

Romans - Introduction

Growth Groups 2018-19

'This Epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul. It can never be read or pondered on too much and the more it is dealt with, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes'

Luther – preface to Romans

Breakdown of Romans

1:1-17	Introduction	
1:18-3:20	Problem	Jew and Gentile alike under sin and the law can't help
3:21-4:25	Solution	Justification from God, by faith, apart from the law
5:1-8:39	Consequence	Freedom, life and hope through the gospel, not law
9:1-11:36	Israel	Israel's rejection of the gospel is, surprisingly, part of God's plan to unite Jews and Gentiles
12:1-15:13	Implication	The gospel calls for holiness, love and mutual acceptance in light of that plan
15:14-16:27	Conclusion	

Wonderful Gospel Truths

Romans 3:23	For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.
Romans 6:23	For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Romans 5:8	But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 10:9	If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.
Romans 5:1	Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."
Romans 8:38-39	I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Bible Project - Romans

Audience

Jewish Christians - 4:1 – Abraham was OUR father according to the flesh,
7:1 - Brothers— I am speaking to those who know the law

Gentile Christians- 1:5-6- you are among those Gentiles called to belong to Jesus
11:13- I am talking to you Gentiles.

Historical Situation

49AD – Jews (Christian & Non-Christian) driven out of Rome by decree of Claudius

54AD – Claudius’ decree elapses as he dies allowing Jews to return

57AD - Paul writes letter probably from Corinth.

Letter’s Purpose – Unity and Mission

“God is glorified in a united missionary church humbled together under grace.”
(Christopher Ash: NIV Proclamation Bible)

Paul travels for unity and mission

In pairs – Read Romans 15:22-29 & mark on Paul’s planned journeys

How do his journeys demonstrate his desire for unity and mission?

Why does Paul want to go to Spain according to 15:20?



Paul's writes for unity and mission

Paul writes:

To a mature church... (15:14)

...struggling with disunity... (14:1-4)

...and suspicious of Paul (1:8-13)

Paul writes the gospel:

To establish Christians (1:12, 16:25)

To humble Christians (5:6-8, 3:27, 12:1-3)

To breed Christian unity (13:8)

To show the world needs the gospel (3:9-20, 10:13-15)

To teach our new life of service (6:15-18)

To call us to help evangelise the nations (15:24)

Preparing before Studies

Paul says in 2 Tim 2:7 that we should 'think over what [he says], for the Lord will give [us] understanding in everything.' It's God's work to give us insight, so we should pray, but he works through our work – that we should *think* over what the bible says.

Put simply - the more we put into studying Romans, the more we will get out of it. If we come having read the passage and thought about it in advance, the times in our groups will be even more helpful (the outline of the year is below).

Here are some questions we could ask of any passage in Romans. Feel free to use them as a way to prepare, maybe in your quiet times/devotional times leading up to the Growth Group study itself.

- How would you divide up the passage into sections and what title would you give each section?
- What shocks are there in the passage?
- What does the passage teach us about God, and about ourselves?
- How does this fit into what Romans has been saying so far?
- What questions do you still have about the passage?

Bible Handling Tools

As well as knowing God through Romans, we want this year to leave us all better equipped to read the bible for ourselves. Each study we'll look at a different 'tool' we can use to understand God's word. Some of the main tools are listed below.

1. Author's Purpose tool

The biggest question we can ever ask of a passage in the Bible is simply, 'Why did the author write this?'

2. Context tool

Words come within sentences, sentences in paragraphs, paragraphs in chapters, chapters in sections ... If you take a text out of context, you're left with a con!

3. Structure tool

How has the author broken down his material into sections? How do these sections fit together?

4. Tone and Feel tool

pay attention to how the point is being made. Is it happy? Tragic? Comforting? Frightening? How does the author want you to feel about what he is saying?

5. Linking Words tool

Whenever you see a 'therefore', ask what it's there for! And the same goes for words like because', 'so that', 'for', etc.

6. Quotation/ Allusion tool

When the author quotes or alludes to another part of the Bible, we should turn there to see what ideas he is picking up on.

7. Repetition tool

Sometimes the author says something more than once to make sure that we don't miss it. Sometimes the author says something more than once to make sure that we don't miss it.

8. Copycat tool

Is the author holding up one of his characters as someone we should imitate, or whose likeness we should avoid?

9. 'So What?' tool

What implications does this have for me? For my church? For an unbeliever?

10. Parallels tool

Bible poetry doesn't tend to rhyme. Instead, it says the same thing twice in different words (and so you get two chances at understanding it): 'Twinkle, twinkle little star; Shiny, shiny, tiny nebular'.

11. Narrator's Comment tool

Sometimes the author breaks into his narrative to explain on (a kind of 'Pssst, reader, make sure you understand this...')

12. Vocabulary tool

Bible meanings. Be alert in case the author is using a familiar word in an unusual way.

13. Translations tool

the passage in more than one translation, just in case there is a nuance that one version has missed.

14. Genre tool

There are many genres in the Bible -- e.g. song, historical narrative, genealogy, law. Identifying the genre is important to how we interpret a passage.

15. Bible Timeline tool

Where is this passage on the Bible timeline? Where am I on the Bible timeline? How do I read this in the light of what has happened in between (e.g. the other side of Jesus)?

16. 'Who Am I?' tool

Whose shoes in the passage are we supposed to step into? If any!

Growth Groups this Term

26/09/2018 Study 1:1-17

03/10/2018 Study 1:18-32

10/10/2018 Prayer + How to work for God's glory

17/10/2018 Study 2:1-16

24/10/2018 Group socials (arranged by group leaders)

31/10/2018 Study 2:17-3:8

07/11/2018 Study 3:9-20

14/11/2018 Prayer + How does God guide?

21/11/2018 Study 3:21-31

28/11/2018 Study 4:1-25

05/12/2018 Christmas Prayer +

12/12/2018 Prayer Meeting

09/01- 03/04 Term 2

24/04- 10/07 Term 3

Eight things to Remember about Growth Groups

(adapted from the Good-Book Company Blog by Tim Thornborough)

1. **Our attendance really matters.** Even if we're dead on our feet, with numbed neurones from a brutal day at the grindstone—just being there will be a massive encouragement and help to others.
2. **Our thoughts really matter.** We don't want the Bible study to be "lively" for the sake of it. A growth group is an expression of a fundamental principle of the Christian life: God's people gathered around God's word, trying to work out how God would have us live for him today. Sharing our thoughts from the passage with the group—even if we are nervous to speaking up, or think our observations are obvious—is really important for everyone in the room. It's what fellowship is all about.
3. **Our prayers really matter.** We pray en masse at whole church gatherings, but it is in small groups that prayer takes on a more intimate character. We bless and encourage others by praying out loud for them, and by engaging with their prayer requests in a way that shows we have listened and understood what they are struggling with.
4. **Our prayer requests really matter.** As forgiven sinners, Christians should be free-er than most to admit weakness, failures, needs. Doing so in a small group is easier than a larger group, and it helps others to know that they are not alone in their experience of weakness and failure. This is surely part of what James means when he encourages us to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16).
5. **Our gratitude matters.** Prayer times can often be characterised by a lot of grumbling: illness, trauma, conflict and ... well, more illness! Expressing things we are grateful to God for is a great example to set for others—especially if what we are grateful for is everyday experiences that others will have. If we invite people to rejoice in God's goodness and grace with us, we will make our group prayer times more rounded and rewarding.
6. **Our laughter matters.** There should be moments for seriousness any time Christians meet. But our gatherings are chiefly characterised by joy. After all, we share the riches of Christ, and look forward to eternity together. Every growth group should be a little taste of heaven. So smiling and laughing with the group is of particular importance; if we treat it as a business meeting, or a classroom, we're missing the point.
7. **Our dependence on the group matters.** All the above adds up one thing. Participating in our growth group with joy is a sign that we have got a healthy relationship with church. Not a club to dip into. But a family to belong to, that depends on each other in tangible ways.
8. **All the Growth Group program matters.** Whether it's encouraging each other over food together, hearing talks on a particular issue or praying corporately for the needs of the church. Our aim is to grow as a group (the clue's in the name!) in likeness to Jesus and dependence on him and all parts of the Growth Group program serve this end.