

ROMANS

MICHAEL DEFAZIO | 12 SESSIONS

**NEXT
LEVEL**



ONLINE

OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

SESSION 1 – Romans 1.1-17: Intro and Purpose

Romans can and should change us. You should walk away

- knowing Jesus more clearly, understanding the gospel more accurately,
- abandoning sin more thoroughly, feeling grace more deeply,
- and grasping more faithfully the large story of God's purposes for this world and his faithful achievement of those purposes in spite of evil and sin.

Goal and Approach: Goal: to say *enough*... (can't say everything, but that's okay)

- To spark thought / generate conversation
- To send you back to the text
- Approach: walk through the text... (You will need to have read it for this to make sense!)
 - Zoom in, zoom out... verses that represent larger sections
 - Reflect on a big question (for yourself or your group)
- Today... What do I know and what do I expect to learn?
 - Look at 1.14-17 and see the purpose of Romans; why Paul wrote it
 - (3 of 4; other one is to raise support, which we'll hit later)

Romans 1.14-17 (Paul's "thesis statement") Okay if you feel slightly lost (like a pre-tour video; "alright, let's go for it...")

1. Clarify the gospel. (*Rom 1.14-16a*)
 - If you're going to be a follower of Jesus, a Christian, you've got to know what the gospel actually is. If you're going to be a church, a real faithful one, this is 1.0. Gotta get it, gotta get it right.
 - The words:
 - Gospel – good report
 - Background in Isaiah
 - Foreground in Roman media
 - Salvation – means being healed or put back together; restored to health
 - Faith: For all who *believe*... faith: trust, confidence, commitment
 - Literally the whole book is about these things, so we don't need to have it all nailed down up front. But this is Paul's purpose: clarify the gospel.
 - Practical edge to it...
2. Unite the church. (*Rom 1.16b*)
 - You'll see this all time: Jews and Gentiles, Gentiles and Jews...
 - Here's the story:
 - Late 30s – gospel comes to Rome, mainly by and among Jews
 - 49 – Jews expelled
 - 54 – Jews return... to a very Gentile church
 - Paul writes in 56-57 to unite (or maintain unity)
3. Prove God's righteousness. (*Rom 1.17*)
 - This is a big part of what Paul wants to say about the gospel; and it's a big part of how he aims to unite the two groups.
 - What does it mean? Righteous means "meets a standard" (waves; behavior);
 - God is his own standard. Two aspects
 - Legal: integrity as judge; to be righteous is to be just
 - Covenant: faithfulness as promise maker; righteous is to be faithful
 - Yes, Jesus was something of a surprise. Yes, Gentiles can now be saved without submitting to the Law of Moses (the OT). But no, this does not mean God changed his mind or came up with a plan B or reneged on his word. On the contrary, a right view of the gospel reveals a God who is faithful and just.

SESSION 2 – Romans 1.18-32: The Problem

If you've read Romans before, you know that he goes pretty dark pretty quick. 1.18. Wow.

So we live in a jacked-up world that celebrates its jacked... Clearly, we have a problem. But what is it? That's today's Q: What is our problem? At the core, what is happening? What has gone wrong?

Plenty have tried to diagnose the core of our disease....Here at the start of Romans, we find Paul's most thorough answer. To see this well, we're actually going to take the text backwards. (Tracing to the lead domino)

(5) *People celebrate evil.* (Rom 1.32)

(4) *People do evil things.* (Rom 1.28b-31)

(3) *People's minds have stopped working.* (Rom 1.28)

- Sin doesn't make you an adult. It turns you back into a child. Sin doesn't make us smart or sophisticated. Sin is dumb and it makes us dumb. Have you ever tried to help someone who has locked themselves into a years-long pattern of sin? It's like they can't even think straight. Because they can't! You know why? Paul does.

(2) *God is judging people.* (Rom 1.24-28)

- God judges us by releasing us to the consequences of our sin. This is how his wrath will work with finality at the end of time, and it is how it works here and now. God does not choose evil for anyone, but he permits our choice as well as the consequences of that choice.

(1) *People replace God.* (Romans 1.18-23)

- There it is. The fundamental problem with the world is humanity. And the fundamental humanity problem is idolatry.

That is our root problem.

- Idolatry breeds immorality. Replace God, reap the consequences. We see the consequences daily...
- And don't be fooled: Idolatry is not an ancient problem. We think that though. Is it possible that we still do this? That I am an idolater? This is not how we like to think of ourselves.
- An idol is anything that in any way takes the place of God in your life. Anything you serve, love, trust in, die for, might just be an idol.
- It could be anything. G. K. Chesterton said that when people stop believing in God, we don't believe in nothing. We'll believe in anything. John Calvin called the human heart an "idol factory". Seems on point to me.

SESSION 3 – Romans 2.1-3.20: The (Failed) Solution

Background:

- What Paul gave us in Romans 1-18-32 is actually a standard Jewish critique of Gentile idolatry. The people who worship God looked at those who don't and said, "We can see clear as day why you've ruined this place."
- The Jews, or Jewish Christians, were probably cheering Paul on – yeah, see, you guys are the problem. And yet in chapter 2 Paul basically says, "Not so fast."

Judge lightly b/c God will judge fairly (2.1-16)

1. None of you come out clean (2.1-3)
2. God judges fairly or impartially – according to what we have or know. (2.12)

The solution has become part of the problem (2.17-29)

- "The well has been poisoned" ...
 - Look again at 2.19ff – this is how they liked to think of themselves
 - And this is who they were called to be! Think about how the Old Testament story goes. Adam . . . Abraham/Israel... And yet?
- Think about the story of Jonah – he was God's chosen means to reach the Assyrians, but he ran the other direction. I think Jonah is the best metaphor for what Paul is saying here about Israel as a whole. This is the OT story in miniature.
- Despair doesn't account for God. Surely God won't cash in. Surely he'll figure out a way to solve the problem and the solution that became part of the problem. And the next section will be one of the most frustrating parts of Romans if you don't get what Paul's doing. Basically, he's setting the table for the rest of Romans. Let's look at it.

God has an answer, but the Law isn't it (3.1-20). God will make a way, but the Law is not that way.

- 3.3 – Is God going to abandon his covenant? His promise? His world? Of course not!
- But the Law cannot solve our problem (the Law itself makes clear).
 - The Law itself admits that we are all a mess.
 - Side-to-side... (10-12)
 - Up-and-down... (13-18)
 - The Law itself makes clear that the helpers need help. (19-20)
- And with that Paul makes his case: We have a serious problem. All failed. Then God chose one nation and promised to save all the others through her, but that one became like all of them and failed too. Now God has to find a way to save everyone

without abandoning that promise. God will fix it, we can be sure. But we don't really know how.

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SESSION 4 – Romans 3.21-4.25: The Question of Romans

The middle of Romans 3 – 3.21ff – is the heartbeat of Romans. I'm not even kidding.

- Douglas Moo: "Rarely does the Bible bring together in so few verses so many important theological ideas.... Here, more than anywhere else in Romans, Paul explains why Christ's coming means 'good news' for needy, sinful people."
- Martin Luther claimed that this section was "the chief point, and the very central place of the Letter, and of the whole Bible."

Here's the problem though: This section is dense and compact and full of beautiful truth that it's hard to squeeze it out without ruining the whole thing.

First, let me back up a bit. It's time to get a good bird's eye view of Romans.

- 1-4: Paul Explains the Gospel
- 5-8: Paul Explores Salvation...
- 9-11: Paul Engages a Problem...
- 12-16: Paul Encourages the Church...

For now, Romans 3.21-26. Lots of translation differences. I'm going to read what I think is the way Paul intended it...

- 3.21-26 is an answer, but what is the question. Ask the right question, understand the answer.
- Here is the question, and I think it is the question of Romans. It's a little long, but no one said Romans was easy: How can God save sinful Jews and Gentiles through faith in Jesus without violating his integrity or breaking his promise?
- Note the twofold problem with salvation by grace through faith:
 - Is God letting people off the hook (by not punishing sin)?
 - Has God abandoned his covenant promise to save through Israel? We're pretty good at answering one part of the question. How can God save us through Jesus without violating his integrity as a judge, without punishing wrongdoing as his own character demands?
 - Jesus died as a propitiation to redeem us from sins.
 - *Hilasterion* – "Place of atonement" representing the means of atonement
 - Jesus bore the wrath of God and so freed us from that necessary consequence for sin.
 - This is what we catch: Jesus' sacrificial death proves God to be just and the one who justifies. Case isn't closed, however. What about Israel? What about the covenant?

- This is the second part of the question: Paul frames Jesus death as an act of faithfulness.

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SESSION 5 – Romans 5-1.11: Taking Justification Personally

- Justified by grace through faith. Saved from wrath. Isn't that what he just said? Paul, why repeat yourself? Well, if Paul could answer us I think he would say, "Because I want it to sink down from your head to your heart." Because we know that there is a difference between seeing that something is true and feeling that truth in your bones; between understanding and *getting* it, you know? We gotta move from "I agree this is true," to "Yes, and this will now define me."
- So taking my cues from Paul, what I want to do today is linger in this truth a little longer. The truth Paul explains in Romans 3-4 is that God justifies us – he declares us righteous or acquitted or pardoned – not on the basis of our good behavior but solely on the basis of his mercy and grace, solely on the basis of Jesus' death as the perfect sacrifice that atones for our sin. That is *objectively* true – it's true whether you believe it, it's true whether you feel it or not. We learn about objective truth every time we run into a wall or stub a toe. That table leg was always there, whether we were aware of it or not. When we kicked it, we became aware of its presence.
- That's the objective side, and this time I want to talk about the subjective side. I want us all to move from, "Okay I agree with that statement" to "Yes, and this truth now defines me."
- I'll tell you right up front that I think we need to make two moves for this to work. Two steps that begin with a choice and then proceed as we keep choosing them.
 1. *Let God's opinion of you define you.*
 2. *Let Christ's death define God's opinion of you.*
- The original context for justification was Jews and Gentiles trying to walk together in Christ... (Jews leave in 49, return in 54...)
- I don't think the question is *if* you seek justification, but *how*.
- Like I said, there are as many flavors of "justification by works" as there are people in the room. But let me mention a few things to help you ask the question: How do I tend to justify my existence by what I do?
- Knowing. Could be college basketball stats. Could be Bible verses. Producing. Need visible evidence of your effort. If not, worthless. Earning. Paycheck makes you feel internally secure. Winning. Sports. Sales. Baking. Parenting. Impressing. We lost but I played well. Helping. You want to make an impact – to know that people's lives are better because you were here. You need to help people to justify you being alive. You ever think, "You know, I could lose everything and not be a success, but if I can make sure my kids turn out okay

then I'll be fine." Kids can't bear that kind of pressure. And I can't love them if beneath all my effort to help is a need to feel okay, to feel enough, to feel righteous.

- Remember Romans. Remember that:
 1. Your well-being is determined by your status before God.
 2. Your status before God is determined by the cross.
- Put simply: let the cross of Christ tell you who you are.

SESSION 6 – Romans 5.12-6.23: Gospel Freedom

- Let's take a few moments and study Romans chapter 6. Let's remind ourselves that Paul spent chapters 1-4 *explaining the gospel*; God saves all people by grace through faith in Jesus who died for our sins, just like he always said he would. And now in chapters 5-8 Paul is digging deeper into this gospel by exploring the salvation that it brings.
- We're going to focus on 6, but let's say a few things about 5.12-21. Romans 5 is a profound part of Scripture that repays whatever meditation we give to it. On the surface the meaning is clear:
 - Paul is comparing Jesus and Adam, showing that while Adam messed everything up, Jesus more than cleaned up the mess. "What was lost in Adam is more than regained in Christ."
 - Paul is talking specifically about death and life. Adam was given the beginnings of life and told to grow it, but instead he brought death to all. Jesus came into a world ruled by death but restored life to the full.
 - And Paul is once again especially clear that all this comes by grace. This brings us to 6, where Paul starts with a question. 6.1: *What then...* He answers with an emphatic no, and then unpacks the freedom that comprises our salvation.
- 6.1-14: Because baptism, sin no more.
 1. You have been freed from sin.
 - Penalty yes, but also power: you don't have to sin any more.
 2. Through baptism (or "baptismal union with Christ")
 3. Old habits die hard.
- 6.15-23: Choose your master.
 - You will serve someone, Paul says (old Bob Dylan song); you will be someone's or something's slave, he goes so far as to say. And most of the next section basically lays out these two paths – slavery to sin leading to death, or slavery to grace leading to life. It's pretty clear. Choose your path. Choose your master. But let's try to be practical. How?
 - (1) Listen to your master's voice (and ignore the others)
 - (2) Consecrate, or *offer* the parts of your body to God. Again, and again, and again.
- In the past, "Is Christianity true?" More so now... "Does Christianity work?"

SESSION 7 – Romans 7-8: God, Law, and Life

- These two chapters wrap up the second section of Romans. 1-4 was about explaining the gospel; 5-8 has been about exploring salvation.

- And to a large degree, the theme is freedom... from death; from sin; now from the Law
 - Remember Paul's specific purpose to unify Jews and Gentiles...
 - Here was the thorniest of the thorny issues: what to do with the Law...
 - Paul is clear: we are free from it's direct jurisdiction. 7.4-6
 - Raises the question: Is the Law a bad thing?

- Rom 7: Law is good but limited
 1. Reflects God's character.
 - Psalm 19 or 119;
 - 2 Timothy 3.16
 2. Teaches God's will.
 3. Identifies sin.

PROBLEM: Cannot accomplish the goal it seeks (because of our weakness)

Once again, *good* but *limited*; 7 ends not with despair, however, but with hope.

- Rom 8: God does what the Law could not do
 - Through Jesus, God forgives our sins (8.1-4)
 - Through the Spirit, God regenerates us (8.5-11) and leads us out of sin (8.12ff)
 - Israel/church parallel –
 - Just as God led Israel into the promised Land, he will lead us to new creation. (8.12-30)

<i>Israel's Story of Exodus</i>	<i>Paul's "Narrative" of Salvation (Rom 5-8)</i>
God defeats Pharaoh/Gods of Egypt	Jesus defeats Adam/Sin/Death (Romans 5.12-21)

Liberation through waters of Red Sea	Liberation through waters of baptism (Romans 6.1-23)
Giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai	Role of Law / Giving of the Spirit (Romans 7.1-8.11)
Led through wilderness by pillar/cloud	Guided by the Spirit through the realm of flesh (Romans 8.1-17)
Enters (inherits) the Promised Land	Inheritance of liberated new creation (Romans 8.18ff)

- This is the context for our favorites...
 - Romans 8.17 – it will be hard, but worth it in the end; Romans 8.28 – everything will be redeemed; Romans 8.29ff – nothing can stop God from getting us there

SESSION 8 – Romans 9-11: Problem with the Plan?

- And coming out of Romans 8, Paul is... crying?! **9.1-2**. This is not what we expect!
- The problem is that most of his fellow Jews don't believe... **9.3-4**
- Rom 9: The plan always worked this way.
 - Faith, not bloodlines (membership in God's people; 9.6 crucial)
 - Grace, not works; mercy, not perfect obedience
 - God hardens the rebellious to rescue the faithful (Pharaoh / Israel, now Israel / Church)
- Rom 10: The plan worked.
 - 10.4: The Law's goal was always to get to Christ (crossing the street)
 - 10.9-15: Gospel is going out to all, believed on by some
- Rom 11: The plan will keep working.
 - Hardened will soften... 11.9-11... because of jealousy
 - Don't be arrogant! You are not superior...
 - Don't doubt that God will forgive the moment they stop persisting in unbelief...
 - "And *in this way* all Israel will be saved" (11.26)
 - "All Israel" = Jews and Gentiles in Christ
 - I know this is controversial, but... Paul has worked hard in Romans to teach us how to read this: membership in God's family – in "Israel" – is not defined by bloodlines but by faith. Remember 9.6
- What now?
 - Be grateful for Israel's part in the story
 - Be evangelistic in every direction
 - Be impressed by God. After all this analysis, all this complex theologizing, Paul can only stop and worship. 11.33-36. Amen indeed.

SESSION 9 – Romans 12.1-2: The Process of Transformation

How do I put this into practice? That is the question I want you thinking about right now

Paul's plan for transformation... Romans 12.1-2

- Basis: mercy (grace, Holy Spirit)... this is how Paul summarizes Rom 1-11
- Goal: wisdom discernment – not just following the rules; know what to do & have power to do it
- Process:
 - A lot of people in our world promise transformation. And in large part you can break their promises and strategies down into two main categories:
 - Self-help – change the way you think; these strategies focus on the mind
 - Health and Wellness – change the way you eat and exercise; these strategies focus on the mind
 - I find it fascinating that long before the self-help industry or our addiction to dieting, Paul spoke with Holy Spirit wisdom and included both. That's what we see in 12.1-2: Want to change? Then do something with your body, and something with your mind. Let's take them in reverse order.
 - Mind – *don't conform to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds*
 - Don't conform to everyone around you, Paul says. But notice what comes next:
 - He does not say "withdraw"; make your own little Christian ghetto where you'll be safe and protected from that nasty world out there
 - But instead he says stay and think different.
 - Growing bodies of psychology and neuroscience are consistently confirming what common sense teaches and the Bible has been saying for a long time: What we believe, what think, how we process the world and God and ourselves, matters.
 - This means that one of the most powerful disciplines you can practice is thinking about what is true.
 - Body – *offer your bodies as a living sacrifice*
 - We're basically talking about obedience
 - But we're seeing obedience as worship
 - "Offer" or "consecrate" sacrifice language;
 - And if it wasn't clear, the following "as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God"

- So it's a sacrifice, but a living one, holy and pleasing to God
- So there it is. Concentrate your mind and Consecrate your body. Think and obey – not by your natural power but by the Spirit's power; not to earn God's favor, but to form new habits that build on gospel truth.
- I beg of you to take this personally, not leave it on the level of theory. Do some examination:
 - How can I arrange my day to intentionally think about gospel truth?
 - What habits need some attention? Mouth; eyes; hands; feet
- The world is watching to see if your Christianity – if your “good news” – makes a tangible difference in how you live. It can and it will if you let it. Romans 12.1-2

SESSION 10 – Romans 12-13: Being the Church

- As we get close to the end, let's remember what we've learned: Romans...
 - 1-4: Explaining the gospel – by grace through faith in Jesus, just as he promised
 - 5-8: Exploring salvation – freedom from death, sin, law, life in Christ and Spirit
 - 9-11: Engaging a problem – despite Israel's unbelief, God's plan is working
 - 12-16: Encouraging the church
 - Basis: mercy
 - Goal: wisdom later: add love
 - Process: Obey. Think. And if we stopped here, we would be missing something absolutely necessary.
- Paul does not write Romans to a bunch of individuals; he writes it to the church. Romans 12-16 is not just “practical advice for a successful life”; it is inspired wisdom for how to be the church. God's purposes in the Old Testament centered on a community: Israel. And now that community has grown to adulthood and is defined not by ethnicity but by Jesus and faith. We are God's people; we are the church. And we are a “we,” not just a you or me.
- **We compare and compete (12.3-8)**
 - I don't know who first said that the ground is level at the foot of the cross, but we forget this at our peril. Our eyes are to remain fixed on Christ. And the moment you find yourself looking down on someone, you're no longer looking at Jesus.
 - I have no problem with healthy competition. If we ever play games together, I will try to win. But church is not a game. We are not playing a game; we are in a war. And in a war, you don't compare and compete with your fellow soldiers.
 - No place in the church for this junk. We do not fight for our territory. We fight for the gospel, for sure. But we do not fight for me or my people. We support; we encourage; we work as a team.
- **We love *some* people (12.9-13.7)**
 - What impresses me about this bit of Romans is the scope of those we are called to love. Paul includes everyone.
 - People who need us or whom we need.
 - People who are above and below us socially.
 - People who are mean to us.
 - In chapter 13, even people who rule over us get some love.
 - There are some specifics that you'll have to study on your own, but Paul's overall point is to show proper forms of love to different people. Love won't always look the same, but we'll have some of it for everyone.

I want to leave you with some questions. Simple, but hard. Do with them what you will:

- 1 . Who do you not naturally love? (person, group)
- 2 . Who are you looking down on?
- 3 . With whom do you compare and compete?

Last thing: Hurting the church is a big deal. Don't do it.

SESSION 11 – Romans 14-15: How to Fight in Church

- So far we've unpacked two of Paul's five "church killers"
 1. We compare and compete / look down on others
 2. We love only *some* people
- Now need to add two more:
 3. We let opinions and preferences drive us (14.1-15.13)
 4. We try to go it alone (15.14-33)
- If we're going to be the church, we gotta find a way to disagree well. Paul gives us just what we need in Romans 14-15.

Here are what I see as the basic principles for navigating disagreement:

1. Don't be driven by opinions and preferences.
 - Most of us tend to think too highly of our own perspective. We treat our opinions like facts. We treat our preferences like biblical mandates. Stop it!
 - Don't judge people according to how you fill in the lines the Bible leaves blank. You are not Lord and Master of all. Christ is, and he accepts people whose cultural preferences differ from yours.
 2. Instead be driven by the example of Christ.
 - Prioritize the good of other people. Serve them, not yourself. It's so simple, isn't it? And yet how many church fights could be avoided or peacefully resolved if both sides actually thought and lived like this?
 - You are not required to obey other people's extra-biblical rules. You are free in Christ to fill in some lines the Bible leaves blank. You don't *have* to do what *they* want you to do. But that doesn't mean you are free to do whatever you want any time you want to. That's not the example of Jesus.
 - Enjoy your freedom in Christ, but don't be a slave to it. You are free from the law not so you can act without love, but because the most loving person in existence lives in you. Let him out! *Live like him by not demanding your freedom in ways that cause others distress.*
 - 15.1-6.
- Don't be driven by opinions and preferences. Instead be driven by the example of Christ. Surely that's simple enough to put into practice.

That's the kind of church I want to be part of. You probably do too. So here are the questions I want to leave you with.

1. Any unresolved conflicts need attention?
2. If everyone in the church had my *attitude*, how well would we disagree? If the answer is ugly, you know what you need to do next.

SESSION 12 – Romans 15.13-16.27: Gospel People

- Let's once more remind ourselves of the purpose and layout of Romans. Paul is writing the letter to (1) Clarify the gospel, (2) Prove God's righteousness, and (3) Unify the church. To this end we've broken down his letter into four parts:
 - 1-4: Explaining the Gospel
 - 5-8: Exploring Salvation
 - 9-11: Engaging a Problem
 - 12-16: Encouraging the Church
- Under this last heading we saw that Paul's basic plan for transformation is pretty simple:
 - Basis: mercies
 - Goal: wisdom / love
 - Process: Body. Mind. Church.
- And under "church" we've examined some "church killers" that Paul urges us to avoid:
 1. We compare and compete (12-3-8)
 2. We only love *some* people (12-13)
 3. We let opinions and preferences drive us (14.1-15.13)
 4. We try to go it alone (15.14-33)
- And to this list I want to add a fifth and final, easily forgettable, danger: We de-value the actual people (16.1-27)
- We live in a time when people are simultaneously idolized and de-valued. Now I *don't* have time to unpack that statement, so let me just get to my point. Romans, like the rest of Scripture, knows what matters.
 - God matters most.
 - People matter to God.
- We've studied Romans. Some of it anyway. Where do we go from here? In short, start or continue being gospel people.
 - Understand the gospel.
 - Live out the gospel.
 - Fight for the gospel.
 - Share the gospel.