

All You Need is Good News

Paul's letter to Rome

Doug Rowston



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The front cover features a statue of Caesar Augustus in Rome.

This book is dedicated to

Alan McKee

ADVANCE REVIEWS

Doug Rowston is an enthusiastic student and teacher of Christian Scripture for individuals and groups. In this his eighth book, *All You Need is Good News: Paul's letter to Rome*, he has combined a great balance of the English text with analysis of the message for both then and now, providing both a prayer and searching questions for each section, plus plenty of references to further resources. As in other books he has used photographs effectively to enhance understanding, these from his own travels to Rome and surrounding areas.

A provocative feature is also the accounts of the impact of Romans on five significant men from various periods of history: Aurelius Augustine (354-430), Martin Luther (1489-1546), John Wesley (1703-1791), Karl Barth (1886-1968), and David Suchet (1946-). (My only wish is that he had found a female example!)

Doug concludes this book confidently: “When we read Paul’s greatest letter with heart and mind, God our Father is able to keep filling us with joy and peace that comes from trusting in his Son Jesus, with the result that we overflow with hope by the Holy Spirit despite the ups and downs of life.” I am confident that this book will provide readers with tools the Spirit can use for their joy and peace and hope in a changing world.

Dr Rosalind Gooden
Former ABMS Missionary in Bangladesh

Doug Rowston is indeed right to quote Dale Moody's reflection that 'the well of Romans was too deep to run dry' –and Rowston's engaging handling of this profound text illustrates the truth of that observation. With commendably concise prose, this treatment balances concern for the overarching narrative and development of Paul's argument, alongside identifying and providing helpful guidance in exploring the multifaceted pathways and directions that comprise this rich text.

Creatively employing a framework of Tragedy, Comedy, Dilemma and Fairy Tale, Rowston succeeds in capturing something of the performative quality of a text that was written to be 'performed' (read aloud) when presented to the original recipients. Woven through this analysis are a selection of vignettes of lives touched by Romans from a variety of contexts and times. Through this interplay Rowston brings to the fore an even greater quality evident in Paul's letter – that this is no mere document of passing interest to ancient historians but is truly God-breathed and continues to speak as such as God's living word.

Writing such an overview, summary and guide for Romans is deceptively challenging. All too many read into the text more than is there or provide cursory summations that reflect more the views of the commentator than the theological and pastoral richness found in Paul's own words. Rowston's treatment reflects the maturity of someone who has lived in ongoing reflection and learning, combining the eyes of a disciple, pastor and theological educator.

Any treatment of Romans should lead us to two indispensable landing points: to prayer and praise! It is a pleasure to see these qualities embodied in this stimulating and helpful book.

Dr Tim Harris
Assistant Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide

Filled with details gathered from a lifetime of study, Doug Rowston is a well-informed guide who wants to encourage his readers – both individuals and small groups – towards a devotional (and life-shaping) encounter with the good news of Jesus found in Paul’s letter to the Romans.

The letter is explored within a creative four-part structure of ‘sad news’ (Romans 1:18- 3:20), ‘glad news’ (Romans 3:21-8:39), a gospel that engages dilemmas of past, present, and future (Romans 9:1-11:36), and ‘too good not to be true!’ news (Romans 12:1-15:13).

In seventeen bite-sized sections, Paul’s thought is explored through commentary, stories, thought-provoking questions, and prayers. Identifying Romans as a letter that has “influenced the world very significantly,” brief accounts are included of five historical characters who have been transformed by their reading of Romans in the hope that contemporary readers will also be stimulated to deeds of faith, hope, and love.

This is a gentle study that shows evidence of Doug's extensive experience as a patient teacher and preacher.

Dr Stephen Spence
Author, *The Parting of the Ways*

CONTENTS

Foreword 1

Introduction

Why should we read Romans? 3
A Personal Pilgrimage with Romans 5
The Gospel of God 7
The Background of Paul's Letter to Rome 9
An Overview of Paul's Letter to Rome 13
An Outline of Paul's Letter to Rome 15

The Opening of the Letter

Romans 1:1-17 Greeting, Thanksgiving, Theme 17
Aurelius Augustine's Story 20

First Major Section

Tragedy: How is Romans sad news to Gentiles and Jews?

Romans 1:18-32 In the Gentile world 21
Romans 2:1-3:8 In the Jewish world 25
Romans 3:9-20 In all the world 31
Martin Luther's Story 33

Second Major Section

Comedy: How is Romans glad news to all who believe?

Romans 3:21-31 In Jesus Christ 35
Romans 4:1-25 In Abraham 39
Romans 5:1-21 In grace 43
Romans 6:1-23 In eternal life 47
Romans 7:1-25 In liberation 53
Romans 8:1-39 In the Spirit 57
John Wesley's Story 65

Third Major Section

Dilemma: How is Romans good news to Jew and Gentile?

Romans 9:1-29	Past tragedy	67
Romans 9:30-10:21	Present responsibility	73
Romans 11:1-36	Future mystery	79
Karl Barth's Story		85

Fourth Major Section

Fairy Tale: How is Romans news too good not to be true?

Romans 12:1-21	The upward relation	87
Romans 13:1-14	The outward relation	93
Romans 14:1-15:13	The inward relation	97
David Suchet's Story		103

The Closing of the Letter

Romans 15:14-16:27	Plans, Greetings, Praise	105
--------------------	--------------------------	-----

Appendix: The God of Jesus and Paul	111
--	-----

Afterword	115
------------------	-----

Select Bibliography	117
----------------------------	-----

Foreword

On July 23, 2020, the second last day of a delightful holiday with my wife at Robe in South Australia, I had a significant heart attack. In the providence of God the doctor at the Robe Medical Centre stabilised me and I was transported to Flinders Private Hospital by road ambulance and flying doctor service. All the way the doctors and nurses and paramedics were truly amazing. While Rosalie was driving home alone I was being cared for in Adelaide. The cardiologist planned my treatment. This included an emergency operation on July 25 for the insertion of a stent, time at home for healing and gathering strength before readmission to hospital, and triple bypass surgery on September 15. In retrospect I can only think of a verse in the New Testament. *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God (Romans 8:28).*

More than two years after this experience I have written the following book on Romans, Paul's greatest letter. This is designed to be read by individuals or home groups. Individuals may use it as a collection of devotional studies over an extended time. Home groups may work through a series of weekly or fortnightly gatherings. After the introduction each short section includes the biblical text, some explanatory comments, a prayer, and some questions for discussion. My desire is that readers will come to appreciate the good news that was communicated by Paul in the first century and that still speaks to readers in the twenty-first century. And I trust you, like me, will learn that all things work together for good for those who love God.

Doug Rowston

All You Need is Good News



*Forum
Rome*

Introduction

Why should we read Romans?

This book is about a letter written by a man who lived in the first century of the Christian era. He was named Saul, in Hebrew, or Paul, in Greek. Hebrew was the ancient language of his people, the Jews. Greek was the common language of his world, the Roman Empire. In the second half of the second century, an anonymous writer described Paul as follows: 'a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.' Paul's personal appearance is depicted in such a plain and unflattering manner that the description may well reflect the truth.

This man may have had not only an ugly appearance but he also had an ugly beginning in the history of Christianity. He was in favour of stoning a leading Greek-speaking Jewish Christian, Stephen, and he was actively involved in throwing other Greek-speaking Jewish Christians into jail. But then things changed dramatically. On the way to persecute Christians in Damascus, Paul met the risen Jesus. Paul turned from the darkness to the light. He became a Christian. In time, he made three major journeys to share the good news which he had found through faith in Jesus the Messiah. Eventually, he was taken to Rome and was brought to trial before the emperor. Finally, like Stephen, he was prepared to die for his faith.

Why then do people make the effort to study this man's letter to the Romans? A very good reason is that the letter to Rome

has influenced the history of the world very significantly. It has changed the lives of some of the world's greatest thinkers. Scattered through this book are the testimonies of some very famous characters in Christian history: Aurelius Augustine (354-430), Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Wesley (1703-1791), Karl Barth (1886-1968), and David Suchet (1946-). The common denominator of these five characters is the transforming power of the message of Paul's letter to the Romans. If it has had such an influence, then it seems a worthwhile exercise to make our way through the sixteen chapters of the letter.