

Episode: Paul's Letters Series No. 09

Narrator: Tertius

Primary Scriptures: Romans 1-8

Story Summary: Paul's letter to the churches in Rome

Location: Roman Empire; Italy; Rome

Time: AD 30 Jesus crucified and resurrected; Pentecost; Holy Spirit arrives
 AD 48 Paul's "famine visit" to Jerusalem; First Missionary Journey starts
 AD 50 Council at Jerusalem; Start of Second Missionary Journey.
 AD 53 Start of Third Missionary Journey
 AD 57 Paul writes *Romans* while in Corinth

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Romans 1:16-17, 32; 3:20, 22-23; 5:6, 16, 23; 7:19-20; 8:15-17, 26-27, 28-30, 31, 37-39

There are no exact population figures for the city of Rome in 57 AD, but there were certainly several hundred thousand people living there, and maybe as many as one million. Based on Romans 1:7 and Romans 16, we can surmise there were several house churches in Rome at the time Paul wrote *Romans*.

One of the striking things about *Romans* is that, unlike many of Paul's other letters, it does not address false teaching nor specific problems of a church. This could be due to the fact that Rome's churches had strong leaders such as Priscilla and Aquila.

Though we don't have exact dates, you can think of *Romans* as being Paul's celebration of 25 years of being a Christian. He knows exactly what he believes and has had plenty of practice presenting his beliefs...and defending them.

Many in Paul's audience were non-Jews with little background in the Old Testament. These Gentiles had a background of idolatry and licentious living and needed to understand the heritage of the Jews, which included following the law and the promises of God. The Jews had tried to attain righteousness through following the law, but that didn't work.

Paul wanted to explain how both the Jews and Gentiles had become part of the true Israel, people of God, who attained righteousness through faith. Paul begins the letter by explaining that God is righteous but all humans are unrighteous. God provides a way for people to become righteous through Jesus, if it is received by faith. People are either slaves to sin or to righteousness.

Romans 8 is a powerful testimony to the power of a Spirit-empowered life, and the future glory that believers will obtain. Perhaps the most comforting verse in the New Testament is found in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Discussion Questions:

1. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul clearly states his beliefs about what kinds of behavior are sinful and evil. Modern society disagrees with much of what Paul says. Do you think Paul's beliefs are still valid or do you have reasons why they are not?
2. Romans 4:3 refers to Genesis 15:6 and 15:22, which say that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. How did Abraham demonstrate his belief? How do you demonstrate your belief in God?
3. Romans 4:17 says God calls into being things that were not. What kinds of things can God call into being that didn't exist before? Does God still do this?
4. According to Romans 6:22-23, what are some beneficial results of being set free from sin? Can you be released from sin by just trying harder? How can you be set free?
5. Read Romans 8:28. Do you tend to stop reading that thought before its finish. How do verses 29 and 30 affect your understanding of verse 28?
 1. According to Genesis 1, he called virtually everything into being that didn't exist before. He can also call into being things like: love, respect, glory. 4. Holiness, eternal life. You cannot free yourself, it can only be done by God.

Application Questions:

1. Paul opens this letter by calling himself a "servant" of Christ Jesus. The word "servant" can also be translated as "slave". When you think about your relationship with Jesus, do you think in terms of being His servant? Do you think your relationship is voluntary, or have you made a commitment so strong that it is a complete obligation? Does a committed relationship feel odd in a society that prizes independence?
2. Romans 7:15-24 are some critical verses that explain why Christians sometimes behave irrationally. The power of evil is clearly very strong. How do you quit behaving in ways you don't want and begin behaving in ways you do?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Paul says that some people not only participate in evil, but also approve of those who do evil. Are there times when you don't do evil things but approve of those who do them? Do you show approval of the evil behavior of some celebrities if you support their products and services?
2. Romans 6:12 says not to let sin reign over your body so you obey its evil desires. Does this verse also apply to your mind? What can you do to keep sins from having control over your body and mind? Does Romans 6:14-18 offer solutions to sinful behavior that you can actually use, or do those words just sound good?
3. Romans 8:28 is often misquoted. Does this verse mean that God wants good things to happen to all people, or even to all Christians? What is the difference in "for your good" and "good things?"