

The event that split history into “before” and “after” and changed the world took place about thirty years before Paul wrote this letter. The event - the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus - took place in a remote corner of the extensive Roman Empire. The province of Judea in Palestine. Hardly anyone noticed, certainly no one in busy and powerful Rome.

And when this letter arrived in Rome, hardly anyone read it, certainly no one of influence. There was much to read in Rome - imperial decrees, exquisite poetry, finely crafted moral philosophy - and much of it was world-class. And yet in no time, as such things go, this letter left all those other writings in the dust. Paul's letter to the Romans has had a far larger impact on its readers than the volumes of all the Roman writers put together.

The quick rise of this letter to a peak of influence is extraordinary, written as it was by an obscure Roman citizen without connections. But when we read it for ourselves, we begin to realize that it is the letter itself that is truly extraordinary, and that no obscurity in writer or readers could have kept it obscure for long.

The letter to the Romans is a piece of exuberant and passionate thinking. This is the glorious life of the mind enlisted in the service of God. Paul takes the well-witnessed and devoutly believed fact of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and thinks through its implications. How does it happen that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, world history took a new direction, and at the same moment the life of every man, woman, and child on the planet was eternally affected? What is God up to? What does it mean that Jesus “saves”? What's behind all this, and where is it going?

These are the questions that drive Paul's thinking. Paul's mind is supple and capacious. He takes logic and argument, poetry and imagination, Scripture and prayer, creation and history and experience, and weaves them into this letter that has become the premier document of Christian theology.

Commentary on Romans from The Bible Project:

- <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/romans-1-4/>
- <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/romans-5-16/>

Commentary on themes in Romans from The Bible Project:

- Holiness: <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/holiness/>
- The Law: <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/law/>
- Sacrifice and Atonement: <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/sacrifice-and-atonement/>
- Covenants: <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/covenants/>

Overview of Romans from bible.org:

- <https://bible.org/seriespage/56-romans>

Commentary on Romans 9 from bible.org:

- <https://bible.org/seriespage/21-man-opposes-god-disposes-romans-91-13>
- <https://bible.org/seriespage/22-divine-election-questioned-romans-914-23>
- <https://bible.org/seriespage/23-israel%E2%80%99s-failure-scripture%E2%80%99s-fulfillment-romans-924-33>

READ Romans 9

(The following discussion questions are adapted from The Serendipity Bible)

Opening

- What was one thing about which your folks used to say, “Wait till your older, you’ll understand then?”
- When have you won something unexpected: A trip? Award of achievement? Class officer elections? A big game?
- When have you been surprised to be chosen for something? When have you been disappointed that you weren’t chosen?

Digging in — Discovering the Word

- What does the phrase, “They were born on 3rd but thought they hit a triple.” mean? How does that apply to how Paul characterizes the Jews’ understanding of their place in God’s favor (see vv. 1-5)?
- What is a particular person, group or race that you have a heart for?
- According to this passage, who are God’s children?
- Looking at verses 15-18, on what is God’s favor based? How do verses 19-21 answer questions raised by the previous verses?
- How might God’s plan make a Gentile feel? A Jew? You?
- What qualities of God stand out to you in the Old Testament quotes (vv.25-29)?
- For what work do you feel God created you?

Connecting the Dots — Applying the Word

- What are some ways that you have been born on 3rd? Spiritually? Relationally? Culturally? Societally? Globally?
- On a scale of 1-10, how deeply do you hurt for unbelievers? Describe why you chose that number.
- If you were God would you choose “you” to be part of your plan for the universe? How do you feel about God’s authority to choose who will be “objects of his mercy” (v. 23)?
- Who are some non-Christians God has used to help you on your way to spiritual maturity? How so? In light of this passage how should Christians approach witnessing? Is there any point?
- Where are you growing in your understanding of God’s will for your life? What questions would you like to ask God about this?
- Suppose salvation did depend on human desire and effort. What grade would God give you? If God graded on a curve, would you have a better chance of passing? How about polishing a few apples and becoming the teacher’s pet? How does this passage make you feel about your own salvation?