



LETTERS TO THE CHURCH [ROMANS INTRODUCTION]

The most common way for western evangelicals to read Romans is primarily as a guide to individual salvation. While Paul's letter to a network of house churches in Rome does discuss salvation, this perspective alone is incomplete. Instead, Romans presents a much bigger story—God actively working through Jesus to set the entire world right and to form a new kind of people under His lordship.

The historical context of Romans is essential to understanding its message. Paul writes to a diverse and divided network of house churches in Rome, made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers navigating tension and identity. Into this setting, Paul proclaims that Jesus—not Caesar—is Lord, redefining power, righteousness, and community. The letter unfolds as a sweeping narrative: humanity's shared brokenness, the new life available through Christ and the Spirit, God's faithfulness to Israel, and the call to live as a unified, sacrificial, Spirit-formed people in the world.

Five key themes help expand this broader perspective. First, God's "righteousness" is His covenant faithfulness—His commitment to fulfill His promises through Jesus. Second, Jesus is both Messiah and the true King, the representative human who succeeds where Adam and Israel failed. Third, justification is not merely about personal forgiveness but about belonging to God's multi-ethnic covenant family. Fourth, believers now live in the overlap of two realities—marked by both the struggle of sin and the new life of the Spirit. Finally, the goal of the gospel is not escaping creation, but participating with God in its renewal.

Romans 8 serves as a central anchor for this vision, highlighting life in the Spirit, the hope of new creation, and the unbreakable love of God. The chapter reveals that believers are caught up in a much larger story where creation groans, the Spirit intercedes, and God is actively at work bringing all things toward restoration. Even concepts like "glorification" are reframed—not just as a future reality, but as a present transformation into Christ's likeness, lived out through love and justice. The sermon concludes with an invitation: to approach Romans with openness and expectation, allowing God to reshape both understanding and life as His people embody the gospel in the world.

1. **Perspective Shift:** What has been your primary understanding of the book of Romans in the past? How does this broader lens (God renewing the whole world and forming a new people) challenge or expand your view?
2. **Identity & Belonging:** Paul emphasizes that justification is about belonging to God's family. How does this reshape the way you think about your identity as a Christian and your relationship to others in the church? Does it change how you think about your sin?
3. **Living Between Two Realities:** In what ways do you experience the tension of living between the "old" reality (sin, brokenness) and the "new" life of the Spirit? What helps you lean more into life in the Spirit?
4. **Participation in Renewal:** The goal for the Christ follower is NOT escaping the world but participating in God's renewal of it. What might it look like for you, practically, to join God in that work in your everyday life?
5. **Transformation & Glorification:** If glorification includes becoming like Christ now—especially in love and justice—where do you sense God inviting you to grow or change in this season?