

# Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

## Week 46: Acts 25-28 & Romans, *Paul and Rome*

Welcome to Week 46 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

All right, we are taking a look this week at the end of the book of Acts, and the entire Book of Romans, we're going to finish up the last few chapters of Acts. And then we're going to spend our time in the Bible's most detailed description of Christian theology. It's the book that inspired Martin Luther to start the Reformation. And it probably has altered human history, more than any other book written in the last 2000 years. Yes, it's that important what we're going to be reading this week. So let's take a look at it piece by piece, shall we?

First of all, we're going to finish up with the book of Acts. When we left Paul at the book of Acts. Last week, at the end of chapter 24 he was in Jerusalem, he was on trial, he had appealed to Caesar, which means they had to send them to Caesar. But they were now sending him back and forth between governors and kings and the different people who were kind of middle management in the Roman Empire overseeing Judea and Jerusalem and the region around there.

So when we get back into it in this week's reading, in Acts chapters 25 and 26, we start by finishing up Paul's sham trial, and his trial ends this way, in Acts chapter 26, verses 31 and 32. They say "This man is not doing anything that deserves death, or imprisonment," Agrippa said to Festus, "this man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." So that's how his trial ends. We could let him go but he appealed to Caesar and we're not allowed to withdraw an appeal to Caesar. So we have to send them to Caesar, which Oh, yeah, Caesar is in Rome. And Paul had already felt the call of God to go to Rome and had already written the book of Romans, which we're about to read in advance of his arrival in Rome and now he's got to go on Caesar's dime.

All right, we then go to the last two chapters of Acts. And as Paul sails to Rome, the last chapter of Acts, actually recounts one of the greatest most detailed, real life marine stories in all of ancient literature. I love the last two chapters of Acts simply from a writers and readers standpoint, as you read these last two chapters this week, note the specifics, it says exactly where they are, it says exactly how the storm behaved, even the depth of the water as it starts getting shallower and shallower. How the boat breaks apart. In the rear first, as the bow is stuck on a sandbar, and all of it. Everything in these two chapters in great detail matches what we know about weather, about geography, about sailing, it is as realistic a picture of a real life event, as all of ancient literature has. It's really fascinating, simply from a storytelling standpoint, not to mention how we see God's hand at work in all of it.

And then it ends. And here's how Acts actually ends in chapter 28, verses 30 and 31. For two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house that's in Rome, in a rented house in Rome, he was basically under house arrest. And he welcomed all who came to see him, he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, and without hindrance.

Many Bible scholars, at this point, note that Acts doesn't really end as much as it stops being written, like most of the New Testament books end with a kind of a greeting or a sense of wrapping it all up. And that's a noble ending that we just read. But I think, and many Bible

scholars agree with me on this, or I agree with them on this because they came first, that it was probably ended this way, intentionally by Luke, because it kind of leaves you with the idea that there's more to the story, because there is. Acts ends with Acts 28 and we're living today Acts 29. We're continuing to live as the Holy Spirit works through us to church and I think that was intentional in the way Luke wrote the book of Acts, was he was leaving it like,

Okay, here's how Paul was doing it. He's continuing to declare Christ and basically what he's implying in that is, now you go do the same thing. So that's how the book of Acts will end. And if you're reading through that with us daily, you'll end that on Monday. And then on Tuesday, if you're reading through the daily program with us, you'll pick up the book of Romans.

So let's talk about the book of Romans a little bit. We are now first of all in a new section of the Bible. We have moved from the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John into what are called the letters or the epistles. And that's all of the books of the Bible up until the last book Revelation, which is a book of prophecy. All of this next section of books are written from Christians, to other Christians about how to follow Jesus better. Some The books are written from leaders of the church, to churches themselves and you can tell that in the titles. Romans, First and Second Thessalonians, Galatians. These are two churches in these particular towns. Other books are written from leaders to individual people, like First and Second Peter, and First and Second Timothy. So if it's got a place name, that means it's being written to the church in that place, if it's got a person's name it is being written to that person. And usually that means to another church leader.

Romans was written by Paul, when he was living in the city of Corinth, at around the time of Acts chapter 18, probably so we've just read through the book of Acts, if you go back and dip into 18. That's what was happening in Paul's life as he was writing the book of Romans and sending it off to Rome, before he had to head to Jerusalem, on his way, eventually, back to Rome itself. As I said earlier, the book of Romans is one of the most pivotal books in all of world history. It is by far the Bible's most detailed description of Christian theology. It inspired Martin Luther to start the Reformation. And it has altered history in just extraordinary ways since then.

So let's get into this book by starting with the segment that really was the launching pad for so much change in the way the church operates. And in the way the world itself has unfolded in the last several hundred years. Romans chapter one, verse one through 1:17, after a short greeting in the first 16 verses, Paul writes, what is perhaps the world's most world shifting verse of the last 2000 years, Romans 1:17, reads like this. "For in the Gospel, the righteousness of God has revealed a righteousness that is by faith, from first to last, just as it is written, The righteous will live by faith."

"The righteous will live by faith" or depending on your translation, "The just shall live by faith." It's actually a quote from the book of Habakkuk chapter two, verse four. It's also found later on in the Bible in Galatians, 3:11, and in Hebrews 10:38. So why is this Romans passage so important? And why if this phrase is mentioned four times in the Bible, is the one from Romans 17, the one that's so important to us, and here's why.

It's because about 500 years or so ago, there was a monk named Martin Luther during a season of time where the Catholic church not only ruled the church world, but in many places, they ruled the political world as well. They had actually outlawed the reading of the Bible for people unless you had gone through certain rigorous teaching and rigorous understanding of

theology. And finally, here's Martin Luther, who has already been a pastor who is now teaching at a seminary and is for the first time ever given permission to read the Bible for himself.

Why would they hide the Bible from people? Because when Martin Luther picked up the Bible and started reading it, he started realizing, Wait a minute, this isn't what the church has been teaching at all. And Martin Luther specifically reads this verse, "The just shall live by faith." The church all around him was telling us that you became righteous by the deeds you did, by the work you did, by the money you gave, by the acts that you performed, by the penance that you made, you had to work your way into salvation is what the church was telling people.

And then Martin Luther picks up the Bible and reads in four different places, but starting here with Romans, The righteous will live not by their works, not by their deeds, not by their offerings, not by their giving, the righteous will live by faith, and it changed everything, for him, for the church, and for the world. Okay, this is the pivotal point for that. And then immediately, after making this statement, the apostle Paul jumps from the righteous will live by faith. And in Romans one, verse 17. To this in Romans 1:18, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness." The contrast between the opening of 1:17, "The righteous will live by faith" to 1:18, about godlessness and wickedness.

This actually outlines the great balance that we as Christians are required to hold and to keep struggling with that there is a grace of God given to us that we cannot earn and then there's the wrath of God against godlessness and wickedness and we need to stay away from wickedness. God's grace and God's wrath are laid out there about as obviously as they can be, in one verse after another, from salvation by grace through faith, to we need to stay away from sin.

So which is it? It's both. It's both and this is the interesting dichotomy that we Christians are called to live in. We are saved by grace through faith, we cannot earn it. But after we have received Christ, we then out of our thankfulness, In gratefulness to God for His grace, we want to and we need to stay away from sin so that we can be followers of Jesus in a full and total way. Okay? So it's a challenging contrast that happens there. And that's what takes us through to the end of chapter two.

Then in Romans chapters three through five, we're going to say that, we're going to see that Paul tells us that our faith isn't even something we can take credit for, well, I've got great faith, and therefore I got saved and you don't have much faith so you can't get saved. No, it's just not the way it works. We can't even take credit for our own faith, because our faith comes from God's faithfulness. And in these three chapters, the apostle Paul lays out in such a strong way, that everything we have, even our own ability to believe in God comes from God, and not from ourselves. We then move along in the next few chapters, Romans six through eight, it tells us that our faith isn't about self improvement.

So first of all, it tells us this is by faith. Secondly, it tells us this faith comes from God. Thirdly, Paul tells us what faith is. It's not about self improvement, it's not about getting a little bit better. It's not about going from bad to good. Faith is about going from death to life. Jesus died and rose again, it is the central event in world history. And it is the most pivotal event in the entire church history. Without it, we have nothing as Paul will say later, but it's also a wonderful metaphor for what happens to us.

We don't move from bad to good, or from slightly bad, despite the good. It's not about self improvement, the only way we get to salvation is by dying to self and rising again in Christ. So not only did Jesus physically die and rise again from the dead, but that is what happens to us spiritually when we come into faith in Christ. It is a movement from death to life. That's what Romans six through eight outlines for us.

The next three chapters, then Romans nine through 11. Paul goes back in history a little bit because now he's talking not just to Roman citizens or Gentiles, but to people in Rome, who are coming out of Judaism who are Jews, and who are trying to ask, okay, how does this connect to what we already know of God from the Old Testament. So in these next couple of chapters, Paul goes back into the history of Israel, he clarifies that God's will is being done through Christ and will always be done through Christ. And that God's will was being done in a way through Israel that has now passed on that includes the Gentiles. And he walks through for the Jews primarily, but also for our understanding today, what all of that means. He even describes that God will use our disobedience as he used Israel's disobedience to affirm his glory, and his sovereignty over all things.

We then go to Romans 12, which has one of the most well known passages for anybody who spent much time in the church, where it talks about us being living sacrifices, because the question that was being asked at that time a lot, especially by the people who were Jews was okay, so if Jesus died, and we no longer need to sacrifice animals for the forgiveness of sins, well, then what's left for us to do? Because, as far as it was concerned, if you were a Jew, the way you got past your sinfulness was by offering a sacrifice in payment for the sinfulness. And then you walked out of the temple and you were clean for the next year, or for however long it took for you to get back to the temple to offer a sacrifice again.

But Jesus did that already. Do we need to offer sacrifices? If not, why? And what the Apostle Paul tells us is this, the idea that the blood of a sheep or a lamb or a bowl, that that was somehow going to forgiveness of sins, that is gone. Now, Jesus did that for us completely. So what do we offer, we offer ourselves in our bodies in our behavior as living sacrifices. It's no longer about sacrificing a sheep on the altar. It's about placing our lives on the altar in full obedience to God. Everything we do from this point on needs to be an offering to God, not for salvation, but because of salvation, to be thankful for what Jesus has done for us not to earn salvation, because we can never earn it.

So Romans 12 is a hugely important chapter for us to understand how we are to behave. Once we have been born again by the Spirit of God. We then move to Romans 13, and our instruction to honor earthly authorities. The Bible tells us that our final allegiance is to God. So the question then becomes, well, if we're supposed to follow God alone, do we have any obligation to the kings or the governments around us? And that's laid out in Romans 13. It tells us that we are to honor our earthly authorities so long as they are following biblical authority.

If you've got a boss, or a commander in the army, or a governor or a president or a king, who tells you to do something that, you know, God forbids, then you have to follow God instead of the King instead of the boss instead of the general. All right, we have a primary obligation to God. But God also puts earthly authorities in our life for us to follow his will. And we go along with them, to the degree that they follow God's will, as well we are to honor earthly authorities is fascinating because the Bible, even in its most high minded passages, has this kind of real world application, it always does.

We then move along in chapter 14 In the beginning of chapter 15, to a conversation about what it means to be a weak believer or a strong believer, and it's a lot more practical advice, like we just saw as well. It tells us what strong faith looks like and what weak faith looks like, how strong Christians are to act, how we're to act as strong Christians, particularly towards weaker Christians. And here's a hint in advance before you read it. Just like Jesus did when he taught how Paul teaches the difference between weak and strong Christians, probably is going to turn your ideas about strength and weakness completely upside down. It's always the opposite of what we think. So pay attention when you get there to Romans 14, and the beginning of 15th.

Romans 15, then finishes up and the book of Romans in chapter 16, finishes up with Paul telling about his travel, basically. Here's what I'm gonna do, here's where I'm gonna go next, here are some people that I want you to greet. It is one of the fascinating aspects, especially of the New Testament letters are what are sometimes called the epistles, how much they feel like real life because of course, they were written in real life, they were written by an individual who knew the person he was writing to, who was planning to visit them, who knew the individuals in the church that he was going to. And he mentioned them as the book closes out, you'll see that a lot as we go through the letters, especially of the apostle Paul, he has very personal things to say to people that he actually knows, and to know Him. These are letters between people who knew each other. So he calls them by name, he thanks them.

And there's even a little moment that I love in chapter 16, verse 22, where a man named Tertius says. Hi, who was Tertius? Well, Paul wrote the book of Romans, but he wrote it by dictating it to a secretary. And that Secretary who actually physically wrote it down was a man named Tertius. We think part of the reason that Paul wrote who was secretary is because Paul's eyesight was probably dimming. There are hints about that, as we go through the rest of Paul's writings as well. But either way, Paul dictated it Tertius wrote it down in chapter 16:22. Tertius says, "Hey, this is a greeting from me, Tertius, who's writing all this down," it's a really cool little aside, that gives you just a sense of the real world in which it was written.

So as we conclude, this week, looking at the end of Acts, and all of the amazing book of Romans. This Romans particularly is a book that you may want to read a couple times this week. It is so rich in theology, it's so detailed, and it's so important for our understanding of Christianity, and quite frankly, for the last 2000 years of world history. So here are a couple of things to note, as you read it this week.

First of all, note the emphasis that salvation is by grace. And it is not by works, it's not by what we do, but it is by what Jesus has already done. Note also, how this is balanced, with the importance of staying away from sinfulness. Grace does not give us a license to sin. Grace should make us grateful and give us a desire as the Holy Spirit lives in us to want to live a righteous life. And note also how God's complete sovereignty over everything is on every page and how our complete and total dependence upon God is on every page as well. Our dependence is on him not just for salvation, but after it as well.

It is such a rich week, there's a lot going on. If you've never read Romans before I kind of envy you this chance to read through for the first time. And I do let you know, read it early in the week if you can, because you may want to read it through again. There's just so much in this but have a great time with this week, and we'll see you next week.

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