

Introduction to Romans

"The Right Road"

Acts 20:1-3, 20

(Flight to Rome-Pilot: Bro Ricky Cunningham)

On behalf of Flight 116 to Heavenly Airlines, let me say welcome! In a few moments we are going to leave the Corinth International Airport and fly to the great city of Rome. As the pilot, let me go over a few pre-flight instructions as we prepare for take-off. We are expecting a tail wind from the Holy Spirit but it should be a smooth ride. However, if you have flown as long as I have, you know turbulence is inevitable because Satan would love to distract you during this flight.

The purpose during this flight is to prepare you to land in Rome where we will be hiking through Paul's letter to the Romans, verse by verse. The return flight home has yet to be booked in order to allow ample time for weekly hikes. It is our goal to traverse every inch of the theological topography of Romans. While we are hiking these treacherous mountains, rest assured that we will take time to build several camp sites and camp fires, which will allow maximum exposure to the Word of God and plenty of time to digest Paul's great theological doctrines. From time to time, we will break camp and continue our hike up the mountainous peaks of Romans to reach the summit of the personal revelation of God for us in His son, Jesus Christ.

Scripture

"And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even

handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.” Acts 19:8-12

Departing from Corinth

We are departing from the Corinth International airport because Paul wrote his letter to the Church at Rome during his three month stay in Corinth on his third missionary journey. Luke, writing under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, tells us that Paul goes on his third missionary journey after the uproar had ceased in Ephesus. He has been in Ephesus as the apostle to the Gentiles and like many times, Paul immediately entered into the Jewish synagogue. According to Acts 19, he stayed in the synagogue for three months reasoning with the Jews that the kingdom of God had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Their long-awaited Messiah actually came and died on the cross through crucifixion. He was buried, raised from the dead three days later, and now sits at the right hand throne of God, thus ushering in the kingdom of God in its spiritual realm at that very moment. The Bible says there was a group of stubborn Jews unwilling to believe. They caused such a dissension that Paul actually moved his preaching ministry from its location in the synagogue at Ephesus to the hall of Tyrannus. In Acts 19, we learn he begins to disciple the believers in Ephesus on a daily basis for two years.

As believers in Jesus Christ like these men, most of us are not going to get it all overnight, it will take a while. From time to time we can beat ourselves up about our spiritual development, but let us rest assured that the great doctrines of Paul are not going to be mastered overnight but will take time sitting at Paul's feet.

Commotion in Ephesus

After Paul discipled at Ephesus for two years, something extraordinary happens: miracles. Miracles accompanied the early apostles, but in the 19th chapter of Acts, God began to do extraordinary miracles through Paul. He had such an anointing from God that women in Ephesus would take handkerchiefs or aprons that had simply been rubbed up against Paul's skin back to their sick child or demon- possessed cousin. Once that handkerchief touched them, they would immediately be healed.

The Jewish high priest, Sceva, had seven sons who were itinerant exorcists and made their living by traveling to different parts of the world and casting out demons. When they began to see these miracles, they decided to use the name of Jesus in their exorcisms too. They went up to a man in Ephesus and cast out his demon in the name of Jesus. But when the demon came out, he said to these seven brothers, "We know Jesus and we recognize Paul, but who in the world are you?" And the demon whipped all seven brothers. By the time he got done with them, they ran out of the house stark naked, scared to death! All of a sudden everybody involved in the false arts of magic began to bring all of their magic books and made a big pile. They reasoned there were 50,000 pieces of silver in that pile of books, and they lit every single one of them up. What a bonfire to the glory of God!

Demetrius, a silver smith in Ephesus, made his living by making golden statues of the goddess Diana. He began to realize if this kept up, he would be out of a job. He called the other silversmiths and town leaders together and told them a guy named Paul was converting people from Diana to Jesus. He warned the others if it kept up, no one would buy their little statues. This town meeting led to a riot and the silversmiths and town leaders took Paul's companions to be falsely tried.

It is kind of sad today that we have churches on every corner and nobody in the community is taking issue with the church. You may think it is great to be living in a country where a community tolerates religion, but I think it is a sad thing that the community tolerates the name of Christ in our community. **They tolerate the Church in the community because the churches in most of our communities are not making any impact in people's lives.** It would be wonderful if the Church had such an anointing of God, and the people who came were so radically changed that suddenly the people in the community who made their living by sin would realize if the Church remained there, they would be out of business.

Evidence of a Corinthian Origin

As we prepare for our landing in Rome, remember we are studying a letter written by a man that either caused a riot or a revival when he came into

town. By the time Acts 20 opens, Paul is leaving Ephesus and coming to Greece where he stays in Corinth for three months. It was there he wrote his letter to Rome. Some of you might think the Bible doesn't specifically say he wrote it from Corinth, but let me give you some evidence that Paul did.

- First of all, the Bible teaches after staying in Corinth Paul wants to go to Syria, but because the Jews are plotting against him he decides to go back through Macedonia. When he comes to Asia Minor he won't stop at Ephesus because he wants to get on to Jerusalem. In chapter 19:21, he tells us he wants to get to Jerusalem before the day of Pentecost so he can go onto Rome. In Romans 15, Paul tells the Romans that he has a collection of money he is taking to the saints in Jerusalem. He wants to drop this collection off in Jerusalem and when he gets done there, he wants to stop in Rome because he ultimately wants to go to Spain. The very same thing is happening in Acts 20 while he is in Corinth. Paul writes about these same desires to the church at Rome.
- In Romans 16:1, Paul commends Phoebe, a servant of the church of Cenchreae, to the church in Rome. The word servant is where we get our word deacon, except this word is in the feminine form instead of the masculine. Phoebe had been set apart for a special ministry in the church and was very valuable to Paul. She just happened to be going from Corinth to Rome. We know she is in Corinth because she is a member of the church in Cenchreae, which is the eastern port city of Corinth. Paul is writing her a letter of recommendation because she will be bearing the letter from Paul to the saints in Rome herself.
- The second group of people Paul is going to commend in Romans 16:1 is a couple by the name of Aquila and Priscilla. We first meet them in Acts 18 after Claudius banned Jews from Rome. When Claudius came to sit on the throne of Rome in AD 49, a great uproar began in the Jewish synagogue over Chrestus, which is probably a reference to Christ. The fussing and fighting got so bad among the Jews over Chrestus that Claudius banned Jews from Rome and kicked them all out of the city. So Aquila and Priscilla went to Corinth where

they met Paul. When Apollos came to Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos under their wing and began to teach him of Christ because he was well versed in the Old Testament scriptures. When Claudius died in AD 54, Aquila and Priscilla went back to Rome, which is why Paul sends his greetings to them in his letter and shares with the church how they helped his ministry.

Paul writes this letter from the home of a man named Gaius. At the end of the 16th chapter, he actually states that he and Gaius greeted them. When Paul eventually left Corinth, the church began to divide. One said "I'm with Paul," the other said "I am of Apollos," the other said "I am of Peter," the other said "I am of the Lord," and Paul had to write a letter to straighten them out. He said, "Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul or Apollos?" And then he says this, "I thank God I didn't baptize any of you except Crispus, Stephanas, and Gaius." Gaius was one of the few people Paul baptized in Corinth and now he is in the home of that same man writing a letter to the church at Rome to prepare them for his visit. Doesn't it make sense he is writing from that man's home in Corinth?

Eager to Lay a Proper Foundation

Paul was eager to go to Rome. He says right off the bat that he cannot wait to get to them because he wants to preach the gospel in Rome. Remember, Paul was an apostle to Gentiles. His main call of God was to be used of God to bring light to those pagan nations and open their eyes to the truth of Jesus Christ.

The Roman Empire ruled the world at this time. Rome was the capital city. 40 years prior to this letter, in AD 14, historians say the population of Rome had already exceeded 4.1 million people. Paul started out in silence and solitude. After his conversion, he goes into the Arabian Desert for three years, and all he has is Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms to read. For three years, he sits under the Lord in total silence and solitude, only hearing the word of God, and only hearing the voice of God. Now he is out of that desert, and after preaching to the eastern part of the Roman Empire, he is ready to go west to the hustle and the bustle of the big city.

If I can use farming terminology, Paul wants to come and run the combine because he sees the field in Rome white unto harvest. And then he says

this: I want to impart to you some spiritual gift. We do not know for certain what this term “impart to you some spiritual gift” was. Therefore, there are a lot of different opinions in the commentaries and I just happen to have my own opinion too.

We know from the Scriptures that the Church at Rome did not have apostolic authority, which was very important in the beginning of the church. There is a false teaching there that says the Apostle Peter founded the church at Rome. That is not true. There is no biblical evidence of Peter going to Rome and founding a great church. In Romans 15:20, Paul says he wants to come to Rome and preach the gospel, but here is his claim:

“And thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation.” Romans 15:20

The Apostle Paul never went to a place if he already saw the gospel there in the full power of the Holy Spirit working as a church because they were already ministering and serving. When he looked at Rome, Paul did not see a great church. As a matter of fact when Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome, he did not even call them the church. He didn't say he was writing to the church in Rome, he said he was writing to the saints in Rome.

We know from Romans 16 that when Paul greets the 27 people who were there in Rome, they were meeting in at least five different house churches in different locations. If the Apostle Peter, who was considered the apostle to the Jews, had already been to Rome, started a church, and lived there in Rome, don't you think Paul would have sent greetings to him too?

Reasons for the Letter

- If we go back to Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, there was someone from every nation living in Jerusalem at that time on the earth, according to Luke's records as a historian. At the pouring out of the Spirit on the Church on Pentecost, there was a representative from every nation of people. As Peter began to preach, the Holy Spirit fell upon the church and all of a sudden people began to hear him in their own dialects and languages. And God's word says when they began to list off all the different

nationalities that were there, they noted visitors from Rome were present. On the day of Pentecost 3,000 people were saved, followed the Lord in believer's baptism, and then went home different than the way they came. They went home no longer under law, but under grace. They went home with the seal of the Holy Spirit in their lives, suddenly knowing who Jehovah God was. When they arrived back home in Rome, it only makes sense that they invited their neighbors over for a party at to tell them some Good News! These were just common, ordinary people who had their lives changed by the gospel and told people about it. Now Paul sees a great need to go to Rome and give them a spiritual gift, minister to them, and to collectively bring them together under the doctrines of Christ during his visit.

- He also wrote to the Romans because he was going to Jerusalem and was scared to death. The Holy Spirit had been warning him not to go to Jerusalem, but he decided to go anyway. He had been collecting this large sum of money for financial support for the saints in Jerusalem and needed to deliver it, but was worried about the unbelieving Jews. Everywhere Paul went, there were people who followed him and contradicted everything he said. Can you imagine how annoying that would get after a while? Imagine having somebody wait until you led someone to Christ and went to minister elsewhere and this group converges on your disciples to try and change their minds about everything you said? By now, on his third missionary trip, the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem have heard he is teaching against the Law of Moses and Paul fears for his life. He asks the Roman saints to pray for him to be delivered from the unbelieving Jews.
- His third and final reason for writing is not only for prayer support, but also mission support. He told the Romans he had always wanted to come to Rome and preach the gospel, but also needed their support. Paul wanted to go to Rome, then westward to Spain, but knew there must be a unified church in Rome of Jews and Gentiles so they could hold his rope of support, financially and in prayer, as he went to Spain. Paul knew a divided church never accomplishes much for the kingdom of God. When a church becomes divided, they come to church with their eyes fixed on their side of the problem. Paul

knew that must have been happening in the Roman house churches with Jews and Gentiles divided.

The God that Inspired the Letter

Right before we land today, you can look out your passenger window and see a topographical view of Rome, which is a city of seven hills. You will also notice as we begin to hike through Romans that it is a letter of seven theological truths with one thing in common: God. The book of Romans is a book about God. God is mentioned 153 times, and every 46th word is God. The word law is only used 72 times. The word Jesus Christ is only used 65 times. The word sin is only used 48 times. The word Lord is only used 43 times, and the word faith is only used 40 times. This is a book about God.

Seven Mountains of Truth

On this hike, as you camp and warm by the fire, hopefully you will get to know God. As you hike through these seven truths, we will stand on the peak of every one and look down and see them in their fullness.

- The gospel of God
- The power of God
- The wrath of God
- The righteousness of God
- The new life of God
- The faithfulness of God
- The will of God

Now, on each one of these mountains of theological truths, there will be a doctrine unveiled for us. Studying doctrine is crucial to what you believe because eventually you will live out your true beliefs.

The Lesson Plan

- The Gospel of God is going to teach us about God's goodness and His Son, who was fully God and fully man.

- The power of God will teach us that believers who have come to faith in Jesus Christ are saved completely, and will one day reach New Jerusalem because of God's power unleashed in the gospel of God; not one's beliefs, activities, or works.
- The wrath of God will be a theologically-challenging mountain. If you want to know what you really believe about the doctrine of sin, just listen to yourself when you go the hospital and or a funeral. It is not the same thing we talk about in Sunday school or preach from our pulpits. When we go to the hospital for a birth, we rejoice in this good little fellow that has just been born. When we go to the funeral home, we stand in front of those caskets as believers in Jesus Christ and say how good a loved one was. I have never been to a funeral where it wasn't a good guy who died. It is almost as if we believe they are now in a good place because of their good deeds. We have all been to those funerals. Yet, at the hospital and funeral home, all men are good. Yet, the word of God says all men are sinners, but God's not postponing His wrath for sinners one day in a lake of everlasting fire. The Bible teaches the wrath of God is already being poured out on unbelieving men and women at this very moment.
- The righteousness of God will bring us to the conclusion that there is only one hope for man: God, by his grace, let His son die a redeeming death, and those who turn from sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ will be justified in God's sight.
- The new life in God will help us discover once a believer has been made right with God, He does not leave them on their own, but actually crucifies the old man with Christ and puts within them the power of the new life of God, which is the Holy Spirit. Believers are not only forgiven of sin as saints of God, but are set free from sin and can live a victorious Christian life in order to be like Christ one day.
- The faithfulness of God in Romans 9-11 will make some want to go back home. Many have been lied to about this mountain. On that mountain is the doctrine of election. Believers must ask themselves, if Israel is God's chosen people and all of them are not coming to salvation in Christ, then what consolation is there for the elect of God? Is it possible that some of us might not come to full glorification one day? Paul answers these questions in the doctrine of election. I believe Paul put his letter together in a great way. You can never

understand the doctrine of election until you first understand the doctrine of man in sin. Despite what some of you want to believe, man is not drowning, man is already dead. The only hope for him is not a life-preserver he can grab a hold of by his own human effort. He must have God breathe spiritual life into him. Once God has breathed life into that man, he becomes a different being. As soon as one has the spirit of God within them, they can now approach God and understand it is not about them, but the grace of God. In the Church today, we want to begin with the doctrine of election and get all bent out of shape because we do not understand the true depravity of man.

- The will of God enables believers to take this righteousness from God and go out into the world and live a holy life.

A Life-Changing Trip

As we get ready to land this flight, Flight 116, prepare to be changed upon your return after our hikes in Romans.

In 386 AD, there was a brilliant young man named Augustine in North Africa who began to study pagan philosophy. He lived a life of immorality, debauchery, and drunkenness. His mother Monica began to kneel before God and pray for him. She prayed and prayed, but there was no change in his life. One day she went to Ambrose, a Bishop in Milan, and said, "I've been praying for the salvation of my son and God's not answering my prayer, what can I do?" He said to her, "God's going to answer your prayer. I believe God will save your son, keep praying."

Her son was strolling to the streets and came to a garden with some children playing. These children were playing a game in Latin that had a refrain at the end of their game which said, "Take up and read, take up and read, take up and read." Augustine was having a spiritual battle in his soul about religious things. When he came out of that garden, there was a copy of the New Testament lying on a bench. He felt impressed to take it up and read and randomly opened to Romans 13:13-14:

“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.”

Augustine surrendered his heart to the Lordship of Jesus Christ at that moment and was the most influential leader in the church for 1,000 years even after his death.

One thousand years later, a young man was riding his horse when an electrical storm passed through. Lightning hit several yards away from him and knocked him and his horse to the ground. In fear, he cried out before God, “Save me from this and I’ll become a monk.” God saved him and he became a monk. He worked his way up to become a scholar and became the master/teacher at Wittenberg University in Germany.

One day he was getting ready to lecture to his students about Paul’s letter to the church at Rome, and in his spirit, he said to himself, “I don’t like this God, I hate Him sometimes.” This young monk by the name of Martin Luther would read about the righteousness of God in the Bible. When he would see the goodness and righteousness of God and contrasted his personal sinfulness, he began to believe in his spirit that there was no way he could do enough penance or works to ever be able stand in the presence of this righteous and holy God. Reading the Bible, he became so terrorized and fearful of God that he almost bordered on insanity.

As he was preparing for this lecture on the letter of Romans, he came across 1:16-17:

“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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”

The light of God broke into his life, and Martin Luther began to understand the righteousness of God talked about in this verse was not God’s righteousness in Heaven, but the way God made man right with Him was through the gospel. He realized this passage was saying if a man would simply put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ and believe only in Him, he

could be made right with God. At that moment is when Martin Luther said he surrendered his life to Christ and was reborn. He said, "The gates of paradise swung open and I walked through those gates!" Soon, a reformation swept through Europe. The church would turn from being a works-based church to fully understanding that man is saved through grace and faith alone, and the only authority of the church is Scripture. Then Luther wrote his famous commentary on Romans.

Several years later, a young preacher by the name of John Wesley wrote in his journal, "I went to Georgia to convert the Indians, but who will convert me?" Imagine leaving Europe and coming to America to preach the gospel and then realizing you are not saved. He got back to London and was invited by a believer to an Aldersgate Street location in London where a young man was going to preach the gospel. He did not want to go, but went anyway. The preacher started his sermon by reading from the preface of Martin Luther's commentary on Romans. John Wesley said, upon hearing the conversion of Martin Luther and the impact of grace on his life, "I felt my heart strangely warmed and there I confessed my need of Christ. It was there I came to believe that Jesus Christ had died to atone for my sins, and now my sins were completely forgiven because of Christ." John Wesley started a revival through Europe that would sweep to the U.S. and millions would come to know Christ through the revival of the Methodist church.

That is not all. In 1918, a young Swiss pastor named Karl Barth sat down after studying Romans and wrote his thoughts on the book. It shook the European church of the 20th century that had ceased to believe in the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the working miracles of God.

You may not be Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley, or Karl Barth, but if you are willing to stake your life on the teachings on the Word of God, you too can greatly impact this world for Jesus Christ.

Bring your boots and your backpack; let's start hiking verse by verse through Romans.