

# Romans: The Big Picture

## Introduction

- A. For almost three weeks now our Bible reading has taken us through the book of Romans. While this is a great book, let's be honest; it can really challenge us too. Did you find yourself hitting the pause button, backing up and reading back through some of this again? Maybe you tried several times to read a few of these places and still weren't quite sure you got the point.
- B. I want to encourage you to remember a couple of things as you continue with the Bible reading challenge. Remember that our goal is to read the Bible more this year. Our goal is to find things in God's word that will help us live for Him. Our goal is not to understand every verse of every chapter in every New Testament book. We're not going to figure it all out this time through. So even if you hit a few rough spots, keep on reading.
- C. Getting back to Romans, Max and I decided that we would use the lessons today to give you a little help with this great book. Tonight Max will discuss three of the challenging passages we have encountered reading through the book. Our hope is that this will shed a little light on some of the places where you may have struggled. In the lesson this morning, I want us to step back and see if we can get the big picture of Romans. What is Paul's basic message in this book? If we can get the big picture, it will help us figure out more of the detail. In this lesson we will examine three verses that will serve to summarize Paul's message in this book.

## Key Passage [1]      Romans 3:9-10

- A. These two verses summarize the main point Paul has been making in the early chapters of this book: All men are sinners.
  - 1. He opens the book by leveling this charge at an easy target – the pagan world around them. They should have known better; the evidence for God was all around them (**Romans 1:20**). But instead of being grateful to God and honoring Him, they chose to reject Him and throw themselves completely into sin. Paul graphically describes the downward spiral that follows (idolatry, homosexuality, and all kinds of evil, **vs. 29-31**). There is a warning here for all of us. When we choose to reject God, we have no idea what kinds of terrible places this downward spiral will take us. Notice also that, while God certainly does not want this for His creation, if we insist on taking this path, He will not stop us (**vs. 24, 26, 28**, "God gave them over...").
  - 2. As Paul says all of this, you can almost hear the "amen's" from the Jewish crowd ("Yea, those pagans are really bad."). And yet, Paul makes clear in chapter 2 that they were not innocent (**Romans 2:1**). They too had dishonored God with their disobedience. Though they prided themselves as those who knew the law and showed others the way, Paul says they needed to teach themselves (**Romans 2:21-23**).
  - 3. Can you see how all of this is building to our key passage – Romans 3:9? Paul wants us to see that all men are sinners – both Jews and Gentiles (**Romans 3:23**).
- B. But there is more to this problem than simply the fact that it is pervasive – ultimately infecting all men.
  - 1. This is a serious problem with the most terrible consequences (**Romans 2:5-11**). It doesn't matter who I am, in the end I will be judged according to my deeds. God will be completely fair with every one of us.
  - 2. If I choose the path of sin and do evil, I will be on the receiving end of God's wrath (**Romans 2:8-9**). The possibility described here is terrifying.
- C. But there is more. Once I choose to be a sinner, I stand condemned and there is nothing I can do to fix the problem (**Romans 5:6**).
  - 1. When Paul says that we are helpless, he means that we are powerless on our own to fix the sin problem.
  - 2. Left to our own devices, we would be hopelessly condemned. It is a really sad picture.
  - 3. There is simply no way to understate the tragedy of being a sinner. One of Paul's objectives is to make sure his audience understand that all men face this crisis (**Romans 3:23**).
  - 4. Once we see this powerful and painful reality, we will be ready for the wonderful truth to be found in our next key passage.

## Key Passage [2]      Romans 5:8-10

- A. It's hard to appreciate how wonderful it is to be saved until we have properly understood how terrible it is to be a sinner. Having taken us through that valley, Paul shares the good news.
  - 1. God still loves us (**Romans 5:8**). Even though we were rebels; even though we broke His heart again and again with our sin, He still loves us. In fact, He demonstrated His love in the most dramatic way. Even though we were rebels against His will, He sent Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins (**v. 8**).
  - 2. This sacrifice did four great things for us.
    - a. First, it justified us. To be justified means to be declared not guilty. It's hard to imagine how this could ever be said since it has already been made clear that all of us ARE GUILTY. But notice, we are justified "by His blood." The blood of Jesus is powerful – able to wash us of our sins and cleanse us so thoroughly that we can now be declared NOT GUILTY! How awesome! But there is more.
    - b. Because we are no longer guilty, we are saved from the wrath of God which will one day fall on sinners (**Romans 5:9**). I will not have to face the tribulation and distress Paul warned of in Romans 2:9.
    - c. In fact, I'm not only saved from God's wrath, I'm also reconciled to God. As a rebel against God's will, I made myself His enemy. There was no peace in my relationship with Him. In fact, when sinners think about God, they feel fear and dread. No sinner wants to face a righteous God. But because of Jesus' sacrifice, because I can now be justified, I am able to be God's friend again. There is peace in our relationship; and peace reigns in my heart (**Romans 5:1**). But there is more.

- d. Those who are the recipients of these great blessings are able to rejoice (**Romans 5:11**). There is an abiding joy experienced by those who have this most important kind of peace – peace with God. It overrides all the troubles and sorrows of life. No matter what’s happening now, I know things are right with me and God – and that’s the thing that really matters.
- B. Of course, Paul has much more to say about this central theme.
- 1. For example, he will emphasize to the Jews that they are saved by faith in Jesus, not by following the Old Testament laws.
  - 2. But still his central theme remains. Man faces a terrible crisis because of sin. Jesus is the answer.
  - 3. God has done amazing things for us in Jesus Christ. But a critical question still remains to be answered: how will we respond to this amazing expression of His love?
  - 4. This question brings us to our third passage and another key lesson to be learned from Romans.

### Key Passage [3] Romans 12:1-2

- A. There are three things I want you to notice with me in these two verses.
- 1. First, notice the foundation upon which Paul will build his appeal in this verse (**v. 1**, “the mercies of God”). With these words Paul pushes us to look backward at all the things he has said up to this point. He wants us to think again about the amazing things God has done for us in Jesus (my sins are washed away, I’m able to be God’s friend again, I have peace with God, etc.). Because of what God has done, there is something we should do. Paul is about to tell us what that is.
  - 2. Second, Paul says that because of this we should present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Sometimes people say, “God has done so much for us and He asks so little in return.” I think we should reconsider that sentiment. Paul does not say that God only expects a little from us. He says that God expects everything, that we are to give ourselves completely to Him and to His service – to be a living sacrifice (**Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:21**). I live to do His will and bring Him glory. Here’s the tough question: is that what my life is all about? Because if it’s not, then I’m not responding the way I should to what Jesus has done.
  - 3. Third, notice that these are not just fancy words. There is a hard hitting, practical side to what he says here. If we are going to present our bodies as a sacrifice to God, there will have to be some changes (**Romans 12:2**). I cannot continue to live like the world around me. I have to be transformed. I have to become a whole new person. I have rejected the pattern of the world. I’m not interested in what everyone else is doing. I’m only interested in what God wants. Not content even with this, Paul will give us some detail about what this new life looks like in the chapters that follow. You saw it if you did your Bible reading.
    - a. We need to use the gifts God has given us to serve Him (12:3-8).
    - b. We should do this fervently (12:11).
    - c. We should respond to mistreatment with kindness (12:14-21).
    - d. We should respect our leaders and love each other (13).
    - e. We should work hard at maintaining peace with each other and building each other up (14:19).
    - f. Watch for more of these as you read chapters 15 and 16 tomorrow and Tuesday.
 But again, there is a really tough question lurking out there. Does my life look like this? Because if it does not, then I’m not becoming that transformed person Jesus calls me to be.
- B. Here’s the point: when I really understand where I stand as a sinner and what God did for me, there is a natural response that ought to follow.
- 1. I should love Him.
  - 2. I should give myself, wholehearted, without hesitation, completely to Jesus and to His service.
  - 3. My life should be about Him – His will, His work, His service...
  - 4. To do any less just isn’t reasonable.

### Conclusion: one more, perhaps the most important...Romans 1:16

- A. What all these passage demonstrate is the transforming power of the gospel. If you’re a sinner, this message can alter the trajectory of your life. It can take a person who has made a disaster of their life and is facing an even worse fate when this life is over, and it can turn you around. Jesus will cleanse all the past sins. He will give you a road map to get you through this life. You will live with the promise that, when this life is over, you will be with Him forever in heaven.
- B. If you decided to follow Jesus but turned away from Him, this message can change you too. His love can draw you back. His truth can transform your life and help you fix the mess you’ve made. You can have peace once more by getting things right with God.
- C. The gospel is powerful, but there is one thing it cannot do. It cannot overrule a stubborn heart. You have to decide that you will let this power work in your life. What choice will you make today?

- David A. Banning