

SYLLABUS

Plan of Action

This study of the book of Romans will take place over a series of twenty-four sessions. Romans consists of sixteen chapters and in some places can be quite heavy theologically, rhetorically, and practically. As such, we want to be sure to take as much time as needed to grasp the important facts, features, and concepts presented, and answer questions along the way.

Review of the information presented is a big part of the learning process, and it helps student learning if students are able to lead the process of review. So, our schedule designates time for student-led review discussions. All students will be asked to participate by leading some portion of the conversation on a specified date. Student reviewers will determine the format of the review sessions.

Designated days off. Due to holidays and the need for periodic rest, **there are some Thursdays we will not meet. These dates are: November 19, November 26, December 24, and December 31, 2020; and March 4, 2021.** If all goes according to plan, the last session will take place on Thursday, April 8, 2021. However, advance notice of schedule adjustments will be provided.

Reading Resources

The following resources are provided to help us study together, while also empowering each person to engage in individual study and reflection. I encourage the purchase of the RECOMMENDED RESOURCES. The resources listed under SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES will prove useful as well, but I will share the information needed from these resources during our time of study.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Holy Bible (your translation of choice, but an NRSV study Bible will be helpful)
- N.T. Wright. *Romans: 18 Studies for Individuals and Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect) 2009.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

- D. Stuart Briscoe. *Romans* in Lloyd J. Ogilvie (ed.). *Mastering the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Commentary by Today's Great Bible Teachers* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing) 1982.
- John Stott. *Romans: Encountering the Gospel's Power* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect) 1998.
- Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) 2004.

INTRODUCTION

Why is Romans important? (Why study Romans?)

Paul's letter to the Romans is a declarative statement of faith. By that, I mean that throughout the letter, there is an emphasis on identifying and naming what Christianity is and how it is to be practiced. Paul makes definitive faith claims, informed by three points of emphasis: 1) Paul's theological training, including his view of the Gospel and its effects on human spirituality and practical application thereof; 2) Paul's understanding of relationship with Jesus; and 3) Paul's understanding of Jesus's call for him to be an apostle. Through these three lenses, we begin to recognize the importance of Romans for its initial audience, for Christians historically, and for contemporary Christians.

To be sure, Romans is written to a specific group of people at a specific point in history. With Romans, Paul's effort is to teach believers about the faith and how to exercise their beliefs. He accomplishes this by framing it as part of how believers in Rome could partner with him in ministry--his current travels, his time in Jerusalem, and his future ministry plans. As such, the result of this letter is the creation of a theological treatise that has guided the church's orthodoxy and orthopraxis for millenia.

We study Romans because we are in the Christian faith tradition, and we hold the Bible as a guide for understanding our faith in the world. Within the Bible, Romans provides the most complete treatment of how Christians should live and function in the world, as people who have been saved. With Romans, we get a detailed account of how we relate to God, how we should be shaped by the Gospel, how we should engage in the work of ministry, and how to engage God's grace toward us.

What are we to do with Romans?

This question is important for any study because it forces consideration of how one might apply the information acquired and the lessons learned. So, this is a general question intended for anyone who reads Romans. At the same time, this question is meant to help us, WORD For Life Church Ministries, to focus our attention on how the information and lessons from Romans apply to our church. So, in response to the question "What are we to do with Romans?" the following are offered:

1. **Read it.** Romans is a letter shared with a group of believers who would have had the letter read aloud to them. The reading of this letter would have been continuous, with no breaks for chapters or verses, and they would have heard it as such. So, when we read Romans, we should remember that it is a letter intended to be read and understood as a continuous document.
2. **Learn from it.** With the exception of teaching from Jesus himself, Romans is the high-water mark of Christian doctrine. What a mistake it would be to read and study the letter without really learning from it. More than simply memorizing verses from it--which we should do--we should learn from it. Let's learn how to present the Gospel. Let's learn how to define our faith. Let's learn why we need the grace of regeneration. Let's learn about the glory of salvation. There is much to learn, so let us take that as our task. Ask the Holy Spirit to be your teacher, and learn.

3. **Continue to mature by it.** A measure of whether or not one has learned, or developed, is by the way they act or govern themselves within a given environment. Christian spiritual maturity is measured in the same way, and this is why Christian spiritual growth/maturity is necessary. Through study of the Word and applying the lessons learned in the development of our beliefs, we can be prepared to confidently engage various situations from a position of spiritual maturity and informed activity.

What is meant by Forming Faith by Favor and Freedom?

Romans is received as a document that informs and shapes Christian faith and practices. Therefore, the title of this series, "Forming Faith by Favor and Freedom," speaks directly to the ways persons have been claimed by God for the purpose of salvation. Favor refers to the fact of God's unmerited selection of Abraham's family to represent God on earth and to receive salvation on the basis of their birth-relationship. This is favor. Freedom refers to the enjoyment of God's grace, available to people who are not Jewish and yet through Jesus are free to reject sin and receive salvation. This is freedom.

No matter how one finds themselves in the family of faith, what is important is that they learn what the faith is about and that they allow their beliefs, thoughts, and actions to be shaped thereby.

MAJOR THEMES

Romans is full of important theological and practical insight for Christians. A case can be made that there are more, or other, major themes presented in this letter. However, the themes outlined below provide cover sufficient for our study.

Authorship

- Paul's biographical sketch _____

- Date of writing _____

- Paul's relationship with the church _____

FOR REFLECTION

1. In your own words, why is it necessary for Christians to study Paul's letter to the Romans?

2. What do you think of when you hear the words favor and freedom associated with salvation?

3. Who is Paul and why does this letter matter in his day and in ours?
