

## Romans

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### Romans – Introduction Part 2

#### Impact

- We mentioned last week in Introduction Part 1, that the book of Romans was the theological foundation of the German resistance to Hitler and the Nazis. Led by Karl Barth, a group of faithful German pastors met in the town of Barmen and drafted a resolution based on Roman's declaration of the supremacy of Christ. But such was hardly the first time Romans has had such an impact. In volume 5 of Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, the great Bible scholar FF Bruce says of Romans, "Time and again in the course of Christian history it has liberated the minds of men, brought them back to an understanding of the essential Gospel of Christ, and started spiritual revolutions". One of the most influential theologians of all time was St. Augustine. One day as a young man he was reflecting on the pain he had caused by his sinful misadventures and what it all had cost him. He was sitting under a tree, brokenhearted and weeping, when he heard a voice say, "Take up and read". He looked around and saw a book nearby. It was a Bible. He opened it and read Romans 13:13-14. "Let us behave properly as in the day, not carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity, not in strife and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." Augustine believed, obeyed, and was saved. Centuries later, a young priest in Wittenberg, Germany was reading Romans and was captivated by it. He gave a series of lectures on Romans, causing him to dig deeper. Romans so transformed his life that young Martin Luther became convinced by what he called "the righteousness by which through grace and the sheer mercy of God justified us through faith...Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into Paradise". Soon the young priest would take all of this and kick off a firestorm known as the Protestant Reformation. Further through time, a defeated John Wesley is returning to England from Savannah. Not long after his return, he reluctantly went to a meeting at Aldersgate where Luther's preface to Romans was being read. During the reading Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed". From that experience, he would later write in his journal, "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away

my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death". As a result, Wesley set about preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit and started revivals across England and America that burned for well over a hundred years to the mid-1800's, changing the course of history.

### The uniqueness of Romans

- You don't have to read very far to get a sense that Romans is different from all the other letters of Paul. There is perhaps a very simple reason why: when Paul wrote to the Church at Rome, he was writing to a Church with whose founding he had had nothing to do with, even indirectly. Paul was not the founder of any of the Galatian churches, but his disciples surely were, so Paul had an indirect hand in Galatia. But in the founding of the church in Rome, there is no evidence he had had any personal contact at all. That explains why in Romans there are so few of the details of practical problems which fill the other letters. There was no letter from questioning children to their father for Paul to respond to. That is why Romans at first seems so much more impersonal than Paul's other letters. As Dibelius put it, "It is of all Paul's letters, the least conditioned by the momentary situation."

### Theology and a Penny of Prevention

- Because of its location, Paul realized the importance of the church in Rome, that potentially the church in Rome could become the most important church in the world, certainly the most important Gentile church. So as he is writing to them, Paul wants to make a statement. He wants to set down on paper the very essence of his faith. At the same time, Paul must have realized the danger of the church in Rome becoming infected with false teachings, as so many of the other churches to the east had been. Paul must have seen the need for the church in Rome to stay theologically grounded in order to be an example and light to the rest of the Gentile churches. He must have believed that the best protection against the infection of false teaching was the antiseptic of the truth.