

Keener Romans Session01

Did you know that sending Paul's letter to the Romans would have cost him like 2,275 bucks in today's money. Wow. That's like a first-class plane ticket.

Really? Yeah, you know it makes you think this was not your average ancient letter, right? So we're gonna take a deep dive today into some excerpts from a lecture by biblical scholar. Dr. Craig Keener. Okay, and Hopefully we can better understand why Paul invested so much in this particular message Sounds good.

You're ready to see Romans in a whole new light. Absolutely And it's amazing how such a simple fact like the cost of sending a letter you reveal so much about its importance It's true. It wasn't like dashing off a quick text message, right? This is a major undertaking for sure So it makes me wonder what exactly made this letter worth that kind of investment.

Well, dr Keener points out that Paul's letter to the Romans. It wasn't just a personal note It was a carefully constructed theological treatise It was strategically sent to a specific audience the believers in Rome gotcha So I see where you're going with this the cost kind of reflects the weight of the message Yeah, but what was so special about the believers in Rome? Why were they worth a first-class letter? Well Rome at the time was like the heart of the Roman Empire a busy metropolis The diverse population yeah, and that included a significant Jewish community So understanding this context is crucial because it helps us to understand the complexities that Paul was addressing in his letter Okay, so Paul is sending a message to the center of the world Addressing issues that have implications far beyond just Rome itself. Absolutely, but let's back up a bit here We mentioned that Paul's letters were long Yeah, especially Romans, uh-huh over 7,000 words, it's incredible and he's dictating all of this to a scribe Yeah, just imagine that scene.

Yeah, it's mind-boggling, isn't it? It is and dr Keener points out that this wasn't just Paul rambling on, you know, okay, he was meticulously crafting his arguments Oh, right. He used rhetorical devices Okay to engage his audience and to persuade them of the truth of the gospel wait Rhetorical devices, what do you mean? You're gonna have to break that down for sure. This is a little academic Yeah, think of it this way.

Paul was a very skilled communicator Okay He knew how to use language very effectively to make his points right to connect with his audience on like an emotional level Yeah, and to build a compelling case for his message. Okay. He wasn't just throwing out random theological ideas He was strategically using the tools of rhetoric, okay to make his writing Engaging and persuasive.

Okay, so he was like the ancient world's version of like a top-notch Yes speaker or writer exactly and you can see why his letters would have had such an impact Exactly, and by understanding these replacable strategies, right it can unlock new layers of meaning. Yes writing Yeah, this is already making me want to reread Romans with like fresh eyes Yeah, but let's stick with the historical context for a moment. Sure.

You mentioned that Rome had a significant Jewish community Yes, like how large are we talking? Dr Keener estimates that they may have made up as much as 5% of the city's population really imagine that Wow Tens of thousands of Jewish people living in the heart

of the Roman Empire Yeah, and facing a lot of prejudice right Romans look down on their practices Sabbath Circumcision certain foods right there were even expulsions under emperors Tiberius and Quadius Yeah, it was a really complicated social landscape. Yeah for the early church. Yeah, which had strong Jewish roots Okay, so I'm starting to see how all of this connects now.

Mm-hmm We had a powerful Empire yeah, a diverse city, uh-huh a complex social landscape, right and a Burgeoning Christian movement with both Jewish and Gentile believers, right? No wonder Paul's letter had to be so carefully crafted Sounds like he was walking a tightrope Trying to address all these different dynamics while proclaiming the gospel you're catching on quickly Oh good, and that's precisely why understanding the historical context is so crucial, right? It helps us to appreciate The challenges that Paul faced right the arguments that he engaged with and the profound truths that he sought to communicate This is fascinating. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, I want to circle back to something you mentioned earlier Okay, you said something about these? Transcultural moral norms that Paul addressed in his letter, right? What exactly did you mean by that? That's a good question Dr. Keener uses that term to describe moral principles that are condemned across time and across cultures Okay, and when you look at Paul's list of vices in Romans, right, you know sexual sins slander greed deceit Yeah, it's striking how relevant they still are today. It's like he's reading from today's headlines But how does this concept of transcultural moral norms? How does that help us to understand Paul's letter better? well, it highlights this tension between timeless moral principles and Culturally specific practices.

Okay. So for example Paul talks about women in the home in 1st Timothy Okay, but we also see examples of women working outside the home in other parts of the Bible, right? And so understanding the cultural context helps us to distinguish between those timeless moral principles Okay, and cultural practices that might not be as relevant today It's all about nuance gotcha. So it's not about Imposing a rigid set of rules from the past on to the present, right? But it's about understanding the principles behind those rules.

Yeah and applying them wisely in our own context Exactly, and this is where careful study and discernment come in. Okay, but let's not get ahead of ourselves Let's delve a bit deeper into this question of the Roman Church's makeup. Okay, dr Keener points out that there's a bit of a debate among scholars wait, so there's debate about who Paul was writing to That kind of changes things tell me more about why that's important Well, you see in 49 AD Emperor Claudius expelled Jewish Christian leaders from Rome Okay, and this suggests that the early church in Rome had strong Jewish roots, right? However, by the time that Paul wrote Romans, which was around 56 AD Okay, those leaders had only recently been allowed to return So a five-year gap where the church in Rome was probably predominantly Gentile It's possible Yeah It does change things it does and this context helps us to understand why Paul might be so concerned with explaining how Jewish and Gentile Believers fit together in God's plan, right? And remember this is just a few years after the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 Oh, right where they wrestled with similar issue.

Hold on the Jerusalem Council. Can you give me a quick refresher? Sure The Jerusalem Council was a pivotal gathering of early Christian leaders Okay, and they came together to address the question of whether or not Gentile believers needed to follow Jewish law, right?

It was a heated debate. Yeah, but ultimately they affirmed that salvation was by grace Through faith in Jesus Christ not by works of the law.

Ah, that's right It was a landmark decision It was that shaped the future of the Christian movement precisely and it's crucial background for understanding Paul's letter to the Romans This is all starting to click into place, but I have to ask what about Paul himself? Yes, we know he was a Jew Deeply devoted to the Torah, right, but he also moved easily in the Greco-Roman world. He did. How does that play into his letter? That's a brilliant observation.

Well, thanks. Dr. Keener highlights this fascinating tension in Paul's background, right? You know, he was a Hebrew of Hebrews a Pharisee trained under Gamaliel right yet. He was also born in Tarsus Okay, a center of Greco-Roman culture and learning so he was straddling two worlds Exactly, and this unique position allowed him to bridge the gap between Jewish and Gentile believers Yeah, he could speak the language of both cultures connect with their experiences, right and ultimately present the gospel in a way That resonated with both groups.

Wow. I never thought about it like that. It's like having the best translator in the world But speaking of translation, I've always wondered about some of Paul's arguments Yeah, sometimes they seem I don't know a bit out there like that thing about women's head coverings Yes, the head coverings dr.

Keener addresses that too, okay, he explains that Paul like any good communicator Adapted his arguments to his audience, right? So sometimes he used Ad-hoc Arguments, okay, meaning they were specific to the situation and the cultural norms of the time So what exactly does ad hoc mean like in this context? It means that Paul's arguments were tailored to the specific circumstances that he was addressing Okay, he wasn't laying down universal laws for all time in all cultures Okay, you know he was engaging with the specific issues and concerns of his audience, right? Using arguments that would make sense to them in their cultural context So he was kind of playing by the rules of the game so to speak exactly and in the case of the head coverings Paul's ultimate point was about order and decorum. Okay within the church He even admits that if they don't accept his other arguments, it's just the way things are done in churches across the region Okay, so that makes a lot more sense. Yeah, it's like look this isn't the hill I want to die on just follow the cultural norms exactly, but it does make you wonder about other parts of his letters Yeah, like how do we know what's timeless truth, right? And what's culturally bound? That's the million-dollar question and that's where careful study and discernment come in Right, but remember even those culturally bound instruction Okay can still teach us something about Paul's values and priorities, right? We just need to be careful Yeah, not to impose those specific practices onto our own culture.

Yeah without understanding the underlying principles Okay, so we have Paul This brilliant bicultural theologian. Yes writing to a diverse Church in Rome, right? Navigating these complex social and theological issues. Huh? What's the big takeaway here? Well, why should we care about all this historical context because it unlocks the power of Paul's message Okay by understanding his world right his audience and his communication style

Romans becomes more than just an ancient letter, right? It becomes like a living breathing conversation I love that that speaks to our own lives and challenges.

Yeah, but there's one more piece of the puzzle. I'm curious about okay Dr. Keener mentioned something about Paul being accused of teaching that it's okay to sin because God's grace is so abundant Yeah, that sounds a little sketchy. What's the deal with that? Well, that's a charge that has followed Paul throughout history sadly, right but as dr.

Keener explains it's a gross misrepresentation of his teaching Okay, Paul clearly believed that God's grace empowers us to live transformed lives Not to wallow in sin, right? He addresses this distortion directly in Romans Okay, stating that those who twist his words are slanderers. That's harsh But it shows how important it is to read Paul in context Yes, you know, it's easy to cherry-pick Versus right and create our own version of Christianity. Exactly.

That's not what Paul intended. No, it's about understanding the whole picture hmm, the historical the cultural and the rhetorical tapestry that makes Romans such a powerful and enduring Text I couldn't agree more. This deep dive has been incredible.

It has been good. But before we get you know Lost in the book of Romans. Yeah, I'm curious to hear what you found most surprising about this deep dive so far Hmm anything that really stood out to you Well for me, it was learning about how Paul Masterfully used these rhetorical techniques to communicate his message, right? It makes you realize he wasn't just a theologian He was also a skilled communicator who knew how to connect with his audience on an intellectual and emotional level Yeah, that's a great point.

You know, it's easy to forget that these ancient texts They were originally delivered as speeches or read aloud in communities, right? So Paul was writing for the ear not just the eye exactly and that changes how we read and interpret his words Absolutely. Yeah, you know, we need to listen for the rhythm of His arguments the way he builds suspense The emotional weight that he carries in his words Yeah, you know, this is making me even more excited to dive back into Romans YouTube But before we go there's one more thing we need to unpack Okay, that tension between grace and law right that seems to be at the heart of Paul's message, right? Did dr. Keener shed any light on how Paul navigated that he did and it's actually a point of contention among scholars Dr. Keener challenges the traditional view that Paul was reacting against a legalistic Judaism that emphasized Earning God's favor through good works.

Well, hold on. That's like the foundation of Reformation theology Are you saying Lucre got it wrong not necessarily but dr. Keener points out that recent scholarship Yeah has revealed a more nuanced picture of ancient Judaism Okay, there was certainly an emphasis on obedience to God's law, right? But there was also a strong belief in God's grace and mercy.

Okay, so it wasn't just about racking up good deed points Not at all. It was about living in covenant relationship with God Okay, a relationship initiated and sustained by God's love and faithfulness Okay, and this is where Paul comes in. Okay, he's not abolishing the law.

Okay, but he's showing how Jesus fulfills it Okay, opening up this new way to experience God's grace and righteousness Not through our own efforts, but through faith in Christ So

he's kind of saying you can't earn your way into God's good graces exactly. It's a gift exactly freely given Yes, that's such a powerful message. It is it's no wonder Romans has resonated with people right for centuries for sure It speaks to that deep human longing for acceptance.

Yeah for freedom from guilt and shame It does Wow, that's heavy stuff. It is. I'm definitely gonna be pondering that for a while Yeah, but before we wrap up I have to ask the classic deep dive question Okay, shoot knowing what you now know about Paul's context.

Yeah Do you think his letter to the Romans speaks differently to us today That's a fantastic question. And I think the answer is a resounding. Yes Okay Understanding the historical backdrop the cultural nuances the rhetorical strategies It all adds like layers of meaning and depth.

Yeah to Paul's words Well, it allows us to appreciate the challenges that he faced right the arguments that he engaged with Yeah, and the profound truth that he proclaimed beautifully said and for you out there listening We'd love to hear your thoughts you mentioned in your notes that you've always kind of struggled with Paul's teachings on women Yeah, well, dr. Keener's insights on this are fascinating. They are so I'm curious to hear what resonated with you most Yeah from this deep dive so far.

I'm curious too. Okay, so let's take a quick pause here And we'll pick up this conversation in part two. Sounds good.

So picking up where we left off I think it's really remarkable how Paul in his letter to the Romans Grapples with this tension between grace and the Jewish law, right? You know, he was after all a devout Jew Yeah with a deep respect for the Torah right and knowing that makes his message about grace even more powerful Yeah, it wasn't just some abstract theological concept for him. It was a Lived reality that transformed his own life Absolutely, and it's this transformation that he's so eager to share right with the Roman believers Yeah, he wants them to understand that this new way of Relating to God this freedom from trying to earn God's favor through the law Right is available to everyone both Jew and Gentile that reminds me of something that dr Keener mentioned in his lecture. Okay, this idea that Paul wasn't necessarily Reacting against like a legalistic version of Judaism, right? Like some have traditionally argued.

That's a key point. Yeah, dr Keener challenges this traditional view Arguing that recent scholarship has shown us a more nuanced picture. Okay of ancient Judaism Yeah, while obedience to God's law was certainly important, right? There was also a strong emphasis on God's grace and mercy so it wasn't just about Following the rules to a tee not at all.

Okay. It was about living in a covenant relationship with God a Relationship grounded in God's love and faithfulness. Yeah, and this is where Paul's message of grace becomes so crucial Okay, he's not saying that the law is irrelevant, right, but he's showing how Jesus fulfills the law Okay opening up a new way to experience God's grace and righteousness right not through our own efforts but through faith in Christ I'm starting to see how revolutionary Paul's message really was Yeah, like he's turning the whole religious system on its head saying look right.

You can't earn your way into God's good graces Yeah, it's a gift freely given it is stop striving and start trusting. That's a great way to put it Thanks, and it's a message that's resonated with people throughout history, right? Particularly during the Protestant Reformation When Martin Luther rediscovered this emphasis on grace and faith now that you mentioned it. I remember you saying that dr Keener's view of Paul's relationship to the law.

Yes Challenges some traditional Reformation theology. It does. Can you unpack that a bit more? Certainly, right the Reformation placed a strong emphasis on the idea That Paul was breaking away from a legalistic Judaism, right that focused solely on works righteousness Okay, but dr.

Keener suggests that this view might be a bit too simplistic wait So Luther might have oversimplified things a bit perhaps dr. Keener argues that Paul wasn't so much Rejecting the Jewish law. Okay, as he was redefining its role in light of the gospel Okay, he saw the law as a tutor pointing to Christ, okay, but ultimately insufficient for salvation That's interesting.

So instead of seeing Paul as like a radical reformer, right who completely threw out the old system Yeah, we should see him more as a bridge builder Yes showing how the old and the new fit together in God's grand plan Exactly, and that's what makes Paul's letter to the Romans so fascinating, right? He's not just preaching a new set of rules Yeah, he's Grappling with these profound theological questions, right? Exploring the relationship between grace and law right faith and works Jewish identity and Gentile inclusion. It's pretty incredible It is, you know, one thing that's always stood out to me is how personal Paul's writing is Even when he's dealing with these complex theological issues. Yeah, he doesn't shy away from sharing his own struggles and doubts.

Absolutely Yeah, and that's what makes him so relatable even centuries later Right. He's not just some distant figure spouting theological pronouncements, right? He's a fellow traveler sharing his journey of faith honesty and vulnerability. How does that? Personal touch play into his rhetorical strategy.

It's brilliant. Really? Yeah by sharing his own experiences Paul connects with his audience on a deeper level Okay, he creates a sense of empathy and trust right which makes his arguments all the more persuasive It's like he's saying look, yeah, I've wrestled with these issues, too. I've been where you are, right? But here's what I've discovered that's powerful.

It is. It's not just an intellectual exercise, right? It's a heartfelt invitation to share in his journey of discovery precisely Yeah, and it's this combination of theological depth right and personal authenticity That makes Paul's letters, especially Romans. Yeah, so compelling and enduring I'm starting to get a sense of why Romans has had such a profound impact.

Yeah on Christian thought throughout history for sure It's like a wellspring of theological insight. It is that continues to speak to us today. Absolutely But with all this talk about theology and rhetoric, I don't want to lose sight of the people right at the heart of this story You're right.

Yeah, it's easy to get lost in the abstractions. Yeah, but ultimately Paul's letter was addressed to real people living in a specific time and place Yeah And as we've been discussing Understanding that context is crucial for grasping the full impact of his message

and speaking of those real people you mentioned earlier That there's some debate about the makeup. Yeah of the Roman Church when Paul wrote his letter There is some scholars believe it was predominantly Jewish right while others suggest it was mostly Gentile, right? What does dr.

Keener say about this well, dr. Keener acknowledges this debate Okay, highlighting the complexities of the historical evidence, right? He points out that the expulsion of Jewish Christians under Emperor Claudius Yeah would have significantly altered the demographics of the church, right? But it's difficult to say with certainty what the exact composition was when Paul wrote his letter So there's still a bit of mystery surrounding Paul's audience. There is okay But that doesn't mean that we can't glean Valuable insights right from the historical context, right? We know that Rome had a substantial Jewish community, right? And we know that the early church had strong Jewish roots exactly And even if the church was predominantly Gentile by the time Paul wrote Romans, right? He was clearly writing with both Jewish and Gentile believers in mind.

Oh, absolutely Like he addresses issues of Jewish identity Yes, the role of the law and the inclusion of the Gentiles throughout his letter exactly. Yeah, he's crafting a message That speaks to the heart of the Christian faith, right a message that transcends cultural and ethnic boundaries Yeah, and that's why his letter continues to resonate with us today. Yeah, regardless of our background or beliefs Speaking of resonating today.

Yeah, you know I mentioned earlier that I've always struggled a bit with Paul's teachings on women some of his statements Seem pretty restrictive right especially from our modern perspective. I get it. Yeah, that's a common struggle for many readers of Paul, right? Dr. Keener addresses this issue head-on Reminding us that we can't simply impose our 21st century values right on to the first century world Context is everything it is but that doesn't mean we have to just blindly accept everything Paul says Right critical thinking and careful discernment Yeah are essential when engaging with any ancient texts, right, especially the Bible, especially the Bible and dr Keener encourages us to wrestle with these difficult passages Okay to consider the historical and cultural factors at play right and to seek understanding within the broader Context of Paul's message.

I appreciate that. Yeah, it's a reminder that studying the Bible isn't about finding easy answers We're conforming to a rigid set of rules, right? It's about engaging in an honest dialogue with the text Wrestling with its complexity Yeah And allowing it to challenge and transform us all I've said and it's in that spirit of honest dialogue that I want to ask you A question. Okay, shoot.

Okay. Yeah, remember how we talked about the cost of sending Paul's letter? Yeah, that hefty two thousand two hundred seventy five dollar price tag, right? Yeah, I can't get over that I know it really highlights the significance of this letter right? Yeah, and it makes me wonder Yeah, what was it about the message in Romans right that made it worth such a significant investment for Paul? That's a great question What did he see as like the heart of the gospel right the message that was so crucial to communicate? Yeah to the believers in Rome Indeed that's a great question and one that I think we need to unpack a bit further Yeah, let's explore that question as we continue our deep dive into Paul's letter to the Romans sounds like a plan Yeah, let's take another quick pause here and we'll pick up this

conversation in part three Okay, so we're back and I'm ready to dig into that question You asked at the end of part two, you know about what made Paul's letter to the Romans worth the price of a first-class Plane ticket to send right it is a question worth thinking about Yeah, especially since you know, I mentioned that I've always wrestled a bit with some of Paul's more challenging teachings, right? If this letter was so valuable so carefully crafted that I want to understand why what was at its core Well, I think as we've been talking about, you know, dr Keener really emphasizes that understanding Paul's context is key, right? So let's go back to Rome for a minute Okay, imagine like this bustling city. Okay this mix of cultures The tensions between the Jewish community Yeah And the Roman authorities right then picture this new Christian movement emerging composed of both Jews and Gentiles Trying to like figure out their place in this complex world.

Yeah, I could see it. You know, it's this melting pot of Ideas and beliefs. Yeah with the early Christians trying to navigate a whole new way of life Absolutely and into this dynamic setting Yeah, Paul sends his letter a letter that's not just like a collection of rules or rituals, right? But a profound exploration of the gospel.

Yeah, you know the good news of God's grace and salvation through Jesus Christ Okay, so the context sets the stage but what's like the main act right? What's the heart of Paul's message that made it? So important to deliver Dr. Keener argues that at the core of Romans is this radical notion? God's righteousness is a gift Freely given to all who believe yeah regardless of their background or their ability to follow the law perfectly Okay, that sounds familiar. You know, we've been dancing around this idea of grace Throughout our deep dive. Yeah, but I mean, how does that one concept justify the cost the effort the meticulous crafting of this letter? Yeah, because for Paul this wasn't just like an abstract theological idea It was the key to unlocking true freedom and transformation, right? Remember he himself had been you know, a zealous Pharisee, right? He was like the ultimate rule follower Exactly striving for righteousness through strict adherence to the law, right? And yet he came to realize that true righteousness couldn't be earned It could only be received as a gift right through faith in Jesus Christ So he's kind of writing to the Romans to set them free.

Yes from that same striving Yes, like that same burden of trying to earn God's favor precisely. He's saying stop trying to prove yourselves, right? Stop trying to earn God's love right? It's already yours Embrace the gift of grace and let it transform your lives. Yeah, that's powerful It's like he's offering them like I get out of jail free card not to excuse sin Right, but to empower them to live a new life free from the condemnation of the law Exactly and this freedom this transformation is at the heart of what makes Romans so valuable so worth the cost of sending Yeah, it's a message that speaks to the deepest longings of the human heart, right? You know the longing for acceptance for forgiveness for purpose, you know as you're talking it makes me think about those transcultural Moral norms.

Yeah that we discussed earlier the vices that Paul lists Greed envy deceit, right? No, they're all kind of symptoms of that striving that trying to find fulfillment and worth apart from God That's a great connection when we're trying to earn our own righteousness, right? We inevitably fall short Yeah, we become consumed with ourselves with getting ahead with protecting our own interests, right? But when we embrace the gift of grace, yeah, it frees us from that self-centeredness It's like that line from Romans for the wages of sin is death But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord exactly Paul's contrasting the dead end

of trying to earn our salvation right with the life-giving power of God's grace This is really making me see Romans in a whole new light good. It's not just a theological treatise It's like a road map to freedom. It is I died to living a truly transformed life and it's a road map That's just as relevant today.

Yeah as it was in Paul's time We still struggle with that same striving that same temptation to earn our own worth Yeah, but the message of Romans reminds us that true freedom and fulfillment are found not in our own efforts But in the grace of God Wow This deep dive has been incredibly insightful. I feel like I have a much deeper appreciation for Paul's letter to the Romans and for you listening. I hope this has sparked a new curiosity about this incredible book me, too You know, it's a letter worth revisiting again and again, right allowing its message of grace and transformation To speak to us afresh each time.

Absolutely So knowing what you now know about Paul's context the complexities of the Roman Church The cost of sending this letter and the heart of its message. Do you think Roman speaks differently to you today? I do understanding the historical and cultural backdrop has really enriched my understanding of Paul's words And recognizing the immense value that Paul placed on this message right makes it all the more powerful and relevant for me I couldn't agree more. It's been a privilege to kind of unpack these insights with you The pleasure was all mine and for you listening We encourage you to pick up a copy of Romans dive into its depths and discover the transformative power of God's grace for yourself Until next time keep diving