

R.C. SPROUL

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ROMANS

ROMANS: AN EXPOSITIONAL COMMENTARY

“R.C. Sproul,’ someone said to me in the 1970s, ‘is the finest communicator in the Reformed world.’ Now, four decades later, his skills honed by long practice, his understanding deepened by years of prayer, meditation, and testing (as Martin Luther counseled), R.C. shares the fruit of what became perhaps his greatest love: feeding and nourishing his own congregation at St. Andrew’s from the Word of God and building them up in faith and fellowship and in Christian living and serving. Dr. Sproul’s expositional commentaries have all R.C.’s hallmarks: clarity and liveliness, humor and pathos, always expressed in application to the mind, will, and affections. R.C.’s ability to focus on ‘the big picture,’ his genius of never saying too much, leaving his hearers satisfied yet wanting more, never making the Word dull, are all present in these expositions. They are his gift to the wider church. May they nourish God’s people well and serve as models of the kind of ministry for which we continue to hunger.”

—Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson
Teaching Fellow
Ligonier Ministries

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—Dr. W. Robert Godfrey
President emeritus and professor of church history emeritus
Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, California

“I tell my students again and again, ‘You need to buy good commentaries and do so with some discernment.’ Among them there must be preacher’s commentaries, for not all commentaries are the same. Some may tell you what the text means but provide little help in answering the question, ‘How do I preach this text?’ Dr. R.C. Sproul was a legend in our time. His preaching held us in awe for half a century, and these pages represent the fruit of his exposition at the very peak of his abilities and insights. Dr. Sproul’s expositional commentary series represents Reformed theology on fire, delivered from a pastor’s heart in a vibrant congregation. Essential reading.”

—Dr. Derek W.H. Thomas
Senior minister
First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, South Carolina

“Dr. R.C. Sproul was the premier theologian of our day, an extraordinary instrument in the hand of the Lord. Possessed with penetrating insight into the text of Scripture, Dr. Sproul was a gifted expositor and world-class teacher, endowed with a strategic grasp and command of the inspired Word. When he stepped into the pulpit of St. Andrew’s and committed himself to the weekly discipline of biblical exposition, this noted preacher demonstrated a rare ability to explicate and apply God’s Word. I wholeheartedly recommend Dr. Sproul’s expositional commentaries to all who long to know the truth better and experience it more deeply in a life-changing fashion. Here is an indispensable tool for digging deeper into God’s Word. This is a must-read for every Christian.”

—Dr. Steven J. Lawson
Founder and president
OnePassion Ministries, Dallas

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—Dr. Joel R. Beeke
President and professor of systematic theology and homiletics,
Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan

ROMANS

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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*To my beloved Saint Andrew's congregation
in Sanford, Florida, who faithfully attend the
exposition of sacred Scripture.*

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SERIES PREFACE

When God called me into full-time Christian ministry, He called me to the academy. I was trained and ordained to a ministry of teaching, and the majority of my adult life has been devoted to preparing young men for the Christian ministry and to trying to bridge the gap between seminary and Sunday school through various means under the aegis of Ligonier Ministries.

Then, in 1997, God did something I never anticipated: He placed me in the position of preaching weekly as a leader of a congregation of His people—St. Andrew’s in Sanford, Florida. Over the past twelve years, as I have opened the Word of God on a weekly basis for these dear saints, I have come to love the task of the local minister. Though my role as a teacher continues, I am eternally grateful to God that He saw fit to place me in this new ministry, the ministry of a preacher.

Very early in my tenure with St. Andrew’s, I determined that I should adopt the ancient Christian practice of *lectio continua*, “continuous expositions,” in my preaching. This method of preaching verse-by-verse through books of the Bible (rather than choosing a new topic each week) has been attested throughout church history as the one approach that ensures believers hear the full counsel of God. Therefore, I began preaching lengthy series of messages at St. Andrew’s, eventually working my way through several biblical books in a practice that continues to the present day.

Previously, I had taught through books of the Bible in various settings, including Sunday school classes, Bible studies, and audio and video teaching series for Ligonier Ministries. But now I found myself appealing not so much to the minds of my hearers but to both their minds and their hearts. I knew that I was responsible as a preacher to clearly explain God’s Word *and* to show how we ought to live in light of it. I sought to fulfill both tasks as I ascended the St. Andrew’s pulpit each week.

What you hold in your hand, then, is a written record of my preaching

labors amidst my beloved Sanford congregation. The dear saints who sit under my preaching encouraged me to give my sermons a broader hearing. To that end, the chapters that follow were adapted from a sermon series I preached at St. Andrew's.

Please be aware that this book is part of a broader series of books containing adaptations of my St. Andrew's sermons. This book, like all the others in the series, will *not* give you the fullest possible insight into each and every verse in this biblical book. Though I sought to at least touch on each verse, I focused on the key themes and ideas that comprised the "big picture" of each passage I covered. Therefore, I urge you to use this book as an overview and introduction.

I pray that you will be as blessed in reading this material as I was in preaching it.

—R.C. Sproul
Lake Mary, Florida
April 2009

PREFACE

On the first page of Romans in my Greek testament, I have scribbled at the top of the page a few significant dates. The first one is the year AD 386. In the latter part of the fourth century lived a young man whose father was a pagan and whose mother was a devout Christian. This young man had devoted himself to immorality. He had already sired one illegitimate son, yet his mother continued to pray for his soul and sought the counsel of her pastor, Bishop Ambrose of Milan.

This young man was pacing one day in a garden where a copy of the New Testament was chained to a lectern. As he was walking, he overheard children playing in the grass, singing a refrain to one of their childhood games: *Tolle lege, tolle lege*, which means “take up and read.” So this young man, whose name was Aurelius Augustine, went to the Scriptures that were there. He allowed the volume of sacred writ to fall open where it would, and in the providence of God it fell open to Romans 13. Augustine’s eyes fell on this passage:

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Rom. 13:11–14)

As Augustine read these words, the Spirit of God took them and pierced between joint and sinew, bone and marrow, to the very depths of this young man’s soul. By the power of the Word of God with the Spirit attending it, Augustine was converted to the Christian faith, and we know him today as Saint Augustine of Hippo.

Later in church history, in 1515, an Augustinian monk who had diligently pursued his doctoral studies in the works of Augustine was consigned to a

university to be the professor of biblical studies. He had already delivered his first series of lectures on the book of Psalms, and now his task was to teach his students the book of Romans. As he was preparing his lectures on Romans and studying this epistle's first chapter, he found a notation from an ancient manuscript of Augustine defining the righteousness of Christ. Augustine said that when Paul speaks of the righteousness of God in Romans 1, it is not the righteousness by which God Himself is righteous, but the righteousness that He freely gives to those who put their trust in Christ. For the first time in his life, Martin Luther, whose conscience had been wounded by the burden of the law of God that daily exposed his relentless guilt, understood the gospel of Christ. The doors of paradise swung open and he walked through, and it was from Paul's teaching on the doctrine of justification by faith alone that Luther stood against the whole world in the sixteenth-century Reformation.

Another date I have scribbled in my Greek testament is the year 1738, when a man who was already ordained to the ministry in the Anglican church in England was listening to a message being delivered outside in London at Aldersgate. He mentioned later that as he was listening to the words of Romans, he felt his heart was strangely warmed. He said that was the moment of his authentic conversion, and it defined the life and ministry of John Wesley for the rest of his days.

I could mention the impact of Romans on John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and a host of others throughout church history, but as we come to it now, I simply remind you that God has richly blessed those who have devoted themselves to the study of this book.

1

GREETINGS

Romans 1:1–7



Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of Romans begins with one word, **Paul** (v. 1). From the book of Acts we are familiar with the trials and missionary activity of the apostle Paul. He is well known to us. We consider him our mentor and friend. At the beginning of this letter he follows a custom practiced regularly in his day. In antiquity the author of an epistle usually identified himself by name at the beginning. Today we read “Dear Bill,” or “Dear John,” or “Dear Mary,” then wait to the end of the letter to find out who wrote it. Paul does not depart from the old custom and identifies himself as the author of the epistle in the first word.

Who Was Paul?

Paul starts by giving his name, but he then seeks to define who he understands himself to be. This self-identification is not just Paul's introspection or self-evaluation; the Holy Spirit superintends the apostle's writing, which is how we know that this is a true and accurate description of the author of the epistle.

Paul identifies himself as a **bondsman of Jesus Christ** (v. 1). I have never been satisfied with that English translation of this second phrase. Some translations have, "Paul, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ." *Bondsman* is an improvement, but I think the proper translation should read, "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ." The Greek word Paul used here is *doulos*. A *doulos* was not a hired servant who could come and go as he pleased. A *doulos* was a person who had been purchased, and once purchased he became his master's possession.

This idea of the *doulos* in Scripture is always connected to another descriptive word, *kurios*. If you have a Roman Catholic background or if you know something of sacred music in church history and high church liturgy, you have heard of the Kyrie. "Kyrie eleison, Christus eleison, Kyrie eleison." It means "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy" because the supreme title given to Jesus by the Father in the New Testament is the title *Kurios*. *Kurios* translates the Old Testament *Adon* or *Adonai*, which means "the sovereign one," a name in the Old Testament that was reserved for God.

In the New Testament the title "lord" or *kurios* is used in three ways. There is a simple, common usage, where calling someone *kurios* is like addressing him as "sir," a polite form of address. The supreme use of *kurios* refers to the sovereign God, who rules all things. *Kurios*, "the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9), is the name given to Jesus, whom the Father calls the King of kings and the Lord of lords. There is yet a middle usage of the term *kurios* in the New Testament. It is used to describe a slave owner, which is an apt description of Jesus, and it is from this that Paul describes himself. He is not just a servant but a slave.

Paul, in addressing believers, said, "You are not your own. For you were bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:19). We have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). There is a paradox here: when the New Testament describes our condition by nature, as fallen people, it describes us as slaves to sin. We are by nature in bondage to sin, bondsmen of the flesh, and the only remedy for that, according to the New Testament, is to be liberated by the work of the Holy Spirit. For "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). Everyone born of the Spirit is set free from slavery to sin.

There is also irony here: when Christ sets us free from slavery to the flesh, He calls us to the royal liberty of slavery to Him. That is why we call Him Master. We acknowledge that it is from Him that we get our marching orders. He is the

Lord of our lives. We are not our own. We are not autonomous or independent. Unless people understand their relationship to Christ in these terms, they remain unconverted.

Paul makes a significant affirmation about himself and his mission: **called to be an apostle** (v. 1). In the early chapters of Acts, the church gathered to elect a new apostle, and it set forth the criteria for apostleship. The first criterion was having been a disciple of Jesus during His earthly ministry; the second was having been an eyewitness of the resurrection; and the third and most important criterion was having been directly and immediately called by Jesus (Acts 1:20–26).

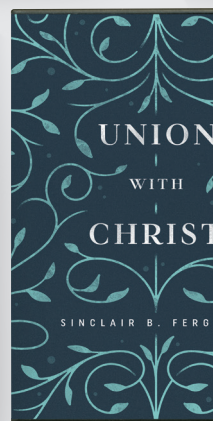
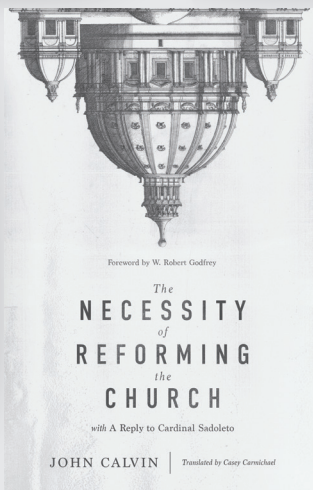
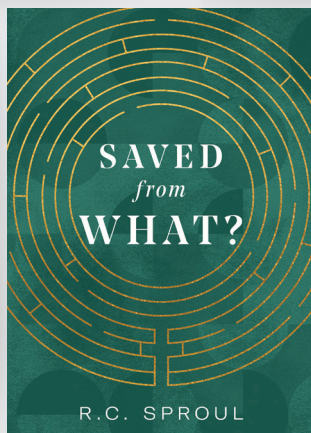
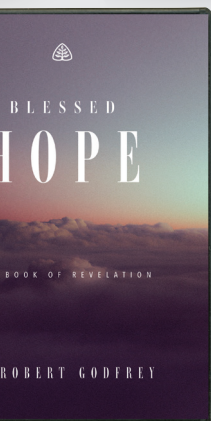
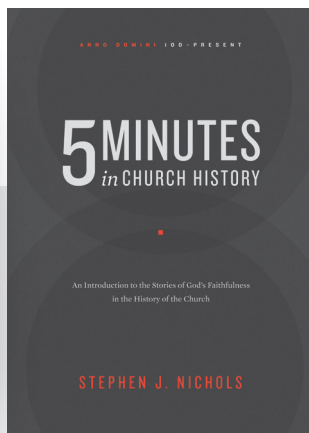
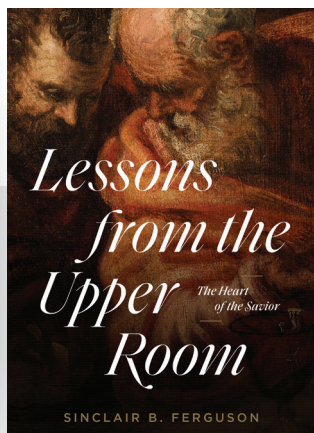
On one occasion Jesus sent out seventy disciples. There were far more disciples than the Twelve. Not all those who were disciples became apostles. We tend to use these words interchangeably, as if *twelve disciples* and *twelve apostles* must mean the same thing, but a disciple is simply a learner or a student. Jesus was the Rabbi and enrolled in His school were many disciples. From out of that group He chose twelve to be elevated to the rank of apostle, those who were commissioned to speak for the Master. In the ancient world an apostle was like an ambassador who spoke on behalf of the king. The ambassador's message carried with it the authority of the one who sent him. The word *apostolos* in Greek means simply "one who is sent." "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me" (Luke 10:16).

People often say, "I like to know what Jesus says; it is Paul I do not want to listen to." Almost all we know about Jesus is that which comes through apostolic authority, so such remarks set Paul against Matthew, or Paul against John. That may not be done with impunity because all of the apostolic writings carry the delegated authority of Jesus Himself. That is what it means to be an apostle. That is why the New Testament church is built on the foundation of the apostles.

In the three criteria for apostleship, Paul fails the first two tests: he had not been a disciple of Jesus during Jesus' tenure on earth, nor had he been an eyewitness of the resurrection of Christ. That is why there were some in the early church who seriously challenged the apostolic authority of Paul. The supreme qualification for apostolic authority was a direct and immediate call by Jesus. I believe that is why, in the book of Acts, the account of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, where Christ called him to be His apostle, is repeated three times. It is to remind the people that Paul is an authentic agent of revelation. He speaks with the authority of Jesus.

The next thing we learn about Paul is that he had been **separated to the gospel of God** (v. 1). In Latin *separated* means "segregated," set apart from the multitude to a specific, sacred, consecrated task. The phrase Paul uses involves a part of speech in the Greek language called the genitive, which indicates possession.

We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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