

Dr. Craig Keener, Romans, Session 1

Introduction

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Keener, Romans, Session 1, Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener introduces his course on the Book of Romans. He emphasizes the letter's historical impact, discussing its influence on figures like Martin Luther and John Wesley. Keener then examines the letter's genre, comparing it to other ancient letters and speeches, highlighting Paul's extensive use of rhetoric and argumentation. He explores the cultural context of the letter, including the demographics and religious landscape of first-century Rome. Finally, Keener addresses various interpretations of Paul's work, particularly concerning his relationship with Judaism and the application of his teachings to contemporary issues.

2. 30 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Romans, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Pauline Epistles → Romans).



Keener_Romans_Session01.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpt by Dr. Craig Keener on the book of Romans:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener's Introduction to Romans

Overall Theme: This lecture serves as an introduction to Paul's letter to the Romans, focusing on the historical, cultural, and literary context crucial for proper interpretation. Keener emphasizes that Romans is not a systematic theology but a powerful, carefully constructed letter with profound implications for Christian thought and practice.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **Impact of Romans:**
 - Romans has profoundly impacted history, influencing figures like Origen, Martin Luther, and John Wesley.
 - It's considered a "magnificent masterpiece" by Christian scholars across denominations.
 - It touches on major theological points, influencing systematic theology, but wasn't intended as a systematic treatise.
- **Genre: Letter vs. Epistle:**
 - Early scholars differentiated between literary "epistles" (like Seneca's) and ordinary "letters" based on papyri finds.
 - Paul's letters, while written in the common Koine Greek, are longer than average papyrus letters (average 87 words compared to Paul's average of 2,495).
 - Paul's letter to the Romans is the longest extant letter at 7,114 words.
 - Paul uses an epistolary frame (opening, conclusion) but also includes argumentation, more common in speeches or letter-essays.
 - Paul's letters were not written "off the top of his head" but carefully crafted and likely involved multiple drafts. It may have taken over 11 hours to dictate Romans, and could have cost around \$2,275 in modern US currency for materials and scribe's labor.

- **Rhetorical Analysis:**

- Paul's letters are not elite like Cicero's or Pliny's, but neither were they off-the-cuff. They are carefully constructed.
- Rhetorical critics have shown Paul's letters are not elite but thoughtfully written.
- While not strictly adhering to speech structures, Paul utilizes rhetorical devices.
- Ancient rhetorical handbooks do not deal with letters until much later than Paul's day, however there are some things in common.
- Letters typically have introductions, bodies, and conclusions, and ancient handbooks outline rules for different types of letters.
- Different types include letters of reproof (Galatians) and letters of recommendation (Philemon).
- Paul's introductions commonly include the author, audience, and greetings.

- **Paul's Letter Introductions:**

- Typical introduction includes author (Paul as apostle), recipients ("saints" in Rome), and greetings.
- The standard Greek greeting "kairein" (greetings) is adapted to "charis" (grace), combined with the Jewish "shalom" (peace) as "grace and peace".
- Keener notes "Paul may have been the first one to do this. We don't know. But instead of having kairein, greetings, we have karis, grace."
- These greetings functioned as blessings, implicitly invoking God, and often included a thanksgiving.
- Paul gives blessings from "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," which indicates the shared understanding that Jesus is divine.
- Keener states, "right here, right up front in Paul's letters, he is indicating the knowledge that he shares in common with his congregations, that Jesus is divine."

- **Structure and Argumentation in Paul's letters:**

- The body of Paul's letters can include narrative (narratio), a thesis statement (propositio, like Romans 1:16-17), argument with proofs (probatio, scripture quotations).

- Paul uses rhetorical devices, though not as explicitly as speeches.
- Keener notes that "Although Paul does it more in letters than you would expect because he's also good at argumentation."
- **Hermeneutics and Context:**
- Understanding the original audience is crucial for interpreting the letters.
- Keener shares "For if Paul says he's writing this to the church in Rome, chances are the believers in Rome know some of the issues that he's addressing. They know why he's addressing this. They know what he means sometimes by these things."
- Relevance theory suggests that communication is often incomplete without understanding the social context.
- Background research on Paul's cultural context is vital to avoid misinterpretations.
- Keener notes "And it was because of that that I began digging into ancient culture. It was because of that I wrote the IVP Bible background commentary. It's because of that that I eventually went on and became a biblical scholar because otherwise, I was just going to read the Bible on my own and preach it. But for the background, I needed to do more research and try to make that research available to others to put it at their fingertips."
- We must distinguish transcultural moral norms (like those in vice lists) from culturally specific issues.
- Biblical principles need to be applied to analogous circumstances today.
- Keener notes "If we want to apply them rightly, we need to make sure we apply them to analogous circumstances."
- The Bible doesn't always speak with a unanimous voice on certain cultural issues, suggesting that some teachings are culturally specific, whereas other issues, such as condemnation of all sexual intercourse outside of heterosexual marriage, are consistent throughout.
- **Paul's Education and Background:**
- Paul was educated in Tarsus, considered a major philosophical center.
- He was familiar with Stoic and Platonist philosophy. Keener notes that Paul "knew the language of popular philosophy"

- He likely had training in rhetoric at a lower level and developed his skills over time.
- He was a Pharisee, trained in Jerusalem under Gamaliel.
- He had both Hellenistic and Palestinian Jewish backgrounds.
- He was familiar with the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament).
- He did not show off classical quotations, and was more subdued, unlike highly educated orators of the day.
- Keener likens Paul to "a seminarian who had some homiletic courses and was a Bible major."
- **Paul's Understanding of the Torah:**
 - Paul was devoted to the Torah before his conversion, but had the wrong framework, believing his zeal led him to rebel against God.
 - He came to believe the issue was not the Torah, but human "flesh" and the limitations of written law.
 - Only God can make people righteous, and salvation comes through grace.
 - Paul uses "ad hoc" arguments for persuasion, and uses some caricatures (reductio ad absurdum), in polemical contexts.
- **Legacy and Misinterpretations of Paul:**
 - Paul's teachings were caricatured and contested.
 - Some accused him of teaching "let us sin that grace may abound," which he didn't teach.
 - Keener notes "Romans chapter 3 and verse 8, he says that there were some people who complained about him and said that he taught let us sin that grace may abound, which certainly was not what Paul was teaching."
 - James, some scholars think, may be refuting a misrepresentation of Paul.
 - E.P. Sanders critiqued anti-Semitic approaches to Judaism, emphasizing grace in early Judaism.
 - Keener quotes Sanders as saying that "the older anti-Semitic approaches to Judaism, making it a foil for God's grace in early Christianity, were unfounded."

- While there was grace in Judaism, legalism was also present.
- The issue for Paul is not ethnic, but about using religion in service of ourselves rather than accepting God's grace.
- **Setting of Romans:**
- Paul wrote Romans from Corinth and delivered by Phoebe.
- The letter was likely written during Paul's winter stay in Achaia.
- Rome was a major Roman colony with ties to Corinth.
- Rome's population was likely around a million.
- Tenements had shops on lower floors and poor people living in rickety upper stories.
- Jewish residents were as much as 5% of the population, mostly living across the Tiber.
- Many were poor and worked on the docks.
- The synagogues in Rome were not united.
- The Jewish community was largely Greek speaking, although many had Latin names.
- Many Roman citizens in Rome were Jewish, often descendants of slaves brought by Pompeii.
- Romans had some xenophobia towards Jewish practices.
- Jewish Christian leaders were expelled by Claudius but returned after his death.
- Keener explains that "Claudius expelled Jewish Christian leaders in the year 49, or most likely 49... It was automatically repealed, as other edicts would be when he died in the year 54. So, after five years, some Jewish believers in Jesus could return to Rome and other Jewish believers could come to Rome."
- Nero's massacre of Christians in 64 did not destroy the thriving church.
- The church was likely predominantly Gentile, but had Jewish roots.

Conclusion:

Keener's lecture provides a comprehensive introduction to the letter to the Romans by emphasizing the complexities of its context. He stresses the importance of understanding Paul's cultural background, the literary devices he employs, and the historical circumstances surrounding the letter's composition. By examining these factors, readers can develop a better understanding of this pivotal text and learn how to apply its messages to our current situations.

4. Romans Study Guide: Session 1, Introduction

Romans: Lecture 1 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. What is the historical significance of Paul's letter to the Romans?
2. How did the discovery of papyri affect the understanding of Paul's letters?
3. What is the average length of Paul's letters compared to ordinary papyri letters and letters from figures like Cicero and Seneca?
4. What are some common elements of letters in the ancient world?
5. What is unique about Paul's use of the greeting "grace and peace" in his letters?
6. What are the typical components of a letter, according to rhetorical criticism?
7. Why is understanding the original audience important for interpreting a letter like Romans?
8. What is the difference between transcultural moral norms and culturally specific practices in the Bible, according to the lecture?
9. How did the dominant forms of tertiary training in antiquity, philosophy and rhetoric, influence the ways of communication?
10. Describe the controversy over the interpretation of Paul's teachings in subsequent generations.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Paul's letter to the Romans has had a major impact throughout history, revolutionizing perspectives on salvation, as seen in the lives of figures like Martin Luther and John Wesley. It continues to be regarded by Christian scholars as a masterpiece that synthesizes much of Paul's teaching.
2. The discovery of papyri led scholars like Adolph Deissmann to initially believe that Paul's letters were similar to ordinary, non-elite communication, but further analysis revealed that they were more complex than the average papyrus document.

3. Paul's letters are significantly longer than ordinary papyri (which average about 87 words), and longer than the letters of Cicero (average 295 words), and Seneca (average 995 words) with an average length of 2,495 words.
4. Ancient letters typically included an introduction with the author's name, the recipient's name, and a greeting; a body where the main message was conveyed; and a conclusion that often included final remarks and blessings.
5. Paul uniquely adapts the traditional Greek greeting *kairein* (greetings) to *charis* (grace) and combines this with the Jewish greeting *shalom* (peace) in his letters, framing these as blessings or "wish prayers" invoking God's favor and well-being.
6. According to rhetorical criticism, letters typically include an introduction, body, and conclusion, and when argumentation is present, it often contains a *narratio* (narrative), a *propositio* (thesis statement), and a *probatio* (argument with proofs).
7. Understanding the original audience is crucial because it helps readers grasp the context, shared cultural knowledge, and specific issues Paul was addressing, enabling a more accurate interpretation of his intended message.
8. Transcultural moral norms are principles that are consistently condemned throughout the Bible, like sexual immorality, slander, and greed, while culturally specific practices, like women's roles in certain passages, reflect the norms of the historical and social context.
9. Rhetoric, being the more valued form of tertiary training, greatly influenced the way people crafted and delivered arguments. Even without formal training, people were exposed to rhetorical devices, making structured arguments and specific figures of speech a common feature of literate communication.
10. Paul's teachings were sometimes caricatured as advocating for sin in order to receive grace, and James' letter may be an attempt to correct this misrepresentation, highlighting the tension between how Paul's theology was interpreted and his actual intent.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the impact of Paul's letter to the Romans on Christian theology and history. How has its interpretation evolved over time, and what are some of the continuing debates surrounding it?
2. Analyze the role of rhetoric in Paul's letters, particularly in Romans. How does his use of rhetorical devices and argumentation contribute to his message and impact?
3. Explore the cultural and historical context of the Roman church as presented in the lecture. How do factors such as its social makeup, the presence of Jewish and Gentile believers, and Roman attitudes toward Jewish practices shape our understanding of the letter?
4. Compare and contrast the different educational backgrounds of Paul. How do his Jewish, Hellenistic, and Roman influences interact, and how do they inform the content and style of Romans?
5. Examine the relationship between law and grace in Paul's thought as discussed in the lecture. How did Paul's understanding of the Torah evolve, and how did this shift in perspective affect his theology?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Koine:** The common dialect of Greek that was widely spoken in the Hellenistic and Roman periods; the language of the New Testament.
- **Epistle:** A formal letter, often intended for a wider audience and more carefully crafted, sometimes with the characteristics of a letter essay.
- **Papyri:** Ancient writing materials made from the pith of the papyrus plant, on which letters and other documents were commonly written in the ancient world.
- **Rhetorical Criticism:** A method of analyzing texts that focuses on the use of persuasion, argumentation, and literary devices.
- **Epistolary Criticism:** A method of analyzing texts that focuses on the form and structure of letters, often comparing them to other letters from the same period.
- **Kairein:** The traditional Greek greeting, meaning "greetings."
- **Charis:** The Greek word for "grace," used by Paul in his greetings as a blessing.

- **Shalom:** The Hebrew word for "peace," used by Paul in his greetings as a blessing.
- **Transcultural Norms:** Moral principles and values that are considered to be universal and applicable across different cultures and time periods.
- **Narratio:** In rhetoric, the part of a speech or letter that narrates the events leading up to the situation being discussed.
- **Propositio:** In rhetoric, the thesis statement or main proposition that is being argued in a speech or letter.
- **Probatio:** In rhetoric, the part of a speech or letter where arguments are presented and supported with evidence.
- **Reductio ad Absurdum:** A rhetorical device used to discredit an argument by reducing it to an absurd or illogical conclusion.
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, widely used in the Hellenistic world, and often quoted by Paul in his writings.
- **Stoicism:** A school of Hellenistic philosophy that emphasized reason, virtue, and living in accordance with nature, influential in Paul's time.
- **Diaspora:** The dispersion of Jews outside of Israel.
- **Alcosts:** A means of transporting ships and goods by land across the Isthmus of Corinth.
- **Diakonos:** A Greek term that can refer to a servant, minister, or deacon; used to describe Phoebe in Romans 16:1.

5. FAQs on Keener, Romans, Session 1, Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Romans and Its Context

1. **What makes Paul's letter to the Romans so significant in Christian history?** Paul's letter to the Romans has had a profound impact throughout Christian history. It played a pivotal role in the Reformation, particularly in the life of Martin Luther, who underwent a transformation in his understanding of salvation through faith in Christ. John Wesley also had a life-changing experience when hearing Luther's preface to Romans. Even today, the letter is studied across various Christian traditions, including Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, all viewing it as a masterful work that integrates many of Paul's teachings, though not intended as a systematic theology.
2. **How does the genre of "letter" versus "epistle" impact our understanding of Romans?** While early distinctions were made between ordinary letters and literary epistles (such as those by Seneca and Cicero), the discovery of papyri showed that Paul's letters are not elite in style. However, they are also not simple, everyday letters; they are significantly longer than typical papyri, and include argumentation, which is more characteristic of speeches or letter essays. Paul's letters had a clear structure: an epistolary frame with an opening, a body that included argumentation, and a conclusion.
3. **What does the writing process of Paul's letter to the Romans reveal about its nature and purpose?** Paul's letters were not casually written, but were meticulously composed. It is believed that dictation to a scribe like Tertius, who is mentioned in Romans, required significant time and resources (approximately 11 hours of dictation and roughly \$2,275 in today's US currency). Paul likely revised his drafts before sending. It demonstrates a strong commitment to crafting a letter that would effectively communicate his message to the church in Rome. It also shows us how intentional Paul was in crafting his message.

4. **What is the significance of Paul's use of "grace" and "peace" in his letter openings?** Paul adapts the typical Greek greeting "kairein" (greetings) and incorporates the Jewish greeting "shalom." Instead he uses "grace" (charis) and "peace" (eirēnē), combining Greek and Jewish elements. These terms were not simply greetings but rather blessings and "wish prayers" invoking God's favor and well-being on the recipients. By using grace and peace, Paul is indicating that Jesus, through whom this grace is received, is divine. He also does this from God the Father, indicating the unique blessings they have received through Christ.
5. **How does Paul structure his letters, and what rhetorical devices does he employ?** Paul's letters generally follow an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. In some letters, including Romans, the body includes argumentation with narrative, thesis statements (propositio), and proofs (probatio), often through Scripture. Paul uses rhetorical devices, including repeating phrases or sounds in successive clauses and other figures of speech. Although not writing formal speeches, Paul's argumentation reflects his awareness of common rhetorical conventions of his time. He was able to communicate effectively through various methods of rhetoric.
6. **How does understanding the cultural background of Paul and his audience affect our interpretation of his letters, particularly Romans?** Understanding the cultural context is vital. Paul wrote to specific congregations addressing specific situations, meaning that some messages would make sense to his contemporary readers that may not be obvious to us today. Distinguishing between transcultural moral norms (like those in Paul's vice lists) and culturally specific practices is essential for accurately applying the Bible today. Further, analyzing the options available to the writer helps determine whether particular instructions are meant for a specific cultural context or if they have transcultural implications. Paul is not addressing a purely modern world view, so it is essential to note the audience he is communicating with.

7. **What was Paul's background and training, and how did it shape his ministry?**

Paul had a multifaceted background as a Hellenistic and Palestinian Jew. He was trained in Torah and was likely exposed to some rhetoric and philosophy. He studied under Gamaliel and was well-versed in Greek intellectual discourse and had great facility in the Greek language. Though not a professional rhetorician, his education, both Jewish and Greco-Roman, greatly influenced his ability to communicate and argue persuasively in his letters. He could incorporate elements of popular philosophy and rhetoric that made his message more accessible to a wider audience.

8. **What was the social and historical context of the church in Rome when Paul wrote his letter?**

The church in Rome was a diverse community with a Jewish foundation that became predominantly Gentile after Jewish Christians were expelled under Claudius and then returned to Rome in subsequent years. The Jewish community in Rome was largely Greek-speaking, often poor, and resided mainly in the trans-Tiberium area and had several synagogues that were not united. Rome's population of about a million people included a significant number of immigrants. The Jewish community faced discrimination, and this dynamic influenced the issues Paul addresses in Romans. Paul is speaking into a specific context in a way that would make sense to his audience, as the cultural context would have been very different than our modern one.