

ROMANS

You may know a lot of Romans.

Romans gets quoted a lot among Christians. The Scripture readings assigned for Sunday morning this summer include Romans 4 through 14. Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Episcopalians and many other Protestant churches use a common lectionary. Every third year, we read Romans for the summer. It was very important for Martin Luther personally. Romans 3 is central to Lutheran theology and identity:

Romans is written with logical precision. The first-time reader and the repeat reader may feel that Paul makes the same point over and over but it is intentional. Paul carefully presents Jesus' saving work as a gift from God for Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). The points he is making are so important and consequences for our life in Christ are so essential it is worth retelling in various ways. As a reader, if you don't understand something in one paragraph, keep reading. You will soon find a sentence full of clarity. You will soon find a familiar verse or two.

The Apostle Paul is the author of this letter to the church in Rome. He wrote this while he was in southern Greece between 56-57 CE. Most of Paul's letters are to congregations he knew and knew well, but this was written before he was taken to Rome as a prisoner on trial for proclamation of Jesus. (See Acts 28)

Instead of addressing a specific problem in a familiar congregation, Paul addresses issues and questions shared by Christians of that time and today. For example, God's covenant with the Jews through Abraham continues. Gentile Christians do not replace Jews as the people of God. We are all waiting for God to finish the work of salvation when Jesus returns.

There are a few places where background information is useful:

- Romans 1 has a section that includes a reference to homosexuality. The Greek (and Roman) use of the word at that time was limited to men with boys. We would call that pedophilia. It is not about committed same sex attraction.

- Romans 3 through 7 uses the language of the Roman justice system. A judge declares that you are justified: declared innocent of the charges.
- Romans 16: Paul sends greetings and encouragement to many people. Notice how many women are in the list. Some of the names are from the book of Acts, others are only found here. Paul has never been to Rome, but there are people there who are known to him. Brothers and sisters in Christ whose ministry he affirms.

Here are some other verses you may already know:

²¹ But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets, ²² the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ^[d] for all who believe.^[e] For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:21-24

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39

¹² I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12: 1-2