

Romans

Some introductory matters as we get started:

I. Interpretation

1. Interpretive "Spiral" - The Bible interprets the Bible. You study the parts in order to understand the whole. Then, your understanding of the whole helps you better understand the parts, which helps you better understand the whole...
2. Context, context, context
Eg: Matthew 27:5b—"(Judas) went away and hanged himself..." Luke 10:37b: "Go and do likewise."
3. Just because we don't understand something, doesn't necessarily mean it's not true.

II. Mystery

1. God is infinite. Therefore, He has unlimited knowledge, and He is the source of infinite truth.
2. God has chosen to reveal some of His truth to us. Therefore, we have true knowledge.
3. However, we are finite creatures. Therefore, we have limited knowledge.
4. Thus, we have true but limited knowledge. We can know things truly, but we cannot know them fully.

Because we do not know all the truth, we do not know all the interconnections between truths. Mystery is simply the result of our ignorance about the interconnections. In many doctrinal areas, we do not know fully how various elements of the revelation of God come together, but we do know that because it comes from God, it is true and it does fit together. (Eg. God's Sovereignty/Human Responsibility; God's Goodness/Existence of Evil)

A few examples of the biblical basis for this view of truth and knowledge:

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever..." (Deuteronomy 29:29).

"(God) has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

"Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things... (Christ) was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake" (1 Peter 1:10-12, 20).

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever! Amen. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 11:33-12:2).

Two important applications for our study of Romans:

1. Wrestling with mystery should produce worship! If you come to Romans only to get questions answered or to argue a theological position, you will not see its truth. Come as a worshipper of our great and mysterious God!
2. We are completely dependent on the Spirit to teach us spiritual truth (1 Corinthians 2:9-14). I do not understand everything in Romans. Even what I understand, I can't express all of it in words. Even what I can express, I can't express in a way that you can see the fullness of the truth and the important connections in 50 or 60 minutes once a week. If we are going to see the depth and power and beauty and richness of the truth in Romans, the Spirit must do His great work as the Master Teacher. (See also 2 Peter 3:15-16.)

So come to this study worshipping and come praying out of dependence on the Spirit.

III. Introductory Notes on Romans

A. **Author**—Paul

B. **Audience**—the church(es) in Rome

C. **Date**—between 56-58 AD. Paul is writing near the end of his third missionary journey, just before he returns to Jerusalem with the collection of money to help the poor believers there (15:26). He is probably writing from Corinth, because he sends the letter with Phoebe, who was from the church in Cenchrea, which was the port city closest to Corinth (16:1).

D. **Reasons for writing**

1. Paul has never been to Rome and never personally met the believers there (1:10), so he hopes to travel to see them after his visit to Jerusalem (15:23-24). This letter serves as an introduction of himself.
2. Paul hopes to continue his missionary work in Spain after he leaves Rome (15:24). He will need the support of the Roman church to send him on to Spain. This letter serves as a clear statement of the gospel, so the church in Rome can evaluate Paul's theology and doctrine in order to confirm that they should support him.
3. Paul knows he faces danger when he goes back to Jerusalem (15:31-32). If he is arrested or killed in Jerusalem, he won't be able to go to Rome, so this letter serves as his message to the Romans in case he doesn't get to see them personally. Just so you know, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem after he wrote this letter, but God used his arrest to send him to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. He was able to preach the gospel for two years in Rome while he was on house arrest.

E. **Big Idea of Romans**—Romans 1:17, "For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

Romans is the most in-depth, systematic explanation of justification by faith in the Bible. Every piece of the letter either lays the foundation for, teaches, or builds upon the truth that we can only be justified (declared righteous) before God by faith in Jesus.

On the deepest level, justification by faith is all about God. It's about God's justice and grace. It's what happens when God's righteous insistence that we meet His holy standards meets His gracious willingness to accept those who are unholy when we trust Jesus. In the middle of wrestling with the theological details of Romans, let's never lose sight of the fact that it is ultimately all about God... who He is and what He has done in Jesus. You should know God more accurately, love God more deeply, and worship God more passionately because of our time in Romans.

F. **Outline of Romans**

Romans 1:1-17—Introduction.

Romans 1:18-3:20—No one can be justified by works, because we are all sinners.

Romans 3:21-5:21—God provides righteousness through Jesus to all who believe.

Romans 6:1-8:39—We are to live out the righteousness of Jesus because we are under grace and controlled by the Spirit.

Romans 9:1-11:36—God is just both to grant righteousness to those who have faith and to reject those who don't have faith.

Romans 12:1-15:13—Describes what our lives will look like as we live out the righteousness of Jesus.

Romans 15:14-16:27—Conclusion and Paul's personal remarks.

F. **My Primary Study Sources**

Expositor's Bible Commentary, New American Commentary, New Testament Commentary, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Warren Wiersbe's Be Right, and John Piper's sermons on Romans on desiringgod.org.