



Focus Points...*For Romans 1*

Listen...

- * To Paul's description of how similar the decadent immorality of the ancient Roman world is to our own;
- * To Paul's catalog of the many manifestations of evil in his culture, knowing that whenever these are seen, Satan is very much alive, active and in control.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, You have caused all Scripture to be written for our learning. As I begin Paul's Letter to the Romans, help me to learn what You would have me learn about the depravity of sin in this world and the greatness of Your grace to all who believe. Open my heart, mind and spirit so that Paul's Letter to the Romans becomes the *magna carta* of my Christian faith. I pray this in the name of Him who died and rose to forgive my sin and give me new life. Amen.

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Commentary:

Written to the capital city of the entire Roman Empire, Paul's letter to the Romans was written at the end of his first missionary journey (ca. 56-57 AD). Always planning ahead, Paul wrote this letter to prepare for a visit to Rome.

Paul's *Letter to the Romans* is a primer for Christianity. Written for Gentiles and Jews, Paul's purpose was to teach them how Christian faith works. Expect to find in Romans, extensive information regarding all facets of basic Christian living including...

- * The nature of sin: God's recognition of sin's depravity (Romans 1), God's judgment against sin (Romans 2), God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3-4).
- * The nature of justification: The role of the Law (Romans 5), the role of the Gospel (Romans 6), the struggle with sin (Romans 7)
- * The nature of hope: Romans 8
- * The nature of God's calling to the Sons of Israel: Romans 9-11
- * The nature of the Christian response to grace: Romans 12
- * The nature of Christian citizenship and living: Romans 13-15

Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, as many of his letters, follows the standard format including the author of the letter, the addressees, a greeting/blessing, and personal comments of thanksgiving and longing to visit (1:1-17).

Paul's opening words in Romans 1:1-7 are unique in that they give special attention to the "Gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets" (1:2). Note how Paul describes the Gospel as having ancient roots among the Jews, the "Descendants of David" (1:3). This is an important indicator of his audience: Jews. But it is also directed to Gentiles, too (1:5).

Jews and Gentiles were not natural friends. The Jews believed they were God's chosen people called to separate themselves from the worldly Gentiles. One of the key emphases of Paul's *Letter to the Romans* is that God bridged this gap by sending Jesus Christ to save *all* sinners.

Paul's preaching to the Gentiles had been effective. His desire to preach to the Jews that they might be saved is a major theme of Romans. Paul affirmed, "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish" (1:14). His obligation including his un-ashamed proclamation of the Gospel of salvation to "*everyone* who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (1:16).

Romans 1:18 marks the beginning of one of the most remarkable catalogs of evil and depravity found in the Bible. Note what Paul has to say about God's response to sin in 1:18ff.

- 1) God's wrath against sin is justified (1:18);
- 2) Sinful humanity cannot claim ignorance as an excuse for sin (1:19-20);
- 3) Sinful man is so utterly corrupt and foolish that it doesn't even know God "nor give thanks to Him" (1:21);
- 4) Because of their foolishness and "futility of their thinking," God simply gave the immoral and impure over to the power of Satan to revel in their degradable "shameful lusts" and desires (1:26ff.).

According to Paul, it's easy to tell who is of depraved mind. They are the ones filled with

"every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips...slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful" (1:28-30).

So great is their evil that "they *invent* ways of doing evil" (1:30). The Greek word for "invent" is *epheuretas*. It means "to scheme or plan" evil. These "senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless" evil doers are so corrupt they "also approve of those who practice them" (1:32).

Paul's description of morality and character in the ancient world is an all-too-apt description of our present world. We see this evil in business, politics, families and even in the church. Paul's God-given calling was to recognize—and confront—the rampant epidemic of anti-God immorality. It's our calling, too.

Paul's Letter to the Romans provided his hearers with the necessary understanding of sin and evil, God and grace, so that they would bear witness to Jesus in a corrupt world. Paul's Letter was written to each of us for the same reason: to confront evil, call people to repentance, and invite them to the undeserved grace found in Jesus Christ alone.

Prayer:

Lord, as I look at our society, I see that Paul's *Letter to the Romans* was written for us today. Give me Your Spirit that I may recognize the evil of this world for what it is: a desecration of Your holiness and grace. Move me to boldly give witness to You. Help me confront the evil in this world. Give me a passion to boldly proclaim You even to those who most despise You. In the name of Jesus, Your Son, I pray. Amen.

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