

“Romans” An Introduction

Study in Romans

Romans 1:1-7

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Jeff: Our heavenly Father, we thank You, we praise You. We are gathered together this morning that we might study Your word because we know that Your Spirit and Your word go together, for indeed it is His word and He works through it. You work through it in us. And we know that You work that which is pleasing in Your sight. And we know that the good work that You started in us You will bring to completion. All these things we know to be true because they come from Your word. So Father, as we gather today we are expectant. We have an abiding hope that You will continue to do in us that which is pleasing to You.

Father, we pray for the virtues of Your Spirit, that they may manifest themselves in our lives. And Father, we pray that Your hand will be upon us for good as we interact with others.

Father, we also ask that You would be with our brother Bruce. We ask that Your hand would be upon him for good. We're thankful for his appearance and for his updates, and we pray for his health. Father, we also pray for his wife. We ask that Your hand would be upon her, that You would give her Your sustaining grace.

Father, we're thankful for Andy and his family making it home last night. Lord, we pray that You will continue to bless the Davises, and especially as they are reunited with one another. We pray that their furniture and all that is coming, that all of that would go smoothly, and that they would transition well to their new home. Father, we ask that You'll open our eyes to the wonder of the truth in Your word. Help us, Father, as we study the book of Romans. It's a book that You've used mightily in the life of the church. And Father we ask these things, knowing that we ask them according to the precious name of Your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. It's in His name that we pray. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: Okay. Well let me ask that you would turn to the book of Romans. And I want us to look at the first seven verses today. And some of this is going to be by way of introduction, and so I ask that you turn there now. I'll read the first seven verses.

“Paul, the servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures concerning His Son, who was ascended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of Holiness by His resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ our Lord—through whom we have received grace and apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be His saints. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the word of God.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

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Jeff: All right. Well I think it’s an exciting day today. It’s an exciting day because we’re talking about the book of Romans. I think the book of Romans is one of the most exciting books in the Scriptures, although in some ways everyone talks about the book of Romans and what a meaningful book it is. And yet it’s perhaps the book with the densest theology in it. Oftentimes people love it because it gives the doctrine of original sin. It gives the doctrine of justification. It gives the doctrine of sanctification. It gives all of those things—the doctrine of perseverance, on and on and on. And it is a dense book.

But what’s interesting to me is that it’s not just a dense book. One of the things that just strikes me as very interesting is that it is a book that deals with Jew and Gentile relationships. And so strikingly it’s so meaningful to us as Gentiles. And oftentimes I think that it’s meaningful to us as Gentiles not because of, say, chapters 10 and 11 or chapters 14, 15 and 16. But it’s meaningful to us because of chapters 1-8, and then of course chapter 9 because that’s the predestination chapter, and maybe chapters 12 and 13 because of the “one another” passages, and there’s a little bit on government.

But really the sum and substance of why we love Romans is 1-8. 1-8 is really why we visit the book of Romans as often as we do. And yet what I want us to do is to look at the entire book. I want us to appreciate why it is that we should love the book of Romans—not just the first eight chapters or maybe nine, but all of the book of Romans.

And I want to say some things that I think are helpful by way of getting us started. So I want to look at the introduction and ask the question. Why study the book of Romans at all?

Now you may have some answers of your own. But I have at least three that I want to give to you before we get started in the book of Romans. I just want to give a little bit of background as well.

Why study the book of Romans? Well the first thing that I think we might say is that *it’s the Bible* of course, right? It is; it’s the Scriptures. And when you think about the Scriptures, any one of the books of the Bible, you have the tendency to think.

You know, every once in a while I think to myself that this carpet feels like glue to my feet. Do you know what I’m saying to you? Can I just maybe pause for a minute? I used to wander around a bit. Ever since they put this carpet down I feel like I’m glued to one spot. I don’t know why that is. I don’t know if I feel like I’m going to trip, or what it is. But anyway I’m going to try to walk a minute. *(Laughter)*

So it’s the Bible. And I think that when we think about the Bible we think about the Bible’s attributes. You know, when you think about the Bible’s attributes you think of four of them. You think of *the necessity of the Scriptures*. Why? Because man fell. And in the Fall general revelation was no longer sufficient to save him. You see, general revelation was never built to save sinful men. So it’s necessary; the Scriptures are necessary.

What else are they? *They are authoritative*. General revelation was authoritative. But so too is special revelation in the Scriptures.

And then thirdly we say that *Scripture is perspicuous*. And that’s a fancy word for saying that it’s clear. The Scriptures in terms of the way of salvation are clear. They’re

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not some hidden code or some secret message. They’re clear. Even a child can understand the way of salvation put forth in the Scriptures.

And when you think about the Scriptures you think about the fourth attribute: *they are sufficient*. And so they are sufficient to supply for man’s lack, his need of salvation. They tell the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. Yes, Don?

Don Maurer: I taught a small group the other night on the topic of Islam. And so I decided that I should start reading the Koran. And I’m going to tell you what, you talk about the Scripture. Wow! I mean I would say the exact opposite applies to the Koran. You know, it’s very unclear, very disorganized.

Jeff: Yeah, absolutely. Not a joy to read, right?

Don: No, not at all.

Jeff: No. And so we need to understand that Romans is all of these things. Romans is necessary. It’s just like the other 27 books of the New Testament and the 39 of the Old. It’s just like those. We need to think about it as necessary. We need to think of it as authoritative in our lives. And here’s the challenge. We need to think of it as clear. And we need to understand that it’s sufficient for our needs. This book is sufficient for the way of salvation just like the other books of the Bible. This book is sufficient.

Now I’m going to say something to you a little bit later about access points. And let me just mention this. When you guide someone to the Scriptures, William Perkins in *The Art of Prophesying* says for instance that you can access different disciplines in different ways. One of the things that you can do when you’re studying philosophy for instance is to read an introduction to the general history of philosophy. Or you can get a book on the ideas of philosophy. There are different ways, for instance, to access the discipline. You can do it historically, you can do it ideologically. You can do it from different ways or vantage points.

The Scriptures are the same way. You have 66 books. How many of us would say, “Start with Numbers?” (*Laughter*) I can’t imagine many of us. But we would say—and probably have—to start with John, or to start with another book that might be our favorite.

Well, William Perkins said that you can start with Romans. And he would have said that Romans and John are two of the best access points to Scripture to lead you into the marrow of it. If you want to understand the whole then John and Romans are great places to start.

And Romans is a great place to start. It’s somewhat intimidating, I think, because it’s so didactic and for some so heavy theologically. And yet it’s a rich, rich book. So it’s all of these things because it is Scripture. And I think that’s not something new for you guys. But it’s something that I think that we need to at least say. This is the Bible.

The second one is *God’s providential use of the book*. You know, one of the things that I think is important (and maybe it’s because I enjoy history so much; I love to read biographies; I love to read about how God has worked in the life of the church.) And Romans is one of those books that God has just used in the life of the church. And I think maybe the reason for that is because of what William Perkins said. It’s one of those

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access points into the marrow of the book of the Bible itself. But God has used this book in a rich and full way in the history of the church.

I want to pause for a minute and give you some of those ways. And you’ll know some of them. But for instance Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart (and I don’t know if you know this book; I think it’s a well-worn book by now), but it’s called *How to Read the Bible For All That It’s Worth*.” They say that Romans is the most influential book in Christian history.

That’s a pretty grand statement. I don’t know if you know Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart aren’t historians. But they’re exegetes. In fact each of them wrote a book on how to exegete the Scriptures that is used in many seminaries. In fact I had to use both of these books when I was in seminary, and they’re still being used today. These guys are guys who are steeped in the Scriptures and also able scholars, and they know a thing or two. And I think they’re right; it’s probably the most influential book in Christian history.

This was the book that was at heart and at root for Augustine’s conversion. This is the book where he’s seated in the garden, remember? And he hears the voice of a child: “Take up and read.” And this is after a long pilgrimage through Manicheanism and Neo-Platonism and all of these isms. And he arrives in this garden. He’s been listening to preaching. But he’s sitting there in the garden and this is what he hears.

Now one of the things that you have to understand is that Augustine had lived a life of licentiousness. He had been an immoral man. He had a child out of wedlock; he wasn’t married to the mother of his son. He would move to these places and she would follow him to those places. And eventually, when he joins the church, he does not marry her, and so on. You know, he has a very checkered background by the time he comes to Christianity.

And he’s the kind of guy who basically says this. And this is his prayer in his *Confessions*. “*Lord, save me, but not yet.*” (*Laughter*) You know, he was enjoying his sinful lifestyle, the lust of the flesh.

Well he’s in this garden. And he hears this voice say, “*Tolle lege.*” “Take up and read.” And here is what he turns to and reads. Now knowing what I just said, listen to this. “*Let us walk properly as in the daytime—not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*”

That’s what he read in the garden that day when he heard those words “take up and read.” And he said that his life was changed. And his life was changed through reading these words in Romans. You know, it’s the Spirit and the Word working together. And his life was changed and altered forever. And not just his, but the Christian church’s because of the influence that he’s had.

How about Martin Luther? Martin Luther would say that his conversion had to do with his reading Romans—reading Romans in a different way than he had previously. And we’ll talk about that when we get to Romans 1:16 and 17. We’ll talk a little bit about Luther and the horns of the dilemma he was in. I want to bring in some background about

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Luther because when you do you realize that the Reformation was really a reformation in his understanding of Scripture and really his understanding of the doctrine of God.

But Romans 1:16 is really a powerful text in Luther’s life. *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes—to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*

Now I think I will say a couple of things right now about this. Luther is really on the horns of a dilemma. And the horns of the dilemma that he is on are these. Basically you have the *nominalists*. And I’ll just say this now; we won’t make a big deal out of this now. On the one hand you have nominalism, and on the other you have *Neo-Augustinianism*, which is in some ways mysticism.

Now this nominalism basically said that there is a difference between the naked sovereignty of God and the covenantal sovereignty of God, okay? Now the naked sovereignty of God means that God can do absolutely anything he wants. And that can even tread in a direction that would indicate that God could perhaps take on different attributes; He’s that free. In other words, He has covenanted to be merciful to us and just, and so on. But the covenantal power of God is leashing the naked sovereignty of God. So the only thing that stands between us and the naked sovereignty of God to do absolutely anything He wants is the covenantal leash that God has put on Himself, right? But the fact of the matter is that if you’re Luther you’re going, “If God had enough power to put that leash upon Himself and to restrain Himself, then can’t He take that leash off?”

And so he’s always worried. And one of the things that he’s worried about is, he’s worried about the way in which the nominalists have taught about salvation. In fact some of the old nominalists grew out of some of the medievalists who taught that God’s demands in terms of God’s covenantal leash—this is what God says He will do, but what does God require of me?—Well, God requires of me what was called *facientibus*—offering my very best.

Sig Tragard: That must be German.

Jeff: It’s Latin.

Sig: And Martin Luther is saying that about what God requires.

Jeff: So the nominalists were saying that God puts this covenantal leash on Himself. But our part of the covenant is to offer *facientibus*. And the *facientibus* is to offer our best.

Sig: He’s not saying a dirty word, is he? (*Laughter*)

Jeff: Don, delete that from the manuscript. (*Laughter*) So here is God’s covenantal leash on Him. Here’s what He says He’ll do for me. He’ll reward me if I do what? If I offer my very best.

Well, you can now understand the dilemma that Luther is under. The question he’s asking is well, what’s my very best? And it’s out of this nominalism that Luther’s concerns about “Have I confessed enough? Have I done enough?” grow.

And he would go to Von Staupitz, his spiritual advisor. And his spiritual advisor would basically tell him, “Let go and let God.” He was a mystic. He would say to him, “Martin, just relax!” You know, in fact, in some ways he was close to being what we might call an

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antinomian. Don't worry about the law at all. Just sort of give yourself over to God and let Him worry about it.

And so Von Staupitz was telling him, “Look, Martin; it's by this mystical grace.” And others were saying, “Oh, no, no, no! It's do your best.” And you can see why Luther is going nuts. He's conscientious; he comes and confesses everything.

Von Staupitz says, “Martin Luther, if you're going to confess something, bring me back a good sin,” right? (*Laughter*) “Stop bringing me back these peccadilloes.” And that's the dilemma he's in.

Now he reads Romans 1:16. And he sees righteousness not now as what God's going to do to me if I don't offer my best, but he sees righteousness as the righteousness that God gives to me freely in Jesus Christ. And when he understands that this is what he says. He says, “*I felt that I had been born anew, and that the gates of heaven had been opened. The whole of Scripture gained a new meaning. And from that point on the phrase ‘the justice of God’ or ‘the righteousness of God’ no longer filled me with hatred, but rather became unspeakably sweet by virtue of His great love.*”

His new understanding of God's righteousness was not as God's justice for him not offering his best, but now righteousness is something God gives or imputes by the Lord Jesus Christ. And when he understood that things changed for Martin Luther.

We'll talk about that. I'll talk about that not from Luther's vantage point, but we'll talk about that from the perspective of Romans itself.

In other words, let me ask this. And I won't answer it now because we're not in 1:16 yet. But the question that we need to ask is this. Is that what 1:16 really says? Is Luther a good exegete at this point? Or do we have to wait till we get further into the book of Romans to find out that righteousness is something that God gives? In other words, is this an attribute of God that is descriptive of God, or is it something that God gives to us, at least in Romans 1:16 and 17? We'll have to wait and find out. But it's an interesting question. But you can see how Romans 1:16 and 17 was clearly bound up in the life of Martin Luther in terms of his conversion.

And not just him. Robert Haldane wrote a commentary on the book of Romans. He visited Switzerland in 1816. And he basically started to lead a Bible study. And the Bible study that he started to lead was on Romans. And it started a revival in Germany amongst these students. And in fact the Bible studies become the commentary on Romans. And there were some significant people who were saved out of that Bible study that became famous writers, and so forth at that time in history. And I think one of the guys was Bishop Kenneth Latourette, the historian. He was one of those guys that came out of that Bible study. So it's really fascinating. And Banner of Truth still publishes that work today. It's *Romans*.

Sig: Was that the full name of it, Jeff?

Jeff: I think it's *Romans*. I think it's “The Geneva Series” from The Banner of Truth.

John Wesley goes to a Moravian meeting on Aldersgate Street; I think that's the name of the street. It's a well-known story. There is going to be reading from Martin Luther's Preface to the Romans. And it's at that meeting that Wesley says that the Lord moved in his heart. So it's a fascinating thing.

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John Calvin says this. He says, “*When anyone understands this epistle, he has a sure road open to him to the understanding of the whole of the Scriptures.*” Again I think he’s following William Perkins’ idea in this. William Perkins says in *The Art of Prophesying* that basically John and Romans are two of the great access points of Scripture.

So one of the things that you find is that this book is well used by God in the history of the church to do some significant things when you think about it. In the life of Augustine it makes such an influence and in the life of Luther who is really the fire at the beginning of the Reformation. John Calvin talks to us about it and Robert Haldane at the head of a revival, and so on and so forth. So all kinds of wonderful things as we think about the book of Romans and the way that God uses it in history.

There’s a third reason for studying the book of romans, and it’s a theological reason. When you think about theology you think about it as just one of the theological disciplines. For instance, when you think about the New Testament or the Old Testament you think about the method of exegesis, right? How do we understand? How do we read out of this text what is in it?

When you think about Biblical theology what do you think about? You think about history, the method of historical unfolding, historical progress. When you think about systematic theology you think about logic. You think about the arrangement of ideas in a logical order as they come from the Scriptures.

And so when you think about systematic theology you can distill it into one question. What does the Bible say about x? That is a quintessential theological question.

So you can ask yourself. What does the Bible say about sin? And when you ask that question what you’re asking is not a historical question—in other words, how does the Bible reveal the doctrine of sin over time?—but you’re asking, what does the Bible say about sin? What does it say about its spread? What does it say about its nature? What does it say about it? And that’s a theological question. So what does the Bible say about x?

Now when we turn to the book of Romans we can ask this question. What does Romans or the Bible say about sin, the law, justification, imputation, sanctification, union with Christ, election, civil government, and on and on and on Those questions, at least from this epistle’s standpoint, are answered for us. And this is in part where I say that this epistle is such heavy theology. It’s good theology. It’s theology that we all ought to be interested in studying. But it’s still theology nonetheless.

Now I want to say a couple of things—one just briefly. But first of all, up until the time of F. C. Bauer, which is the mid-19th century, up until that time romans was thought of just the way I’m talking about it, a theological compendium. It was a theological book. And in fact Philip Melancthon who was a good friend of Martin Luther called it “*a religious compendium*”—the Christian religious compendium, a theological book. This was the way Romans was understood up until the 19th century, the 1800s, when F. C. Bauer was living. Andrew Stive in 1945 in his commentary on Romans still calls it “*a compendium of religion.*”

What changed? Well, I’ll tell you what changed. And I’m not going to spend hardly any time here at all. But what changed is this. What changed is that the higher critical

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method came into the study of the New Testament. And when the higher critical method came into the study of the New Testament, the idea of it being a theological text or a dogmatic text was pushed out. And what came to settle on the book’s study was its historical context and why it was written.

And once that started to happen the book started to be treated like a book that you could pull apart, or a book where you could say, “Well, because of this it only mattered in the first century. It didn’t really matter in other centuries.” And did it really happen in the first century to begin with? What happened? What’s part of the original book? For instance, what about chapter 16? Is that really there? Or what about chapters 14 and 15? Were they late editions? Are they part of the original book? All of that kind of questioning started to enter into the study of the book of Romans. And when it did the idea that it’s a theological compendium gets pushed out.

And that kind of thing only remains in circles like ours today. When you go outside of our circles the idea of higher critical work is really ripe in those circles. And so they’re not talking about romans like we are talking about Romans, and like we’re going to talk about Romans as a theological text that answers a lot of theological questions. Well, before I say something about the background of the book, is there anything that you want to talk about in terms of those reasons that I’ve given you? Do you want to add some others or talk about these things?

Sig: So what you’re saying though, Jeff, when it comes to higher critical thinking, is it questioning Romans theology, or it being a foundational theology of the Bible?

Jeff: Well, in one sense there are a number of things that you have to consider. For instance, did you ever hear anybody talk about Lukan theology or Pauline theology—you know, those kinds of things? Well, this is a product of that same period. And that same period, that period of higher criticism, produced what’s called *Biblical theology*.

Now “biblical theology: is a good word. And we trust names connected to biblical theology. Biblical theology actually has some roots in higher criticism or liberal theology. And so for instance, when it comes out of liberal theology, the idea was that Luke had his own theology. And it may be different from Paul’s theology, okay? And there’s a Johannine theology, and so on and so forth.

And so let me give you a for instance. Take Paul’s theology. There might be an early Pauline theology and a late Pauline theology. So for instance some might interpret Philippians chapter 2 as being what? A pre-existent Christology. In other words Christ was pre-existent before He arrived on earth. And I would say, “Yeah!”

And then others would say, “Well, yes. But we also detect a strain of adoptionism.” And so in adoptionism Christ wasn’t pre-existent. But the man Jesus was adopted to be the Son of God and to fulfill His task on earth.

And some would say, “See, in Pauline theology you actually have two streams. You have this stream and you have this stream.”

So my point is that in higher criticism what you have is that you have a number of things at work. You have this kind of Biblical theology which says, “Well, let’s see if we can pull this apart and pull this apart.” So when you have that, for instance in Romans 1:3 you have “*He was declared to be the Son of God.*” Somebody is going to say, “That

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happens to be the strain of theology that is adoption in nature.” So all of a sudden now we’re talking about things like that. So this is the sort of pulling apart and dicing it up, but dicing it up according to a liberal theology that informs this higher critical method.

You remember the four things that I mentioned earlier. At root the Bible is not necessarily those things, right? For many in liberal theology at that time the Bible was basically the diary of Christian experience, right? It wasn’t an infallible, inerrant word of God. This is basically the existential experience of early Christians for us. But it’s not an authoritative experience.

Bishop Rodgers: It’s their experience, and that’s how they described it. You might describe it differently.

Jeff: We might describe it differently, yes. So you get a guy like Boltmann who comes along. And Boltmann says, here’s the problem. The liberals are wrong and the conservatives are wrong.

And why are the conservatives wrong? Well, the conservatives are wrong because, for instance, they want to dogmatize things like miracles. Okay, fine. A miracle is the way that the early Christians expressed their belief. But we shouldn’t dogmatize that. But the liberals are wrong because they want to cut out all the miracles.

And why is that a problem? Well, that’s a problem because then we’re not going to really know how those early Christians expressed their belief. So we have to keep the miracles in order to understand the primitive way in which our early Christian ancestors expressed their belief.

But we should not dogmatize it like the conservatives want to do. If you don’t believe in the Virgin Birth then all of a sudden you’re out. Oh, no, no, no! And so on. But you see, that’s this liberal theology at work, and the way in which you pull apart the Scriptures, and so on and so forth. Yes, Don?

Don: And you see that happening today. Remember the Federal Vision and N. T. Wright?

Jeff: I do; sure.

Don: He says that Christians—both Catholics and Protestants—have gotten it wrong over the centuries.

Jeff: Yes; that’s right.

Don: Yes.

Jeff: It was not until N. T. Wright came along to save us from a misunderstanding.
(Laughter)

Don: Right; yes. It wasn’t talking about justification.

Jeff: Yes. Well, what Wright says is that justification is not telling us how to be saved, right?

Don: Yeah.

Jeff: Justification talks to us about the church; it talks to us about ecclesiology. It doesn’t talk to us about soteriology.

Don: Right.

Jeff: So why this letter? Now we move into this background. Why the letter to the romans to begin with? Well I want you to think about it like this. Let’s think about the

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letter for just a second. Let’s think about chapters 1-4. Chapters 1-4 deal with justification and sin. Chapters 5-8 we might say deal with sanctification and perseverance. And we might say that chapters 9-11 deal with predestination. But there is a Jew/Gentile thing going on in these chapters.

And then in chapters 12-13 you get things like “one another.” You get things like Christian gifts and life and government, which I think fits under that. And then in 14-15 you get *adiaphora* issues. You drink this or you eat that, and I don’t. What about that? And again this is Jew and Gentile stuff. And then in chapter 16 you have the greetings.

Now I want you to think about that just for a minute. Think about it; there are sixteen chapters in the book of Romans. Five of them are taken up with Jew and Gentile problems. Why is that? Well, I’ll tell you why that is. It’s because the church had gone through a difficult time.

Emperor Claudius was fit to be tied because the Jews, and this particular sect of Judaism called Christianity,—and Christos was their head,—were constantly making disturbances in the empire in Rome. And so he decides, “I’m going to banish a large part of them.” So he banishes the Jews. But he’s really banishing Jews and Christians because at this time the Jews and the Christians appeared to be together. In fact, it’s that way until you get to Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council.

When you look at early parts of the book of Acts, where are Christians going? They’re going up to the temple to pray. Why? Because they see themselves as Jews who have had the Messiah come. I mean, it would be the most natural thing in the world for them to go to the temple. They see themselves as Jews who understand that the Messiah has come. The Old Testament predictions have come true.

And so they’re saying to the Jews, “Look, the Messiah has come.” And the Jews are saying, “Forget you; you’re not of us!” And Claudius says, “No, no, no; forget all of you!” And he expels them.

I think that if you go to 1 Peter and look at those exiles that are dispersed at those five parts of the outermost areas of the empire, I think that you find that those are the Claudian exiles. Claudius more than any other emperor really populates those areas, and I think those are the Claudian exiles.

But after five years they’re able to return. So the Claudian exile happens in about 48 or 49—somewhere in that time. They’re able to return five years later. And Romans is probably written in about 55. And when they return, when these exiles return, they find the church in Rome to be pretty much Gentile in nature. The Jewish influence has in some measure departed. And when they return, now you have Jew/Gentile relationships that need to be navigated. Hence you have chapters 9, 10 and 11, where Paul really talks about those Jews that were cut off and those Gentiles who were grafted in, and what that means for you.

And now you have issues of what about eating meat sacrificed to idols? This is the same kind of thing that came up in Acts 15. You know, you have Jewish people who are very sensitive about that, and you have Gentiles who aren’t. What about that relationship? How should we understand that? How should we live with one another about such a practical issue that divides us?

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And so you have five chapters in the book of Romans dealing with Jew/Gentile relationships. And so I think that when you look at the letter as a whole you need to take that into account. Now I think that one of the things that Paul is doing is that Paul is saying, “Look. You guys need to get along.”

I should also say this. When you look at the last chapters, you can detect maybe five house churches at the end of Romans. It depends on how you count the references. But there are possibly up to five different house churches in Rome.

Now what does Paul want to do? Paul wants to use them as a point of departure to go to Spain. And so I think what he’s doing is, he’s saying, “Look. You guys have to be a stable base for me. If you’re not a stable base for me then I’m going to have trouble, because it’s a long way to Spain.” And so that’s what he talks about at the end of the book. He says, “I’m going to come and visit you on my way to Spain. And I would love to be able to come to you and impart some gift to you. I would love for this to be a great meeting and not a difficult one.” That sort of thing.

So why the book of Romans? Well, it’s these particular issues. But can I also say this? When you think about these five chapters, and we say that these are Jewish issues, brothers, what was Acts 15 all about at the Jerusalem Council? It was about justification. And so when you open up the first four chapters of the book of Romans, this is a Jew/Gentile issue right here. This book has Jew/Gentile relationships written all over it. And I think that we shouldn’t forget that. It’s important for us to think in that way when we open up this book. Okay? All right. Any questions on that before—

Bishop: (*A certain author*) writes his book on Romans and refers to 9-11.

Jeff: Yes.

Bishop: And he misses the whole connection. And he’s a famous Lutheran theologian.

Jeff: And I think that’s why, for instance, that it’s described as being a compendium of theology, because if it’s just a compendium of theology why is 9-11 here?

Bishop: Right.

Jeff: I don’t remember who the guy was. But he was a famous preacher and I think his books are published; a series of books are published on this. But when he got to 9, 10 and 11 he just dropped it; he didn’t preach on it at all.

Bishop: Yes, that’s right.

Jeff: So I think we have to be very careful. I do think it’s a theological text—rich, and so on. But I think that if we’re responsible, if we look at Romans in light of the Biblical theology of the unfolding plan of God, for instance in the book of Acts, then we begin to understand that in this letter this is a live issue in the church in the first century.

Bishop: Not only did he found the church in Rome; he also had to introduce himself. What is it that I teach? Who am I?

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. And think about that. I mean, when you think about that he’s not shy about it, is he? Let me just say it now. We’ll get to it later, but here’s the thing. These Jews come back and they’re all bent out of shape when they look at the life of the church. And so Paul immediately begins hammering on the Gentiles.

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And the Jews are going, “You tell ‘em!” And then by the time chapter 2 comes around he’s looking at the Jews. And he says, “Now let me tell you something.” And they’re going, “What? What are you talking to us for?” (*Laughter*)

And this is hilarious. The Gentiles are going, “Yeah, because they have the law.” And Paul turns back around and says, “no, no, no; you have the law too.” Later in chapter 2 “it’s written on your heart.” And then by chapter 3 he’s going, “Now you all need to sit down and shut up.” (*Laughter*) So it’s just a great letter. But it has a historical context that we really need to pay attention to.

Sig: Jeff, in this early part of the book—obviously not today—would you talk more about offering my best? Because I think that has really crept into the culture of modern-day Christianity. You know, we hear just do your best. That’s all God asks of you, to do your best.

Jeff: Yeah.

Sig: And Martin Luther wasn’t satisfied with that, right? From what you said earlier, that troubled him.

Jeff: Yeah. So basically here’s the idea. The idea is that God creates. And he creates Adam in the context of creation. I think—

Sig: How about we talk with one another?

Jeff: I planned on saying more.

Sig: When you talk about that, I think that’s a big issue today.

Jeff: I do too.

Sig: It leaves the door open to yeah, but you still have to do your very best.

Bishop: The big issue here is that if you’re talking about self-salvation you have to do your best.

Sig: Yeah, right.

Bishop: And your best stinks. Your best is nothing.

Jeff: Yeah. And when you think about that time you can understand “do your best.” But then a guy like Martin Luther comes along and he says, “Okay. Well, what is my best? Everybody else has been happy with just that answer, but I’m suffering as a result of this. What if I’m one sin short of doing my best?” Right?

Sig: But isn’t it in the Sermon on the Mount too? “You know, Moses said to you, ‘Don’t commit murder.’ But I tell you that if you hate your brother you’ve already murdered him.” Whoa, wait a minute now! I’m a good guy; I don’t murder people!

Jeff: See, part of the issue here too—and I’ll just say this in a moment—is the issue between *covenant* and *testament*. And Martin Luther used to understand and once understood this early in his day. In fact, when he wrote the commentary on Romans, he understood covenant as being the best descriptor between our relationship with God.

And why is that? Well it’s because God has things that He brings to the table. And man has things that he must bring to the table. And we’ll talk more about this in a minute. But when Luther came to this realization he said, “no, no, no. It’s a testament, because in a testament, when the testator dies, everything is left to me. And there is no obligation on my part to do anything.”

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And that’s why some Lutheran theology characterizes sanctification as getting used to our justification.

Sig: So you’re saying that Jesus dies. He gives us the whole estate; we inherit everything.

Jeff: Yes.

Bishop: That’s right.

Jeff: So there’s a huge shift in Luther’s thinking between covenant and testament. And so the question then becomes, when you get to chapters 5-8—especially chapters 6 and 7—the question then becomes, is there an obligation on my part? And what is that obligation; what does it mean? What is sanctification? So we’ll talk about those things.

But any last-minute questions? Because next time, apparently, we’ll get to the text.

(Laughter) I so did not want to prove Sig right. *(Laughter)*

Sig: Hey Jeff, this is good stuff. I mean, don’t go fast.

Don: That’s right.

Bishop: Just one comment. I deal a lot with Luther’s stuff. Staupitz gets very close to saying the gospel to him. He said, “*Seek your salvation in the wounds of Christ.*” He pointed him to the cross.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: Now maybe neither of the two fully understood that.

Jeff: Right, right.

Bishop: Not right at that point. But it was awful close.

Jeff: But you know, isn’t it neat? And you’ve done a lot on Luther. Luther and Von Staupitz kept up a relationship long after the break.

Bishop: Staupitz was a father. I mean, he was a real father to Luther.

Jeff: Which is kind of an interesting thing. So what’s your favorite commentary? You’ve done a lot with Luther. Give us the one we ought to read.

Bishop: On Romans?

Jeff: On Luther.

Bishop: Oh, on Luther. Let me think about that. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: You think about that. We’ll start with that question when we come back the next time.

Sig: How about Calvin’s commentary on Luther?? Jeff, it’s a joke. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I was processing. *(Laughter)*

Sig: I thought of a good one and you missed it. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I was processing. *(Laughter)*

Bishop: I think the right way to study Luther is to read his commentary on Galatians.

Jeff: Oh, okay.

Bishop: He called it his wife, his Katie. Every time I taught that course on Luther some students got converted listening. They said it went from their heads to their hearts.

Jeff: So you taught a course on Luther in seminary.

Bishop: Every year.

Jeff: Oh, that’s great.

Sig: Did Ted Wood have access to that?

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Bishop: Yep. I don’t remember if he was in the class or not. But I was teaching it while I was there.

Jeff: Man, I’d better go out and buy a copy. *(Laughter)* All right.

Brave Man: It’s still in print?

Bishop: Oh yes. There’s a somewhat reduced version of it, which is probably right. The original is very repetitive.

Jeff: Kregel does the smaller version.

Bishop: The smaller one is enough.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: Kregel is the publisher. It’s a very moving book. I mean, you just can’t help but be touched in your heart deep down inside.

Jeff: You know, I was just going through Vol. 42 of his *Devotional Works*. It’s 42 or 43; they’re both devotional. I found in there the sayings that comforted Luther. They were sayings he was saying in his castle. And even after his death they went into his castle. And they discovered these in his particular room. His physician went in and saw in his room all these sayings that Luther had written down on the wall. And apparently he would go and write this stuff down and then look at it. He must have been quite a guy; you know what I mean? Katie must have been forever after him, sort of wiping the walls down. *(Laughter)* You know what I mean?

Sig: Do you mean the castle where he was hiding from the people that wanted to kill him?

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: He translated the Scripture.

Sig: So how do you spell Kregel?

Bishop: K-r-e-g-e-l.

Jeff: Okay. Let’s pray and I’ll let you guys go. Father, thank You for this day, for the time You’ve given. And thank You for the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts. Thank You, Lord, for the book of Romans—for the richness of it. And Father, as we enter into the study of it we pray that You’ll work in us mightily. It may be a book we know well. It may be a book that we’ve read numerous times. And yet Your word is so deep and so rich. We know that Your Spirit taking it up in our lives will do things in us that will just be glorious. So we anticipate those and look forward to them. And we pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*