some information on what the Catholic Church taught as how one got to heaven.

Gospel Coalition: “We are a fellowship of evangelical churches in the Reformed tradition deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures.”<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/infographic-medieval-view-of-salvation/>

“Luther himself later wrote about the overwhelming experience of celebrating his first mass, when he was gripped by terror upon thinking that he was holding and offering nothing less than the very body of Christ. That feeling of terror then became increasingly frequent, for he felt unworthy of God's love, and he was not convinced that he was doing enough to be saved.”

“In order to be saved, one must confess one's sins, and Luther had discovered that, in spite of his best efforts, his sin went far beyond what he could confess.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/>

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It is interesting to note that a week or so before Luther posted his “95 theses” he posted his “97 theses.” This first posting was critical of the church’s theology. It did not produce a violent reaction. However, the “95 theses” was critical of the way the church raised money for the construction of Saint Peter’s basilica by selling indulgences. It hit them in the “pocket book.” There was also a technological development that allowed written material to be published quickly and widely: the Gutenberg press.

There are some obligatory facts that are usually presented when introducing a book of the Bible. Let us go through them quickly in order to get to the actual text of the book of Romans. Since Robby Dean has already produced a pdf file of this information, I include a link to it here. Rather than try to duplicate what Dr. Dean has already done, I will just use his file.

[https://deanbible.org/dbmfiles/notes/Romans\\_Introduction.pdf](https://deanbible.org/dbmfiles/notes/Romans_Introduction.pdf)

## Historical Context of Romans<sup>4</sup>:

I include here some helpful information on Paul's missionary journeys and the books he wrote.

Written: During Third Missionary Journey

### Paul's Missionary Journeys

#### 1st Missionary Journey

April 48 to September 49

Acts 13:2-14:28

Book written: Galatians

#### 2nd Missionary Journey

Time: April 50 to September 52

Scripture: Acts 15:36-18:22

Books written: 1 & 2 Thessalonians

#### 3rd Missionary Journey

Spring 53 to May 57

Acts 18:23-21:16

Books written: **Romans** and 1st & 2nd Corinthians

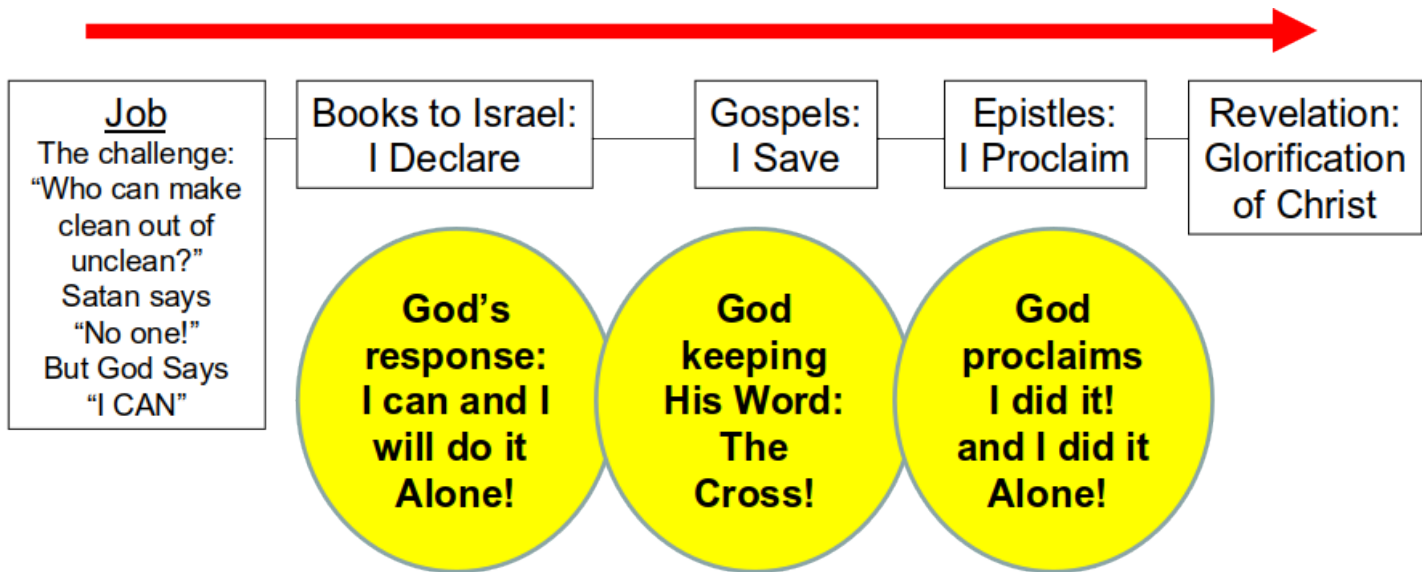
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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.springvalleybiblechurch.org/Audio/1stCorinthians/notes/201104031stCorinthians.pdf>

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## Cannon Context:

Herman has an insightful perspective on the context of the Bible books. I generated the following illustration based upon Herman's teaching:



[from Herman Mattox]

The first book of the Bible, chronologically, Job, is a book whose importance is usually overlooked by most pastors. The Hebrew is difficult. It includes Angelic Conflict information which many do not have a theological framework to deal with. The narrative is mostly discussion between Job and his friends. There is not much "action." It deals with a culture that is ancient, likely patriarchal. Even liberals understand that the book was probably the first book of the Bible that was written. Based upon internal evidence as well as Rabbinic discussion, Job was written around the time of Abraham. Herman has additionally identified ten questions of Job that revolve around the topic of righteousness. He said there are other questions and other references to righteousness in the book of Job. But, these are the most blatant.

**Job 4:17 (#1)‘Can mankind be just (righteous) before God? (#2)Can a man be pure before his Maker?**

**Job 8:3 (#3)“Does God pervert justice? (#4) Or does the Almighty pervert what is right (righteous)?**

**Job 9:2 “In truth I know that this is so; (#5) But how can a man be in the right (righteous) before God?**

**Job 14:4 (#6) “Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!**

**Job 15:14 (#7) “What is man, that he should be pure, (#8) Or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous (righteous)?**

**Job 25:4 (#9)“How then can a man be just (righteous) with God? (#10) Or how can he be clean who is born of woman?**

Job’s friends accused him of having committed some terrible sin. But the concept of righteousness is always lurking behind if not in the questions. Righteousness is what is needed to have fellowship with God and which sin takes away. As we know, Jesus was judged for the eternal penalty of sin. What the unbeliever requires is eternal life and God’s perfect righteousness. Righteousness. The topic of the ten questions of Job.

In the book of Job, the words from this root (righteousness) are found 35 times.

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**Noun** (x11): (masculine) 6:29; 8:3; 8:6; 29:14; 31:6; 35:2; 36:3; (feminine) 27:6; 33:26; 35:8; 37:23

**Verb** (x17): 4:17; 9:2; 9:15; 9:20; 10:15; 11:2 13:18; 15:14; 22:3; 25:4; 27:5; 32:2; 33:12; 33:32; 34:5; 35:7; 40:8

**Adjective** (x7): 12:4; 17:9; 22:19; 27:17; 32:1; 34:17; 36:7

Some insight from the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT) which I found particularly insightful:

“Meaning. Scholarly debate has generally focused on two different understandings of the OT notion of righteousness and justice. One view construes the notion of *sdq*, “legally” and understands righteousness as concurrence with a standard or norm. Whoever watches over righteousness and justice (ultimately God) also distributes reward and punishment according to whether the righteousness in question corresponds to that norm. Antitheses include terms such as “mercy,” “compassion,” and “salvation.” Other scholars understand the notion of *sdq* as virtually synonymous with deliverance and salvation, describing it as a relation with God rather than as related to a norm established by God. God’s beneficent and saving intervention is then an expression of his righteousness rather than its opposite, and the notion of chastising divine righteousness is viewed at most as a secondary effect directed against those who would obstruct such divine intervention.<sup>5</sup>”

Norms and standards versus a relationship. It is both. God demands a righteousness that conforms to His norms and standards. Man cannot produce this. But, they are “imputed” or placed to our account when we express our faith in Jesus Christ and his saving work on the cross. As a result of God’s imputed righteousness, man can have a relationship with the Trinity.

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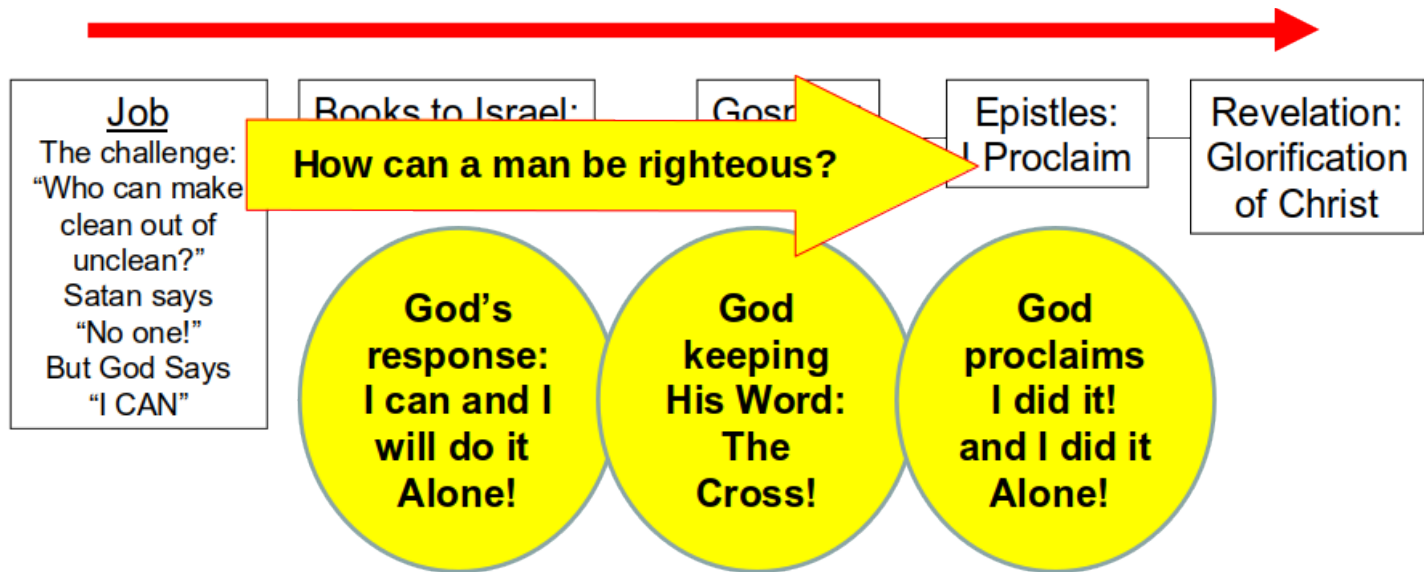
<sup>5</sup> Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Volume XII, page 239



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Paul picks up on righteousness. He answers Job's questions about how one can obtain righteousness without perverting God's character. When an unbeliever expresses faith in Jesus Christ as savior, he is imputed God's righteousness. Having obtained this righteousness, the person who is now a believer is called "justified."



[from Herman Mattox]

It is important to understand the imputation of righteousness. I am not going to cover it in this introduction, but plan to get to it later in the book of Romans. Herman already covered it at least once in the past.

Before getting into the text of the book, let us follow Herman's emphasis on the theme of the letter: the gospel. Paul's statement of the theme of the letter is included in

**Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

**Romans 1:17 For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”**

**Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

Romans 1:16-17 which is quoted above.

**Romans 15:15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God,**

**Romans 15:16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**

**Romans 15:17 Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God.**

**Romans 15:18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,**

**Romans 15:19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.**

**Romans 16:25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past,**

**Romans 16:26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;**

**Romans 16:27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.**

Douglas Moo, a noted Bible scholar who wrote a lengthy commentary on the book of Romans says, “What then, is the theme of the letter? The gospel. The word “gospel” and the cognate verb “evangelize” are particularly prominent in the introduction (cf. 1:1, 2, 9, 15) and conclusion (15:16, 19) of Romans—its epistolary “frame.” And this is the word that has pride of place in Paul’s statement of the theme of the letter: 1:16-17. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel...” True, Paul goes on to speak of the interplay of salvation, the interplay of Jew and Gentile, and justification by faith; and each has been advanced as the theme of the letter. But they are all elaborations of the main topic of these verses, the

gospel. And we require a theme as broad as “the gospel” to encompass the diverse topics in Romans.<sup>6</sup>”

What is the gospel? Let us start with where we got the word “gospel.” I have used a “neutral” source (Wikipedia) that seems to stick to the facts on this subject.

“Gospel is the Old English translation of the Hellenistic Greek term εὐαγγέλιον, meaning "good news";[16] this may be seen from analysis of ευαγγέλιον (εὖ "good" + ἄγγελος "messenger" + -ιον diminutive suffix). The Greek term was Latinized as evangelium in the Vulgate, and translated into Latin as bona annuntiatio. In Old English, it was translated as gōdspel (gōd "good" + spel "news"). The Old English term was retained as gospel in Middle English Bible translations and hence remains in use also in Modern English.<sup>7</sup>”

The word “gospel” comes from Old English gōd + spel = good news which is just a translation from the Greek. When we say gospel we are using Old English. Why not just translate it into Modern English, “good news.” What is the good news?

### Three phases of salvation

- Phase 1: Point of salvation at the point of belief. Saved from penalty of sin.
- Phase 2: Being saved from the power of sin.
- Phase 3: Saved from the presence of sin [in eternity].

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, pp 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel>

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Without jumping into a lesson on those points, there are some important observations that need to be pointed to.

1. Eternal salvation is based upon the work of Jesus Christ on the cross where he bore the sins of the world.
2. Eternal salvation is based upon the righteousness of God.
3. Eternal salvation is received as a result of faith.

**1 Peter 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,**

**1 Peter 2:22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;**

**1 Peter 2:23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;**

**1 Peter 2:24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.**

**1 John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;**

**1 John 2:2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.**

## Three Tenses of Salvation

Phase	Justification	<u>Sanctification</u>	Glorification
Tense	Past	<u>Present</u>	Future
Saved from sin's:	Penalty	<u>Power</u>	Presence
Scripture	Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5	<u>Philip 2:12</u>	Rom 5:10

Three Tenses of Salvation<sup>8</sup>

**Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

<sup>8</sup> <https://slbc.org/sermon/soteriology-001/>

Herman saw the book of Romans like a theological sandwich. The two pieces of bread are Romans chapter 1 and Romans chapters 15 & 16: the gospel. If this is so, then, as Herman says, the gospel is for both unbeliever and for believer. The gospel of salvation by faith is included, but so also is living the Christian life by faith dependence on the Holy Spirit.

**Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**

**Romans 1:15 So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.**

**Romans 15:15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God,**

**Romans 15:16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.**

Gospel = “good news”

Chafer analogy from He that is spiritual

## I. An ANALOGY

THE BIBLE TREATS our deliverance from the bond-servitude to sin as a distinct form of salvation, and there is an analogy between this and the more familiar aspect of salvation which is from the guilt and penalty of sin. In the first five chapters of the letter to the Romans we have presented our salvation from the guilt and penalty of sin into justification and security through the redemption that is in Christ. Beginning with chapter six, a new question is raised: "Shall we [who have been saved into safety] continue in sin?" The major portion of three chapters, as has been stated, is then devoted to a statement of facts and conditions of salvation from the reigning power of sin in the daily life of the child of God.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://lewisperrychafer.org/Spirituality.pdf>