

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship ... be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

5: Freedom!  
22 February  
Rom 12:1-21

Rom 12:1,2

The soaring message of Romans 8 is that we are not just found righteous because of Christ's sacrifice for us, but set free to live new, God-pleasing lives. As we humbly follow him, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can live out the righteous requirements of the law.

Do we still have free will, then? Emphatically yes, says Paul in chapter 12. Our choices, which once led us into trouble, can now be part of God's demonstration of his Kingdom in this world.

Now we are free to offer every aspect of our lives – at home, at work, at school, in our neighbourhood, driving, shopping, wherever – to God. We can do so in a 'holy and pleasing' way, no longer conforming to the pattern of this world. And, as we do, God transforms our behaviour through the renewing of our minds.

Paul discusses how Christians should serve one another, how to be a good citizen, and how to deal with those who are weaker – not sitting in judgement over them, but being ministers of the same mercy we received, always seeking to demonstrate God's righteousness – and love.



Trial scene in a Roman court (New York Public Library)

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1

# ROMANS

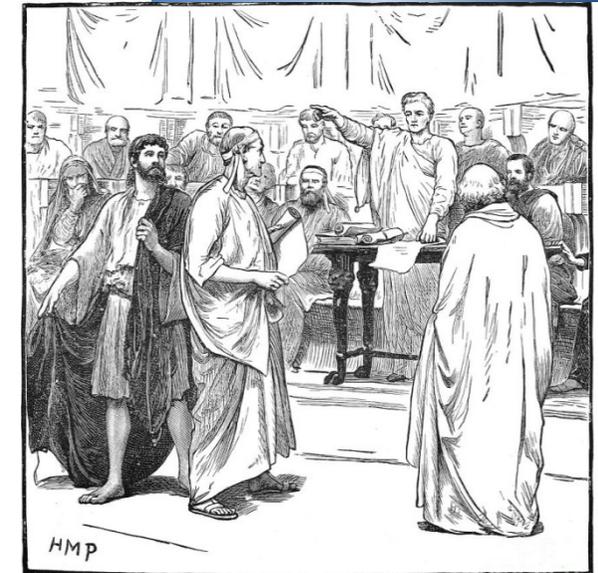
a first century legal drama with eternal spiritual consequences

From 11 January to the end of February we are studying Paul's letter to the Romans – as a legal drama.

We start with *Roman Numerals*, an overview of the book, in *Going Deeper* at 6.30pm on 11 January in Forefront Centre. Then we hear the prosecution case (18 Jan, 10.30am in the Guildhall); the defence (25 Jan); judgement (1 Feb); the verdict (15 Feb); and the life of freedom (22 Feb).

This hand-out aims to assist us as we follow the exciting legal proceedings. We strongly recommend that you prepare for the case by reading the letter to the Romans.

**Any questions? Feel free to ask the preacher of the day, or any member of the Leadership Team.**



Roman court scene: "the expulsion of the Sophists", by H M Paget

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous ... on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

Paul, Romans 2:13,16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last ...

Romans 1:16,17

## 8 facts about Romans

**Who wrote it?** The content is from the Apostle Paul (see 1:1-7, 15:14-16:25) – but it was actually written for him by Tertius (16:22)

**When?** Late 55 to early 57AD, during his third missionary journey, before returning to Jerusalem with a collection for believers in poverty there – probably during Acts 20:3

**Whom was it written to?** House churches in Rome

**What was Paul's plan?** After a decade evangelising the territories around the Aegean, Paul wanted to visit Rome and Spain (1:10-15, 15:24-28)

**Who's named in it?** Too many people to count! Check out chapter 16 for a who's who of the Roman churches, plus a list of eight co-workers with Paul in Corinth (vv21-24)

**What's the main point?** To outline God's revealed mystery of forgiveness and righteousness (for Jews and Gentiles) – which he refers to as 'my Gospel' (1:16,17)

**Any problems in Rome?** It seems there may have been some tension between the Gentile believers and a minority of Jewish Christians, as Paul devotes a considerable passage (ch 9-11) to the salvation of the Jews, and another (14:1-6) apparently urging Gentile Christians to accept the brethren who continue to hold to Jewish traditions.

...our Lord's  
patience means  
salvation, just as our  
dear brother Paul  
also wrote you ...  
2 Pet 3:15

**Where does it fit in history?** Claudius Caesar expelled the Jews from Rome in 49AD, but his successor Nero announced they could return – possibly just a year or two before the letter was written. After a great fire in 64AD, Nero blamed the Christians and they endured a great persecution.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death

Romans 8:1,2

The law, though good, could not save us. We are guilty of breaking the life-giving code, and the penalty for our sin means separation from God – spiritual death.

But God had a plan from before the foundation of the world – by coming in the flesh and living without sin, Jesus could rightfully stand in our place and take the punishment for us.

The law is satisfied because a life has been given. We are set free when we see our need and plead the blood of Jesus rather than our own merits.

God shows himself to be both

holy (all wrongdoing is punished) and kind (all who turn to Christ can be renewed, born again into a life of innocence).

Christ's resurrection seals the transaction – not only did he die for us, we are set free to live his victorious, Holy Spirit-guided life. We are obliged to live differently than before, but also empowered to do so. For those who turn to Jesus there can be no further accusation, no condemnation, no separation. For us, the problem of suffering is resolved because of the coming revelation of the children of God and the liberation from decay of the whole creation.



Soaring with Jesus: one law (in this case aerodynamics) sets us free from another (the law of gravity)

4: Verdict  
15 February  
Romans 8

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.  
Rom 8:33

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement... to demonstrate his righteousness... so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:25-26

In ancient Jewish courts of law, as in many societies today, one person was denounced by another to the judge, who then decided who was in the right. The accused was either pronounced guilty or righteous, and if guilty, might be faced with the death penalty.

Romans 6, as a scene in a law court, is therefore rather unusual! The accused has

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2.10

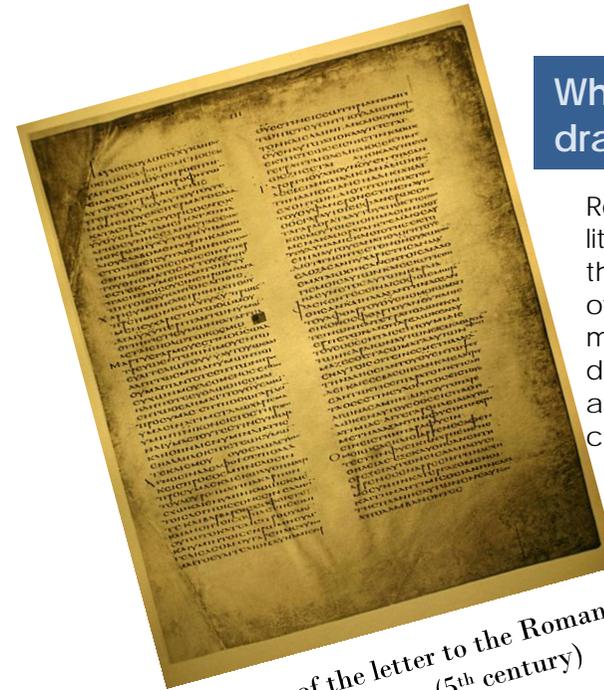
not only been pronounced righteous already (see the previous chapters of Romans) but is, in effect already dead! The judgment, therefore, from God, the righteous judge, is that the penalty is paid. The question for Christians that Paul poses is this: Are we living out the new life we've been given? The sign of new life is baptism; the reality of it is a practical lifestyle of living like Jesus.

A judge today might accept good character as evidence or as mitigation. In God's court, says Paul, it is the expected outcome of the process. We are not only acquitted but expected to respond to what Christ has done for us by being his from start to finish.

- Keith Barnard

... whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Romans 3:19



The start of the letter to the Romans, Codex Alexandrinus (5th century)

### Why a legal drama?

Romans is unique as a form of literature – part epistle, part theological essay, part rebuttal of false teaching and religious misunderstanding. Paul is determined to make a logical argument for his Gospel which cannot be refuted.

Paul is a unique author, too – a trained theological lawyer of the Jewish Pharisees, he is a Roman citizen who had plenty of opportunity to see the Roman legal

process up close.

Paul carries the argument forward in a logical, legal way. Humanity – Jew and Gentile – stands in the dock. God is the Judge. Paul puts the case for the prosecution and the defence. He explains the work of Jesus, who paid the legal penalty for us (despite his innocence) so we could leave the court as free people. Not just free from past sin – free from guilt and death, subject to the law of the spirit of life, "holy and pleasing to God". Rome sat at a historical junction: the meeting of Greek and Latin concepts of law with the Jewish legal code, the Torah. Paul, familiar with both, employs concepts from each as the Holy Spirit explains through him God's eternal plans of salvation.

- For a sense of Roman justice, citizenship and law, see the last few chapters of the Book of Acts. from 22:25 onwards.

Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practise them.

Rom 1: 32

Paul begins his argument by outlining the case for the prosecution. God has made his power and divine nature known to all people through the Creation, but since they

did not acknowledge him as Creator, their hearts were darkened. As their pride and idolatry worsened, God 'gave them over' to their desires – deeper sin. The state of their hearts is revealed in their actions.

In chapter 2, even the most self-righteous is found to be equally subject to judgement. Paul tackles a problem in Rome, the views which Jewish and Gentile Christians held about themselves, their own special merit and the state of the other group. He finds them equally guilty.

There is an advantage to being a Jew, because of the Law; but the very possession of the Law brings judgement down first on the Jew. "There is no-one righteous, not even one", he quotes.

Except, as we are to discover, there is One ... for God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son. That Son, Jesus, the Word made flesh, said he came so that we could have life, and have it in its fullness.

**1: Prosecution**  
**18 January**  
**Rom 1:18-32**



There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honour and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favouritism.

Romans 2:9-11



There is no-one righteous, not even one ...

Romans 3:10

In chapter 1 we heard the case for the prosecution – the wrath of God is revealed against mankind's godlessness and wickedness – SIN! All of mankind is "without excuse."

Is there any defence against this solemn prosecution?

Chapters 2 and 3 tell us nobody can live to please God by their own efforts – neither Jew nor Gentile!

But in defence, some people say – "God is a God of love, He'll forgive me. He understands that I'm trying my best!"

The arrogant atheist, on the other hand, says "there is no God – no-one can tell me how to live! I can do what I like! I don't need a defence, because there is no prosecutor!"

What hope is there?! Can I know forgiveness, and have a relationship with God? Chapter 4: we can only be justified [put right with God] by faith, like Abraham.

Paul says there is only one defence against the prosecution [4:24,25] – *God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

In chapter 5:1-11 Paul explains the basis for our defence –

*"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

- Tom Smith

**2: Defence**  
**25 January**  
**Rom 5:1-11**

Want to read more about Paul's letter to Romans? It could be the Bible book with the most commentaries written about it! Try the 'Resources' tab on [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) for some in-line studies. F F Bruce's *Introduction and Commentary* is deep and detailed. Tom Wright's two-part study of Romans in his *Paul For Everybody* series is an easier read but packed with great insights.