

Ways to Read Romans

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For Evangelism: “The Romans Road”

- Rom 3:10** None is righteous, no, not one.
- Rom 3:23** For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- Rom 5:8** But God shows his love for us in this: while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.
- Rom 6:23** For the wages of sin are death ... but the free gift is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Rom 10:9-10** If you confess with your lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

For Systematic Theology: The Relationship between Justification & Sanctification



As Narrative Theology: Believers Have Been Folded into God's Story Line

Adam — Rom 5:12-21 — as “type of one who was to come” (RSV, ESV, NAS) or “pattern” (NIV) or “foreshadowing” (NEB)

Abraham — Rom 4 — not as warrant for circumcision, but instead as father of all who believe

Moses — not as origin of “works of the law,” but instead as pointer to an obedience grounded in redemption

David — Rom 1:3-4; Rom 15:9 — God's royal Son came in weakness; now exalted in power, He sings the nations into submission

Christ — Rom 10:4 — Christ as “end” of the Law in twofold sense: an end and a beginning

As Pastoral Theology:

The Romans' Situation

- Beginnings at Pentecost — Acts 2:10, “... visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes”
- Claudius issued a decree ca. AD 41 limiting the right of assembly of Jews in Rome (Dio Cassius *Claudius* 60.6.6), nearly simultaneous with a letter to the Alexandrian Jews restoring full rights of assembly (but warning against future sedition). Implication for Roman Jews: discrete congregations, but no central leadership. The lack of a phrase like “the church at Rome” in the opening of Paul's letter, and the suggestion of discrete house churches and clusters of Christians around Rome in ch. 16, suggests early Christians there had to live with the same sort of organizational limitations that Jews did.
- Claudius issued another decree ca. AD 49 expelling Jews because of “disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus” (Suetonius *Claudius* 25). See, for instance, Priscilla & Aquila (Acts 18:1ff). This means that a movement started by “Jews and proselytes” lost its Jewish leadership core and founding identity — through the early 50's it was entirely Gentile.
- It's now ca. AD 57. Claudius is dead and Nero (his nephew) is the new emperor, and apparently has no grudge against the Jews. Roman Jewish Christians are

returning to a largely Gentile church — for instance, Priscilla & Aquila (Rom 16:3-5). But what are they finding?

Rom 11:18,25; Rom 14:1-15:13 — and note Paul's repeated emphasis on there being "no difference" between Jew and Gentile

What if your church's founders were "exiled" for several years, and returned to find their spiritual "antonyms" were in charge?

E.g., exclusive psalm-singers by "praise song" singers; evangelists by social activists; Arminians by Calvinists

- In many respects the pastoral thrust of Romans lies in chapters 9-11 (Gentiles have no bragging rights in the Kingdom of God — God isn't finished with Israel) and in chapters 14-15 ("You all show some deference to one another). As one (less than eminent) NT scholar contextualizes:

"One sings praise songs as well as psalms. Another abstains from praise songs and sings only psalms. Let not him who sings everything despise her who abstains, and let not her who abstains judge him who sings everything; for God welcomes him. . . . He who sings everything sings in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God. She who abstains, does so in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. None of us lives to ourselves, none of us dies to ourselves."

Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice*, pp. 155-156

Paul's Situation & Aims

- Desires a Relationship with Roman Christians — thus, the unusually long list of greetings
- To Request Prayer for the Collection ... Rom 15:23-33
1Co 16:1-4
2Co 8:1-9:15
- ... in Anticipation of Trouble in Jerusalem Rom 15:30-31
- To Solicit Help for the Mission to Spain ... Rom 15:24
- to which end, to offer an Outline of His Gospel Rom 1:16-17)

My Own Personal Assumptions in Reading Romans:

1. There's always a **larger story** — the vindication of God's own character, the demonstration of his righteousness, his holiness, his faithfulness, his mercy, and his love ... God, Israel, Jesus, the Jew-Gentile Church

2. There's always **my story** — my “image-of-God-bearingness,” thus my accountability, guilt, shame, aloneness, and powerlessness; thus also my redeemability, my place in his family and purposes

3. To get at both sides of the story, it's profitable always to be asking **three things**:

- What is **Faith's** read (**Normative Perspective**)?: What's this passage tell that I need to know about God? how am I being called to reimagine Him ... what truths are there? what new insights into his heart and his demands? What furthers “the obedience of faith”? What are “the commandments to keep”? (See Rom 1:5; 1 Cor 7:19)
- What is **Hope's** read (**Situational Perspective**)?: What new aspect to the story of deliverance do I see in this passage? How's he shaping the “Israel of God”? How may I take up my role in “new creation”? How am I being called to reassess my world in light of what He's up to in it? — my community, my relationships, my job ... everything. (See Rom 11:12,25-26; Gal 6:15-16; 2 Cor 5:17)
- What is **Love's** read (**Existential Perspective**)?: What's this passage tell me that I need to know about me ... what I'm being delivered from and to, in my inner being, my drives & aspirations, my affections, desires, and motivations? How may I better find in myself “faith working *in love*”? (See Rom 8:1-4; 13:10; Gal 5:6)