

THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS
Sandymount 2016-2017
 Mount Tabor Centre
 Sandymount Green

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1. **Christianity in Rome: Rom 1:1-17** (19 September 2016)
2. **The letter as a whole: Rom 1-16** (17 October 2016)
3. **Need of grace: Rom 1-4** (21 November 2016)
4. **Gift of grace: Rom 5-8** (12 December 2016)
5. **Jews and Gentiles: Rom 9-11** (16 January 2017)
6. **Grace in practice: Rom 12:1-15:6** (20 February 2017)
7. **Conclusion: Rom 15:7-33; 16** (20 March 2017)
8. **Romans for today's church** (24 April 2017)

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| (1) ROMAN CHRISTIANITY: <i>Romans 1:1-7, 8-17</i> |
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- What was Rome like?
- Who were the Roman Christians
- What was their history?
- Sources: Suetonius, Tacitus, Acts

- Jewish Quarters in Ancient Rome
- Synagogues

Claudius (41-54) became emperor on 24 January AD 41. His accession was irregular. Found hiding in the palace behind a curtain, he was dragged off by the praetorians and proclaimed emperor. His niece Agrippina, who was his fourth wife, had him poisoned on 13 October 54.

His attitude to the Jews was in general enlightened, because Josephus reports that he issued an edict guaranteeing Jews throughout the empire the right to practice their religion "without let or hindrance" (Josephus, Ant 19.290).

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| Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from Rome. <i>Suetonius: Lives (Claudius 25.4)</i> |
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His expulsion of "Jews" from Rome is apparently confirmed by Acts 18:2, where we read:

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| There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. |
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Nero (54-68) was originally named Domitius Ahenobarbus and was adopted by his step-father Claudius, and changed his name at the age of twelve to Nero Claudius Caesar Germanicus. It was precisely to ensure his succession that Agrippina did away with Claudius and accordingly Nero became emperor on 13 October 54.

Nero was the first to persecute the Christians in 64. Eventually, he failed to respond quickly to military crises and was abandoned by the praetorians and the Senate. He took refuge in the villa of his ex-slave Paon and there he committed suicide, reportedly lamenting "What an artist dies with me".

Again, in his *Lives of the Caesars* (Nero xvi), Suetonius mentions the Christians as a

“class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition”.

It is interesting to note that he calls the religion a “new” superstition and seems not to confuse it, as the earlier citation had done, with Judaism.

This distinction is even clearer in the *Chronicle* (ii.29) of Suplicius Severus. Nero had been blamed for the fire in Rome and tried to deflect blame by punishing the Christians who by now had become “very large”.

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.
Tacitus, Annals 15.44

- At the start, Christians were both Jews and some Gentiles.
- At a certain point, the Jewish Christians were expelled (not all Jews).
- The gentiles developed a law-free style of Christianity.
- On the return of the Jewish Christians, the community was in conflict.

Letters at the time

Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, with the following letter:

Superscript

“The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.

Body

Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

Postscript

Farewell.”

(Acts 15:22-29)

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| <i>Romans</i> as a letter | Epistolary Superscript | 1:1-7 |
| | Thanksgiving | 1:8-17 |
| | Body of the Letter | 1:19-15:33 |
| | Epistolary Farewell | 16:1-27 |

Rom. 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7 To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:1-7

- 1 Paul,
a servant of **Jesus Christ**,

called to be an **apostle**,
set apart for the gospel of **God**,
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- 2 **which** he promised beforehand through his prophets
in the *holy* scriptures,
3 **concerning** his **Son**,
who was descended
from David
according to the flesh
4 and was declared to be **Son of God** with power
according to the spirit of *holiness*
by (from) resurrection from the dead,
Jesus Christ our **Lord**,
5 **through** whom we have received grace and **apostleship**
to bring about the obedience of faith
among **all** the Gentiles for the sake of his name,
6 including yourselves who are **called** to belong to **Jesus Christ**,
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- 7 To **all** **God's** beloved in Rome,
who are **called** to be *saints*:
Grace to you and peace from **God** our Father
and the **Lord**
Jesus Christ.

Rom. 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. 9 For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, 10 asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. 11 For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— 12 or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. 13 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish 15—hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

| VERSE | TERM | TOPIC |
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| 1:1-7 | Superscript | Greetings |
| 1:8-15 | Introduction | Reasons for coming to Rome |
| 1:16-17 | Thesis | Justification, Faith, Jews, Gentiles, live |
| 1:18-4:35 | Proof 1 | Sin (all) and faith (everyone) |
| 5-8 | Proof 2 | Salvation for all through Christ |
| 9-11 | Proof 3 | God’s election of both Jews and Gentiles |
| 12-15:6 | Proof 4 | Life together in the community |
| 15:7-33 | Conclusion | Reasons for coming to Rome |
| 16 | Postscript | Greetings |

Pointers for Prayer

1. *There is a strong sense of “being called” in the opening verses; what has been my own sense of vocation over the years? Where am I today?*
2. *Paul feels a great responsibility to proclaim the good news widely. What is my personal experience of the good news? Am I too on fire with the gospel?*
3. *Faith lies at the heart of Paul’s proclamation. What does “faith” mean to me?*

In general, I will use the NRSV. From time to time, use will be made of the NET bible (www.bible.org) for its version of some “neuralgic” passage in Romans.