



## Overview Lesson ~ You Got Mail!

### St. Paul's Letter to the Church at Rome

#### Discussion Starter

- What is the most important letter you have ever received? What impact did it have on your life?
- Share one thing you already know and like about Romans or one thing you are hoping to learn.

#### 10 Quick Facts about Romans

As you read, put a check by any facts that you already know.

- 1. *Romans* was a letter written to Christ-followers living in Rome, the capital city of the Roman Empire.
- 2. *Romans* is a letter written by the Apostle Paul.
- 3. Even though Paul was a Roman citizen, he did not start the church in Rome, nor had he ever been to Rome. He was writing to many people that he had never met.
- 4. *Romans* is Paul's longest and most theological letter and it is considered to be his most important.
- 5. The content of *Romans* has significantly impacted Church history and this letter played a decisive role in the spiritual lives of St. Augustine, Martin Luther and John Wesley – as well as many others.
- 6. Paul wrote this letter in order to introduce himself to the Romans, to tell them he was going to visit them on his way to **Spain** and to strengthen their faith by making sure they knew the basics of Christian faith and living (since no **apostle** had started this church or taught these Christians).
- 7. The church in Rome had both Jewish and Gentile believers and there was tension between these two groups over whether a Christ-follower had to also follow the Jewish religious law (given by God through Moses in the *Old Testament*).
- 8. This letter is often used to show someone that every person is sinful and separated from God, but a person can be reconciled to God by believing that Jesus' death paid the penalty for their sin. The verses from *Romans* that explains God's plan to *save* us is often called the **Roman Road**.
- 9. Famous quotes about *Romans*: *This Epistle is ... the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy [themselves] with it everyday, as the bread of the soul* – **Martin Luther**. *If we understand this Epistle, we have a passage opened to us [that helps us] understand [all] of Scripture* – **John Calvin**. *The more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is* – **William Tyndale** (translated the Bible into English).
- 10. Paul finally got to visit Rome three years after he wrote this letter, but he went as a prisoner, not a tourist. Church history says that Paul was eventually beheaded in Rome, under the Emperor Nero, because he was a Christ-follower. As far as we know, he never made it to Spain.

**Scoring Key** - If you knew:

**1-3 facts** – It's a good thing you are in this Bible study!

**4-6 facts** – Welcome to "average!"

**7-9 facts** - You are facilitating next week!

**10 facts** - You're the new small group leader!



## Paul Who?

When you hear, "You've got mail," you naturally want to know who sent it! When you receive a letter, how seriously you take the contents depends on how well you know the sender.

### 1. Share with your small group some things you already know about the Apostle Paul.

We have some *biographical information* about Paul (**Acts 8:1-5; 9:1-31; 22:3-5; 26:4-21; Galatians 1:11-12**), but if we are going to take the message of Paul's letter seriously, we will want to know what *kind of person* he was. In other words, we will want to know his *heart*.

### 2. Have several read following scripture out loud and then write some short descriptive phrases or sentences that would give people a glimpse of Paul's *heart*, as if he were a *contemporary missionary* being **sent out** from your church or Bible study.

**Romans 1:1; Acts 20:18-20; 1 Corinthians 15:9-10; Philippians 3:7-12, 20; 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; 11:23-28**

- ♥ If he lived today, do you think you would like to be a close friend of Paul? Why or why not?
- ♥ What, in Paul's life, encourages or inspires you?
- ♥ What do you see in Paul's heart that you would like to see in your own?

## What's the Big Deal?

Why is the letter to the Roman Christians considered to be so important – even called the most important book in the New Testament? **What's the big deal?**

Simply put, *Romans* is the **clearest, most complete** and **most compelling** statement of the *gospel* (the good news of Jesus Christ) in the New Testament. No other book of the Bible has affected the *theology* (the study of God) and the *language* (Biblical terms) of the Christian faith like this letter from Paul. All through Church history, *Romans* has continued to have a *powerful* and *positive* effect in reforming and renewing the body of Christ. The *terms* and *themes* in this Epistle are critical to **understanding** and **believing** the **Gospel of Jesus Christ**.

### 3. Our goal, as we study *Romans*, will be to **discover** and **understand** the *terms* and *themes* that Paul uses in this letter. As a way of introduction, look up the verses listed in the chart below and note anything you learn about term listed or any questions that come to mind. We will, of course, define these things more completely as we work through *Romans*.

Term or Theme	Verse(s) in Romans	Observations or Questions
<i>sin</i>	3:23; 5:12	
<i>the law</i>	2:12-15	
<i>righteousness</i>	3:10; 1:17; 3:21-22	
<i>justification</i>	3:28; 5:1; 10:10	
<i>faith/believe</i>	10:9-10, 17	
<i>salvation/saved</i>	1:16; 10:13	
<i>wrath/judgment</i>	2:5; 5:9	

## So, What's Your Favorite?

4. *Romans* contains some wonderful and powerful verses that often become people's favorites. Look up the following verses and decide on a "small group favorite." (Democracy rules!) You might even be so **bold** as to actually agree together to **memorize** this verse in the next couple of weeks, so that you can "hide it in your heart!" (Feel free to suggest other favorite verses from *Romans*.)

- Romans 1:16
- Romans 5:1
- Romans 6:23
- Romans 8:1
- Romans 8:28
- Romans 11:33-36
- Romans 12:12
- Romans 15:13

And the winner is \_\_\_\_\_!

## Set Free!

One of the main themes found in *Romans* is the **freedom** that Jesus Christ won for us. **Freedom** includes both being set free **from** something and being set free **to be** something.

5. Look up the following verses and state some **freedoms** that are *implied* – either **freedom from** or **freedom to be**. (Both the *New International Version* (NIV) and the *New Living Translation* (NLT) will be helpful.)

Romans 5:9                      Free from \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 6:4                      Free to \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 6:6-7                      Free from \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 6:22                      Free from \_\_\_\_\_; Free to \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 7:6                      Free from \_\_\_\_\_; Free to \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 8:1-2                      Free from \_\_\_\_\_; Free from \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 8:21                      Someday, free from \_\_\_\_\_

## Response

F. F. Bruce (1910-1990), a distinguished Scottish scholar on the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul, said this of *Romans*: "*The impact of **Romans** has not been confined to the "giants of the faith" . . . ordinary men and women have been affected by it too. There is no saying what may happen when people begin to study the letter to the **Romans**. So, let those who have read thus far be prepared for the consequences of reading further – you have been warned!*"

- ♥ What is a goal you would like to set for this year's Bible study?
- ♥ What is a question you would like answered?
- ♥ What is some heart desire you would like God to fulfill in you?
- ♥ What prayer would you like to see answered?